

The Mother Figure In The History Plays
of William Shakespeare

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Introduction

I have chosen the topic of the mother figure in the history plays of William Shakespeare because it is a subject that has not received as much attention as other, perhaps more important aspects of Shakespeare's work that have been under constant discussion. Only the figures of Volumnia and Constance have been given their due, receiving considerable treatment as mothers, but the other women have either been discussed as females in love or have been neglected altogether.

In the Roman history plays, there are four mother figures. Calpurnia has always been looked upon as a wife to Julius Caesar and never as an individual woman longing for a child. Cleopatra, the tempting Eve, was always viewed as the female of Egypt but never as the mother of a nation, and I shall try to show this aspect of her character which one never tends to associate with such a woman of love and charm. Volumnia, a woman who is definitely identified as a mother, has often been dealt with as a Roman patroness above all. Tamora can hardly be considered a real mother although I have tried to be as just to her as limitations of her nature allow.

In the English history plays one can find a number and variety of mother figures, although at first glance one may be unable to discern these figures. Joan of Arc is regarded as a symbolic mother of France, although Shakespeare distorts her image and does not really wish to present her as such in order to satisfy his English audience. Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York are three different mothers in their similar woes. Margaret, a character who deserves our admiration for the way the dramatist portrays her, is a woman who would hardly deserve this admiration as a mother. Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York are two other mother figures whose characters are better revealed when they come into contact with the ever-cursing Margaret.

In King John there are a pair of mothers, Queen Elinor and Constance, who are in conflict from beginning to end, and their roles have considerable significance in the drama.

Queen Isabel and her daughter Katharine are another pair of mothers but have, in contrast, much less significance in Henry V.

A third pair of mothers can be seen in Henry VIII where Katharine and Anne are two mothers who despite their faithfulness and love were sent to their early deaths.

In the last chapter England and Rome will be considered as mother figures, viewing them generally in all plays as a whole.

* * *

Many of the mothers mentioned here have been discussed previously as females, women of royal influence, women in love, wives to the mighty or fallen kings, but here they will be considered from within, revealing their motherly wishes, bereavements, hopes, loves, fears and woes.

There are few articles, books, or discussions dealing with many of these female characters, except those figures who have already established their reputations as Shakespeare's heroines. Many female figures have not been dealt with simply because they have been considered as characters too minor to deserve serious discussion, and also

since their parts are extremely small and perhaps insignificant. However, Shakespeare would not introduce a character needlessly, no matter how little he or she speaks throughout the play, and that is why major as well as minor female figures have been considered here since they all partake in the age-old ritual of motherhood. The scarcity of material and resources on these figures has in some ways limited my scope of discussion but in another has helped me introduce more of myself in my writing and has enabled me to encourage the creative part of my imagination to work rather than recreate or merely reproduce old opinions.

This work attempts to present a new aspect of Shakespeare's women and to tackle this subject from a different perspective.¹

* * *

¹ N.B. All references to and quotes from the plays are based on the text of G. B. Harrison, ed. Shakespeare: The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1968).

STATISTICAL

LIST

Statistical List

2

This list shows the frequency the word "mother" occurs in each of the plays, this having a direct relationship to the prominence of the role of the mother figure in each play.

It is noticeable that the word "mother" occurs most frequently in Richard III, Coriolanus, and King John, where mothers have a direct influence on the whole action, while it occurs least often in the Henry IV plays and in Antony and Cleopatra, where there is hardly a trace of a real mother, her existence or even her influence.

	<u>Bartlett's Concordance</u>	<u>Harvard's Concordance</u>
<u>Julius Caesar</u>	6	6
<u>Antony and Cleopatra</u>	2	2
<u>Coriolanus</u>	38	44
<u>Titus Andronicus</u>	27	27

²This list is based on information from Bartlett's Concordance to Shakespeare, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), pp. 1049-1050, and on Marvin Spevack's The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 848-849.

	<u>Bartlett's Concordance</u>	<u>Harvard's Concordance</u>
<u>1 Henry VI</u>	15	15
<u>2 Henry VI</u>	9	8
<u>3 Henry VI</u>	11	12
<u>Richard II</u>	9	9
<u>Richard III</u>	49	49
<u>King John</u>	37	37
<u>1 Henry IV</u>	3	4
<u>2 Henry IV</u>	2	3
<u>Henry V</u>	4	4
<u>Henry VIII</u>	3	2 ³

³The list includes variations on the word mother such as mother's, mothers, mothers', mother-queen, mother's son, etc. . . . "Motherly" and "Maternal" do not occur in any of the plays.

ROMAN HISTORY

PLAYS

Calpurnia: The Sterile Mother
in Julius Caesar

Calpurnia: The Sterile Mother

in Julius Caesar

The very first word that Julius Caesar utters in the drama is "Calpurnia". He is so anxious about his wife that he wants to make sure she is standing in the way of Antony, and his anxiety is again displayed in his reminding Antony to touch Calpurnia because it was believed this will cure her sterility.

Forget not, in your speed, Antonius,
To touch Calpurnia, for our elders say
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.

(I.ii.6-9)

For Caesar, his wife's infertility might be cured on the Feast of the Lupercal, and a blessing might come over her to endow her with a woman's ever-living wish for a child. He wants to obliterate this nightmare from their life and see his offspring from a woman he loves, his wife.

This woman, deprived of motherhood, sublimates her maternal love into another source of love for her husband. She needs to express this love in one way or another, and with no child to share her affections or to partake this great love she has to offer, her husband gets it all, and

perhaps in excess. She becomes overly concerned about Caesar and plays the protective role of a mother as well as that of a wife. She persuades him to stay home after recounting her horrid dream. She acts like a mother whose son has grown up and will probably not listen to her any more, although she secretly hopes he will. Calpurnia is so happy when he consents to follow her "humour" and stay home, and she offers her womanly fears to serve as an excuse for his absence from the Capitol.

Yet a child always reaches a stage of independence from his parents; so does Caesar break away from his mother-wife and decides to go to the Senate after all.

Calpurnia is shown as a woman with her presentiments coming true. When recounting what strange happenings took place that night, it is significant that the first thing she mentions is that

A lioness hath whelpèd in the streets.
 O Caesar! these things are beyond all use.
 (II.ii.17,25)

Even this unnatural sign of motherhood would have seemed an omen good enough for Calpurnia had she any hope of becoming a mother herself. Yet one sees that here as

well as in other instances in the tragedy, whenever the word "mother" is mentioned, it is within an unnatural and grotesque context. Mothers are stabbed as follows:

Casca: If Caesar had stabbed their mothers, they
would have done no less.

(I.ii.278)

And mothers are killed in

Messala: O error, soon conceived,
Thou never comest unto a happy birth,
But kill'st the mother that engendered thee!

(V.iii.69-71)

And it is the dead mothers' weak spirits turning their
sons womanish

Cassius: But, woe the while! our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are governed with our mothers' spirits.

(I.iii.82-83)

We are also told

Antony: That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quartered with the hands of war.

(III.i.267-268)

All the above leads to one thing and points to one conclusion: abnormal state of motherhood. Therefore what did Shakespeare want to say about the abnormal state of Calpurnia? Her barren womb is an abnormal condition for a woman despite all her motherly concerns for her husband. Her deprivation is that of all women who are unable to give life, and thus feel lifeless inside. A woman is still sterile even if she adopts her husband as her child. Or was her physical sterility only another aspect of her sterile and impotent efforts to save the life of her one and only child, her husband?

* * *

Cleopatra: The Selfish Mother of Egypt
in Antony and Cleopatra

Cleopatra : The Selfish Mother of Egypt
in Antony and Cleopatra

The first thing one associates with Cleopatra is beauty and charm. What also comes to mind whenever her name is mentioned is her complex personality, her lustful nature, and her domineering love for Antony who occupied her days and nights.

All this has been dealt with in great detail by many critics. Yet after all that has been said about this serpent of the Nile, one should still consider an aspect of her character that is rather difficult to discern through the highly interwoven details Shakespeare provides about her, because Shakespeare concentrates on her as a woman in love more than as a ruling queen, and what should be discussed is how much of a loving queen she was for her people and how much of a mother she tries to be to Egypt, only through what Shakespeare reveals about her in Antony and Cleopatra.

Shakespeare never shows us the maternal side in the character of this woman. She was, in history, a mother who "could find no titles magnificent enough for her children but those of the Sun and the Moon".⁴ The symbol of fertility is not completely presented as such. The audience sees her as the wanton woman directing all her love towards the one and only Antony of her dreams, and pivoting all her attention upon him. Egypt's most famous widow forgets all about her family life and turns single again looking for a new lover when Octavius Caesar becomes an old admirer in her "salad days" (I.v.73). She is the symbol of fertility only in the sense that she possesses a great attraction for the male, but not in the sense that she will later reproduce this love in the form of a new life.

But the dramatist brings in an ironic touch of motherhood in this woman. When her attendant Charmian enters saying "Oh, Eastern Star!" (V,ii.312), Cleopatra answers in a hysterically-quiet tone

⁴Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), p. 268.

Peace, peace!
 Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
 That sucks the nurse asleep?
 (V.ii.313-314)

For the one and only time do we see Cleopatra in such a serene mood speaking in such a tender voice, and portrayed in a mother-nursing-a-child scene, where the baby is cruelly enough an asp which is actually not taking or sucking from the mother but injecting into her its poison. The "serpent of old Nile" never gave Egypt her reviving milk so it was now time that Egypt repaid her with the same poison it had sucked for years while suffering under her moody rule while she was in love with Antony. Egypt therefore sends back all the love its queen had given it and injects it back into her bloodstream, and this love is nothing but poison. So the mother only **drinks** back the love she had nursed to her babe, Egypt.

We know that Cleopatra is loved by all her followers. She is very generous to them and they feel free enough in her presence to speak their minds openly as her woman Charmian does when she says:

Oh, that brave Caesar!
(I.v.67)

and when Cleopatra angrily scolds her she repeats it,

The valiant Caesar!
(I.v.69)

Of course, her followers would dare speak only to a certain limit for the queen had an uncontrollable temper and fits of anger that would drive her to destroy all of Egypt, her own country, if it opposed her high opinion of her lover Antony, her "man of men" (I.v.72).

He shall have every day a several greeting,
Or I'll unpeople Egypt.
(I.v.77-78)

This cruel mother of Egypt wishes her baby to turn scornfully into snakes. She knows that those she is condemning are innocent, but she replies:

Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt.
Melt Egypt into Nile! And kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents!
(II.v.77-79)

The lust-blinded queen loses all judgement when she thinks of her paramour and becomes ready to sacrifice all her people at his feet. The lives of her men are of no importance or significance, and they should be slaughtered if they do not serve the purpose of keeping her and her lover together. She starts very generously with the messenger who brings her news that Antony is well and safe:

Messenger: First, madam, he is well.
Cleopatra: Why, there's more gold.

and later:

Messenger: Caesar and he are greater friends than ever.
Cleopatra: Make thee a fortune from me.
(II.v.31-32,48-49)

But the generous loving queen bursts into an outrageous storm of anger when the messenger adds

Messenger: Madam, he's married to Octavia.
Cleopatra: The most infectious pestilence upon thee!
(II.v.60-61)

Then she no longer thinks of the life of that poor messenger whose duty was only to carry the message and bring the bad news to her, but she immediately strikes him, draws a knife to kill him, and tells him

to her ears. Even Antony, in calling her "Egypt", is unintentionally perhaps giving her another reason to be flattered, associating all of Egypt with the one woman and embodying the whole of that valley of the Nile in that serpent of the Nile.

In considering her fate if she was to be captured by Caesar, she only thinks of her own humiliation, not as a queen whose whole country will be degraded by her captivity, but first as a queen who refuses to give Caesar the pleasure of showing off his great victory in seizing the "star of the East". She takes into consideration only her personal defeat if she has to face Octavia and allow her to mock at her, the Queen of Egypt.

All this only establishes the point that Cleopatra was first and foremost in love with herself and her title of queen. Yet she did not hold that title deservedly if one considers how much of a good queen she was to Egypt, and how much of a mother she was to her nation and devoted followers. With all the above to disclaim the title, she hardly has any chance of deserving to be called a loving mother of Egypt.

* * *

Volumnia: The Roman Matron
in Coriolanus

Volumnia; The Roman Matron
in Coriolanus

The majestic figure of Volumnia is Shakespeare's ideal of the Roman matron. She is the mother whose wish is a command and whose command is the final word for her son Coriolanus.

Before discussing Volumnia as a mother, a few characteristics should be mentioned that the mother and son have in common. One can clearly note that they both have an aristocratic scorn for the common people. While he calls them "rats" (I.i.253) and "curs" (III.iii,120), she uses no less terms than "cats" (IV.ii.34) to address the tribunes.

As a result of this prejudice, they both share that sense of pride which is inherent in their blood. Volumnia's pride is in her son and her son's deeds and qualities. It is a maternal pride that is characteristic of all mothers who delight in their children's success. On the other hand, Coriolanus has that ideal pride which will not permit him to stoop in order to conquer. He refuses to go out to the streets of Rome and show his open wounds

to the people and beg them to give him their votes. His pride will not admit such ways; he must seek honour through ways he believes to be more honourable.

The mother and son both have unquestionable patriotism. Even when Coriolanus decides to fight against Rome, one feels it was a fight against his own self too. His pride made him decide on that. He would still have been a loser had he conquered Rome; he would have lost his true identity, for he would have never been able to reconcile himself to the idea of hating Rome or being an enemy to his beloved city.

What about Volumnia? Did her lofty patriotism overwhelm her to such a degree that her role as a mother was limited, diminished or overshadowed? There is no question about her profound love for Rome because "She saved Rome and lost her son". But what type of mother is Volumnia? How much of a mother was she to Coriolanus? Did she subject her motherhood to the conditions dictated by her patriotism? All these questions will find their answers as Volumnia the mother of our great hero is discussed.

Both son and mother have uncontrollable rage and fits of temper, although Volumnia is more in command of herself at such times.

Pray be counseled.
I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

(III.ii.28-31)

Yet sometimes her anger is "Juno-like" (IV.ii.53), beyond reins, and her outbursts are blazing fires:

Anger's my meat. I sup upon myself,
And so shall starve with feeding.

(IV.ii.50-51)

She is as stout-hearted as he is:

Come all to ruin, let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou.

(III.ii.125-128)

Volumnia and Coriolanus admire each other. The mother is full of admiration for her son: for his actions

and manners, for his deeds and words. On the other hand, the son has boundless admiration for his mother. She is always concerned about him or about his conduct and the results of that conduct, while his concern for her satisfaction and his total obedience to her are no lesser marks of admiration for her wise judgement.

If one now turns to speak of Volumnia the woman and the mother, he finds that so much can be said. Her motherhood is never diminished, her love for her son is never subordinated to her love for Rome. She is as much a mother as she is a devoted Roman.

Her femininity is never lost despite her overbearing manner and her arrogance. She is a woman with a commanding nature and haughty temper. She is a patriot with total dedication, but above all she is a loving mother.

One can agree that she was glad to see her son's wounds of victory and that a true mother would never be happy at such a sight, no matter how patriotic she is. The reason is that her maternal pride was so overwhelming her that she felt her pain at beholding his

physical injury so meagre compared to his victory over the enemies of her beloved Rome.

O! he is wounded, I thank the gods for't.
(II.i.133)

His honour is more important to her than his bleeding wounds which only serve to add to her pride in him as a hero and son; but never her pity for him because she knew that like herself, he heeded not these petty wounds.

Does that mean she loved Rome more than her son, and that she wanted him to be only the Roman hero? No, she never really sacrificed her son for Rome. In one instance, she turns against the people of Rome when her son, dearer to her than Rome, is doomed to leave his mother city:

Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome
And occupations perish.
(IV.i.13-14)

She lays her curse on Brutus and Sicinius who were the cause of her son's banishment:

I would the gods had nothing else to do
But to confirm my curses.

(IV.ii.45-46)

Volumnia assumes authority towards her son and expects obedience from him. But was she a possessive mother? Was her love for him a selfish love? To a certain extent we might answer yes to her desire to possess his total thoughts and steer him, if we assume that this was not what she did in fact. Yet this possessiveness did not result from selfish love for her son; it resulted from maternal pride and admiration. Nevertheless, she always practised her authority over him suggesting that she is the only one who had really made him that great hero he is:

My praises made thee first a soldier, so,
To have my praise for this, perform a part
Thou has not done before.

(III.ii.108-110)

Coriolanus is unconsciously being nourished from her conscious dictating words coated with sweet pleas. This is not to say that all the play actually revolves around Volumnia and not around Coriolanus, although it bears

his name, for she was pulling the strings that moved the puppet. She keeps feeding him words like "Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me" (III.ii.129) that only add to his attachment to her, his dependence on her, and his admiration for her. She is the one who talks him into going out into the streets of Rome to ask people for their votes; she is the one to move him to stop war against Rome; she is also the one who reproaches him for his quick anger and outrageous temper. Her maternal influence is so great that she is the only one who can really have any effect on his decisions, since his wife is always kept in the shadows.

Against the idea of Volumnia being a possessive despotic mother, there is the fact that Coriolanus never obeyed his mother because she put direct pressure on him or asked him to do something in a really commanding tone. She always suggested it to him in a very tactful way giving him a choice, when she probably knew he would give in to her pleas. When she says "He must, and will" (III.ii.97), she adds "Prithee, now, say you will" (III.ii.98) or "Do as thou list" (III.ii.128) and "At thy choice, then" (III.ii.123).

Coriolanus always pays homage and reverence to his mother. He listens to her and carries out what she suggests only out of his great love and intense admiration for her. He responds to her wish by

Well, I must do't.
 Away, my disposition, and possess me
 Some harlot's spirit!
 (III.ii.110-112)

Maybe in admiring her, he was actually admiring his own self, his own image. For his mother he has "boundless admiration" approaching to worship.⁵ In her presence, when she comes to ask him to spare Rome, his powerful spirit melts in affection and brings him back to the tender loving nature of his true human self.

You gods! I prate,
 And the most noble mother of the world
 Leave unsaluted! sink, my knee, i' the earth,
 Of thy deep duty more impression show
 Than that of common sons.
 (V.iii.48-52)

⁵Frank Harris, "Volumnia, The Portrait of Shakespeare's Mother", The Women of Shakespeare, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911), p.217.

In the very first scene, and before the introduction of the principal personages, one citizen observes to another that the military exploits of Caius Marcius (later called Coriolanus) were performed not so much for his country's sake "as to please his mother"⁶ (I.i.39).

One can not deny that Volumnia's role in the whole drama is a very basic one, and that she even overshadows her son's. The whole action revolves around her and her son, while his wife is kept in the background, although she is given a little more prominence than in Plutarch's account. Volumnia's famous speech beginning, "should we be silent and not speak" (V.iii.94) is nearly word for word from Plutarch.⁷ Shakespeare brings her more into the light and builds the whole action on her unrelenting spirit.

Another important point about Volumnia as a mother

⁶Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), p. 290.

⁷Ibid., p. 297.

is whether or not she was a portrait of Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden. Frank Harris⁸ carries out a long discussion to prove that Shakespeare wrote Coriolanus to praise his mother "who had died in 1608 a short time before Coriolanus was written".

Harris says: "It is poor Shakespeare who in the bitterness of his mourning and sorrow feels that he has not done enough for his 'dear' mother while she was alive; has not rendered her courtesy enough"⁹ when he writes

Thou hast never in thy life
Showed thy dear mother any courtesy.
(V.iii.160-161)

Yet we know that this is not true of Coriolanus who was always careful to show his mother all the courtesy a son could.

Harris also points out the similarity between the

⁸F. Harris, The Women of Shakespeare, pp. 217-226.

⁹Ibid., p. 223.

tempers of the two women, Volumnia and Mary Arden.

"Volumnia has quick temper but more insight and good sense, . . . Shakespeare's mother Mary Arden, who could not read or write, had in her probably the wisdom of the finest English natures. She saw her own faults and her son's, and usually counselled moderation".¹⁰

The admiration of Coriolanus for his mother is also a reflection of Shakespeare's great admiration for his own mother, or vice versa.

One can adopt this point of view with moderation. It is very possible that Shakespeare could be writing about some aspects of his mother's character, but it is difficult to believe that Shakespeare wrote the whole play just to praise his deceased mother. There are so many other things involved in the drama that can not be overlooked, and that can not be discussed fully.

Volumnia is a great mother worthy of Shakespeare's, Coriolanus's, and his audience's great admiration and respect.

¹⁰F. Harris, The Women of Shakespeare, p.226.

Tamora: The Mother of Evil
in Titus Andronicus

Tamora: The Mother of Evil
in Titus Andronicus

Shakespeare introduces Tamora to us as a loving mother. He establishes her first as a woman in weakness and tears. She is presented to us as such, but only for a very short glimpse. However, this dramatic opening enhances the stunning effect that Shakespeare meant to create when she later takes off the mask to bare her grotesque face and soul. It is then that we meet the real Tamora, Tamora the mother of . . . evil.

When the play opens Tamora is pleading for her eldest son's life:

Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son.
(I.i.105-106)

She is first introduced to us as the loving mother afraid of losing her beloved son. Her love for her children can not be questioned since she displays so much affection for them and such great concern for their fates.

Tamora is again portrayed as a sincere good-hearted woman when Saturninus asks her to be his queen. She yet displays no ill feelings or hidden schemes against Rome. She promises to be Rome's faithful queen, and promises Saturninus

She will a handmaid be to his desires,
A loving nurse, a mother to his youth.
(I.i.331-332)

Her motherly love will even extend to her husband. She is until this part of the tragedy a mother whose affection knows no limits and whose love is freely granted. She even approaches Saturninus asking him to pardon Titus, but then we start to know what goes on in those deep recesses of her malignant heart. This female villain is all the time nourishing those insatiable grudges in her, preparing for the right time to pour her wrathful revenge on Titus. Her aside to Saturninus discloses all her evil intentions and her revenge-thirsty spirit: "I'll find a day to massacre them all" (I.i.450).

At this point we have to decide if Tamora has the right to revenge or not. As a mother who pleaded in vain for the life of her son, she has the right to contemplate revenge; and as a queen she felt humiliated at kneeling and begging when she was always the one to be begged and knelt before. Yet we still have to question the way she carried out her revenge and satisfied her hatred.

"... Tamora, the villainous Queen of the Goths, takes a leading part in Act I, and is referred to in the rest of the play as an astute schemer. But it is Aaron, her black paramour, who, though a mute in Act I, afterwards contrives all the outrages against the family of the Andronici, not only without consulting Tamora, but professedly out of sheer devilry."¹¹

Tamora's two sons Demetrius and Chiron were always a helping hand for her schemes. They showed her their concern, whether it was real or not, sincere or pretentious:

How now, dear sovereign, and our gracious Mother!
 Why doth your highness look so pale and wan?
 (II.iii.89-90)

¹¹ John Dover Wilson, ed., Titus Andronicus, by W. Shakespeare (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), Introd. p. x.

They also say:

Come, let us go and pray to all the gods
 For our beloved mother in her pains.
 (IV.ii.46-47)

Tamora is a mother using her children to execute her plot, making use of their love for her, and certainly for themselves:

Revenge it, as you love your mother's life,
 Or be ye not henceforth called my children.
 (II.iii.114-115)

Tamora is a devil in the shape of a woman. She knows no love other than for herself and her own; she can not even experience pity because her heart is turned into stone with hatred. To please her sons, she tells them to use Lavinia for their pleasure and lust and then kill her. Actually she is not concerned about her sons' desires as much as her own vindictive mind yearning for satisfaction and revenge. She keeps reminding them that she's the utmost authority, the main plotter and the real executioner:

You shall know, my boys,
 Your mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong.
 (II.iii.120-121)

She displays complete confidence in her own power that she needs her sons only as the daggers with which she will stab her enemies; she will be the non-hesitant hand that will plant the dagger in the bosom of Titus, her pledged foe. For Tamora, the Andronici are a huge snake with several heads, and she must make sure all the heads are cut before she is safe from the poisonous and deadly bite and from that never-ending nightmare of blood.

It seems ironic that such an evil woman and such a mother who is full of scorn and blind hatred should be the one to talk about love in such sweet terms. ". . . the finest and tenderest passage of any length in the play, the love poem at 2.3.10-29, was placed on the lips of Tamora the tiger?"¹² The passage starts "My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou sad, / When everything doth make a gleeful boast?" She pretends love to her husband while she tells these sweet words to her black lover; she pretends to be a true mother to her sons while her adulterous offspring must die because "the mother wills it so."¹³

¹²John Dover Wilson, ed., Titus Andronicus, pp. xi-xii.

¹³T. A., IV.ii.82.

"Only towards the very end does she once again occupy the center of the stage, and then her scheming is foolish and ineffectual. Moreover, the liaison between Aaron and Tamora, stressed at the opening of Act 2 possesses no further dramatic significance whatever, except in respect of its offspring, the black baby, which does not appear until 4.2. and is itself an excrescence on the plot."¹⁴

Tamora is all the time conscious of her power to convince and twist minds, and even assures Saturninus that she will use her art successfully:

Now will I to that old Andronicus
And temper him with all the art I have,
To pluck proud Lucius from the warlike Goths.
And now, sweet Emperor, be blithe again,
And bury all thy fear in my devices.
(IV.iv.108-112)

Tamora can not be human enough to forgive. She can not understand Titus's agony and sorrow at losing his sons, despite her own loss, because she is not willing to try to understand or forgive. She is not satisfied to see him

¹⁴ John Dover Wilson, ed., Titus Andronicus,
p. xi.

mourn for his sons, but has to have revenge on him personally. She has to quench her outrageous thirst that is calling for revenge. She quenches it with blood and more blood. She becomes the vampire of the Andronici. She even calls herself Revenge for Titus, while she is Revenge against him. She always brings in her sons to complete the scheme and blot her motherhood. In this instance they become her accompanying Rapine and Murder. Yet the loving mother at the end eats her own flesh in a pie without the slightest wink or sign of discomfort. Nothing alarms her, because maybe she loved her sons so much that she welcomed them, though unknowingly, back into her womb.

It is ironic enough that the only contemporary illustration of any scene in Shakespeare's plays is found in a manuscript copy of Titus Andronicus illustrated with a drawing of the scene in which Tamora pleads for the life of her son.¹⁵ So Tamora, after all, is a mother.

¹⁵G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1968), p. 294.

CONCLUSION
To Roman History Plays

Conclusion to Roman History Plays

It is perhaps wise to pause here and summarize the findings of this study of the mothers found in the Roman history plays.

Calpurnia has deserved some pity and understanding, but the impression she leaves is much more shallow than that Volumnia makes in Coriolanus. Calpurnia tries to be convincing to her husband and to the audience, but Volumnia does not need to try; she is. And while the reader might present Calpurnia with a small rose to signify her love and faithfulness, he probably will shower Volumnia with roses of all kinds.

Because Cleopatra showed disregard for her people and no concern for anyone other than Antony, she was faced with a frown from the audience who nevertheless admired her as a lover. However, the severity with which she is condemned is much lighter than the total damnation heaped on Tamora who is actually devoid of all human traits. With Tamora, the reader feels he is in a hellish place full of hatred, intrigue, and cruelty. Tamora deserves all the thorns thrown at her, and she ends the survey of the

mother-figures in the Roman history plays with a grim expression.

It is now time to move on and step into a new garden of thorns and roses; it is time for a look at the mother-figures in the English history plays.

* * *

ENGLISH HISTORY

PLAYS

Joan of Arc: The Mother of France
in 1 Henry VI

Joan of Arc : The Mother of France

In 1 Henry VI

Joan of Arc can definitely be called the mother of France although Shakespeare portrays her as a witch fit only to be burnt at the stake.

Joan of Arc is presented to the reader as a witch since she brings disorder and humiliation to the British. Lord Talbot is faced temporarily with her triumphs, but being himself the symbol of English victory and greatness, and of the British order itself, it would be inappropriate on the part of Shakespeare to present Joan of Arc as a maiden inspired by God and faith. Shakespeare rather magnifies her relationships with evil spirits in order to make the British re-establishment of order more righteous and honorable. This presentation of the maiden reflects the English attitude towards any French claim to victory by the help of God.

Although not a mother herself, Joan of Arc was inspired when "God's mother deigned to appear to me" (I.ii.78).

When La Pucelle overcomes King Charles of France to prove her cause is just and truly inspired, and when she is asked to reveal where she gets her strength, she answers, "Christ's Mother helps me, else I were too weak" (I.ii.106).

Joan of Arc fights Lord Talbot at Orleans, and he calls her a witch:

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 servest.
 (I.v. 5-7)

Shakespeare allows this to happen deliberately as he upsets the balance in creating her character and distorts

the image of this heroic woman, changing this image into the embodiment of evil.

He makes her take Rouen (which was never taken, but opened its gates seventeen years after her death) by a trick because he wants to give Talbot the glory of retaking it by sheer English courage. He puts down all her successes to witchery and sorcery, as Holinshed did . . . 16

She uses motherly words of love to revive the Duke of Burgundy's loyalty to France:

Look on thy country, look on fertile France,

 As looks the mother on her lowly babe,
 When death doth close his tender dying eyes,
 See, see the pining malady of France!
 (III.iii.44,47-49)

It can be noted here that the absence of a father figure or a male leader has added to the prominence of Joan of Arc in her role as the maternal figure. She is the mother and father as well, and therefore the love that was given her from her followers was an entire dedication

¹⁶Frank Harris, The Women of Shakespeare, p. 16.

not to be shared by a male parent.

Joan of Arc is a loving mother looking upon France as her precious baby. She is to protect her own child from the harm others can inflict upon it. She wants others to look upon France in the same manner and take that babe into their arms to protect it from the cruel English invaders.

Joan of Arc was not only the mother of France as a nation but also the mother of the French as soldiers. One can easily visualize the Frenchmen flocking to her and instinctively following her, since she was the heavenly inspired woman who was to take the lead in liberating France from English oppression.

The herd instinct of these French soldiers was not enough to keep them together. They looked upon La Pucelle as the spiritual mother of them all. They were like children seeking assurance from their mother and looking for their lost self-confidence in her. They identified themselves with her. She, in return, was generous in reciprocating the love they showed her; she was the

mother-hen spreading her wings over them all and leading them ahead, but also in return getting her own moral support from them. The interdependence of mother and child can be easily traced here, since no male leader lived up to the French soldiers' expectations, and they therefore turned with all their affections and hopes towards that maiden to crown her a mother of them all.

Yet Shakespeare does not wish us to see Joan of Arc from this point of view. He presents her from such a perspective that she is to us an ungrateful child who denies her parentage. She does that so shamelessly that her father, in his rage, indignantly cries:

I would the milk
Thy mother gave thee when thou suck'dst her breast
Had been a little ratsbane for thy sake!
(V.iv.27-29)

The true mother of France is made to debase motherhood. Shakespeare makes her pretend to be with child in order to save her life, using the title of a mother to serve her own ends. Yet we know that this is only one more blot that Shakespeare might have added to La Pucelle's portrait in order to mar it altogether.

Margaret of Anjou: Queen or Mother?

in 1 Henry VI, 2 Henry VI,

3 Henry VI, Richard III

Margaret of Anjou: Queen or Mother?
 in Henry VI, Parts I, II, III, and Richard III

The beautiful Margaret we meet in 1 Henry VI will turn into a cruel queen in Parts II and III, and an old lamenting mother in Richard III. She undergoes a change as soon as she enters the struggle for the throne, a change that is traced herebelow.

1 Henry VI

When the Earl of Suffolk first meets Margaret of Anjou in Act V, Scene iii, he is enchanted by her beauty and he is completely taken by her ravishing charm. She is yet the coy maiden who will turn later into a daring woman. The cat has not shown its hidden claws yet, and so Margaret has not been proclaimed a tigress until this point.

The sweet princess at the beginning of 1 Henry VI is so gentle and humble that she says, "I am unworthy to be Henry's wife" (V.iii.122), and she later adds, "An if my father please, I am content" (V.iii.127).

When she becomes a wife and mother, this obedient child will require her own child and husband to be blindly obedient to her. Now submitting willingly to her

father's wish, she will ask her son to submit to her own will as we will see later in 3 Henry VI.

The wooing Suffolk, wishing he were the one to wed Margaret, plans to make her queen to his sovereign Henry, "whose asceticism vanishes quickly at Suffolk's description of Margaret."¹⁷ She shyly sends the king

A pure unspotted heart,
Never yet taint with love.
(V.iii.182-183)

Margaret's unspotted heart is later to be stained with the innocent blood she sheds in her cruelty. This fair, young and pure flower is later to turn into a thorn engulfing all that is around it with a mass of pricking spikes and bleeding sores.

T. H. McNeal sees her in 1 Henry VI as the damsel in distress.¹⁸ She represents, he says, the Romantic Princess

¹⁷Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 37.

¹⁸"Margaret of Anjou, Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen", Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 9 (1958), (New York: AMS Reprint Co.), 1-6.

of those stereotypical romantic-interludes with Suffolk wooing her, although not for himself but for his King: "O fairest beauty, do not fear nor fly." (V.iii.46).

Yet there is one hint of her other face that she will show later in the commanding manner in which she speaks when she is Suffolk's prisoner and is in no position to command.

She asks, "Why speak'st thou not? What ransom must I pay?" (V.iii.77) and when Suffolk doesn't answer her, so busy with his own thoughts of how to woo such a rare beauty that she deserves to be called "nature's miracle", she angrily and impatiently questions, "Will thou accept of ransom? Yea, or no?" (V.iii.80).

In this self-defence attitude of a woman who is taken prisoner, we can see how much courage and self-confidence she has, and how much of a commanding nature she possesses. This, of course, is not developed any further until she returns as a queen in 2 Henry VI.

* * *

2 Henry VI

As the days change, so does the face of the moon, and so does Margaret's. Her heart becomes set on new hopes, higher aspirations and wider horizons. These new reaching petals unfold gradually to bring Margaret's true character out into the open.

The second part of Henry VI opens with the marriage of Henry and Margaret. "In every sense this is an unnatural union. Not only has the king neglected his duty in wedding Margaret at all, but she will assume an unwomanly dominion over him and form an adulterous liaison with Suffolk."¹⁹

The she-lamb is let loose now and is ready to undergo the transformation into a wolf. The power with which she is crowned will give her the absolute say, despite the fact that Henry is the king. She is now his speaking authority and his mouthpiece, and puts her judgement before his:

¹⁹ Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 60.

Believe me, lords, were none more wise than I-
 And yet herein I judge mine own wit good-
 (III.i.231-232)

because, she believes,

Henry my lord is cold in great affairs
 Too full of foolish pity.
 (III.i.224-225)

The queen in Margaret emerges as a cruel and haughty part of her character. She is now

a Romantic Princess the shadow, a Wicked Queen the substance . . . Envy and fear of a rival to the throne make up the dominant note of her character in Part II.²⁰

T. H. McNeal carries further his first impression of Margaret into what he sees her now with all her shrewdness and calculating nature:

Margaret, in the plays which follow Part I, completely lacks any damsel-in-distress appeal. No longer is her range limited and

²⁰T. H. McNeal, "Margaret of Anjou, Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen", Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 9 (1958), (New York: AMS Reprint Co), 8.

confused by a romantic interlude designed originally for the lovely Cordella. She is as Shakespeare first found her: 'England's bloody scourge' of Part II, 'She-wolf of France' with a 'tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide' of Part III, and that 'hateful wither'd hag' of Richard III.²¹

Margaret's affair with Suffolk is too obvious to conceal, except from the king. (This relationship between Suffolk and her is not historically true.) This woman, now a queen, is burning inside for the control and power she now possesses, afraid they might slip from her hands and scared of any outsider who might deprive her of those two beloved babies of hers: control and power.

Her jealousy of the Duchess of Gloucester, the wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and the Lord Protector (uncle to King Henry VI), is too painful to hide. Margaret despises her because

She sweeps it through the Court with troops of ladies,
More like an empress than Duke Humphrey's wife.
Strangers in Court do take her for the Queen.
(I.iii.80-82)

²¹Ibid., p. 8.

Margaret is a woman who knows only hatred and therefore could not be a true mother. She rants, "Shall I not live to be avenged on her?" (I.iii.85).

Margaret gives the Duchess a box on the ear pretending she didn't know who she was. The Duchess tells King Henry then

Good King, look to't in time.
She'll hamper thee and dandle thee like a baby.
(I.iii.147-148)

This is certainly not meant to be a compliment. If Margaret was going to treat the king like a baby, it would certainly not be in the loving way in which a mother pampers her child. It would be like a mother who, in her ravenous hunger, would devour her own baby, because Margaret is disgusted with the King. She thinks he is too weak and pious a character to make a good ruler. She is always pushing him to take over the power which is in Duke Humphrey's hands. She finds the opportunity when Lady Gloucester is banished:

Why, now is Henry King, and Margaret Queen,
 And Humphrey Duke of Gloucester scarce himself,

 This staff of honor raught, there let it stand
 Where it best fits to be, in Henry's hand.
 (II.iii.39-40,43-44)

The idea of motherhood being involved in the ugly struggle for power appears indirectly in other characters' words too. Bedford (in 1 Henry VI), in commenting upon the political disorder of the time, foresees the image of a time

When at their mothers' moist eyes babe shall suck,
 Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears,
 And none but women left to wail the dead.
 (1 Henry VI I.i.49-51)

"In parting from Margaret, Suffolk recalls a different world, where children die peacefully in their mothers' arms:"²²

Here could I breathe my soul into the air,
 As mild and gentle as the cradle babe
 Dying with mother's dug between its lips
 (III.ii.391-393)

²²Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays,
 p. 54.

Harrison sums up Margaret's character:

The young Queen Margaret is shown as a ruthless and domineering woman; she despises her meek husband and takes Suffolk as her lover; she resents and insults the Duchess of Gloucester and exults in her disgrace and in the downfall and death of Humphrey, the 'good Duke of Gloucester'. She hates York and his supporters and all his family -which is understandable- and she is the inspiration of the party of the Red Rose, the Lancastrians.²³

It is Margaret who wants to keep the fire of the fight for the throne in blaze. She never stops poking for more flames and certainly gets some deep burns on her hands from her dealings.

²³G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare, The Complete Works, p. 142.

3 Henry VI

In this part of Henry VI Margaret is a queen fighting ferociously for her crown. Her motherhood is here the guideline and course, her incentive and motive; but she never forgets she is a queen, and never for a moment loses her strong hold on her actions and organizing thoughts.

Her son Edward only stands for her right to power and for her continued possession of it. There begins and ends her maternal love, at his right to his father's throne. Not in any word did this mother of Prince Edward show her maternal love and affection towards her son. He is only her means to the perpetuation of power and authority.

How much of a devoted mother was she? She appears to have been little devoted to her son, but much to his cause which was hers too.

The bloody struggle for power in which she was engaged, and the companionship of the ruthless iron men around her, seem to have left her nothing of womanhood but the heart of a mother- that last stronghold of our feminine nature.²⁴

²⁴Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), p. 335.

We first see Margaret scolding the King for disinheriting his son Edward, the Prince of Wales. Here she reminds him of her being the mother of a child whose father is so unnatural as to take the crown off his son's head and place it on York's (York had convinced the king that he is the rightful heir and that he should receive the Crown after King Henry VI's death.) .

Ah, wretched man! Would I had died a maid
 And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
 Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father!
 Hath he deserved to lose his birthright thus?
 Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,
 Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
 Or nourished him as I did with my blood.
 (I.i.216-222)

Here Margaret shows that she does have that maternal concern for her son, but she knows only how to display this maternal care by being cruel to her son's enemies and by fighting for his right to his father's throne. Whenever she speaks to Edward, she calls him "son", and not by name; she speaks of the army as "our" army. Yet there is a note of irony in the King's words who unknowingly says:

Poor Queen! How love to me and to her son
Hath made her break out into terms of rage!
(I.i.264-265)

The King is not aware of how much his wife is worried about herself and her safety more than about him, or even about her son, Edward, the Prince of Wales, although she shows enough concern about her son's well-being, but only to bring about her own security and restoration to power.

The mother who knows no pity gives York a napkin soaked in his son's blood. York replies to this horrible deed with all the names he could call such a cruel woman. He calls her

She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,
Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!
(I.iv.111-112)

He also contemptuously calls her "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!" (I.iv.137).

A woman who enjoys depriving a father of his son and watching his misery is no mother though she bears

children. She is not even a woman because

Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible-
 Thou, stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.
 (I.iv.141-142)

Queen Margaret here is another Queen Tamora. She, like Tamora, was brought over as a prisoner, became queen, and was abusing her power cruelly. Here we see Margaret, like Tamora before, enjoying the sight of tears flooding from the eyes of another Titus, for his dead son whom she has ruthlessly slain.

In Act II the Queen wants to make sure her son is getting all his rights, and she causes him to be a copy of her in his forward spirit and daring words. Thus Richard says

Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands;
 For, well I wot, thou hast thy mother's tongue.
 (II.ii.133-134)

Margaret goes to the King of France for help. There she again plays the role of the maiden in distress; only here she is a queen raging for her lost sceptre. She

successfully gets King Lewis XI of France to aid her and is willing enough to become friends with her most despised enemy Warwick whose words immediately turn her hate to love, and she accepts Warwick's daughter for her son's bride. Although not the same in history,

in the play Margaret embraces the offer without a moment's hesitation. We are disgusted by her versatile policy, and a meanness of spirit in no way allied to the magnanimous forgiveness of her terrible adversary.²⁵

For her, everything is forgiven, or she is willing to say it is as long as it serves her purpose as well as her son's. In return her son is always following his mother, always obedient and admiring his mother, much in the manner of Coriolanus:

Methinks a woman of this valiant spirit
Should, if a coward heard her speak these words,
Infuse his breast with magnanimity.
(V.iv.39-41)

The young prince puts his cause in the hands of

²⁵Ibid., p. 339.

his mother whose strong spirit overshadows his father's feeble character, and he tells his father:

When I return with victory from the field
I'll see your Grace. Till then I'll follow her.
(I.i.261-262)

At the close of the drama we still see the mother's admiration for her son even when he is taken prisoner, which contrasts with her low esteem of his father: "Ah, that thy father had been so resolved!" (V.v.22).

The loving mother now swoons at seeing her beloved son stabbed before her eyes. Only here does she speak in agony: "O Ned, sweet Ned! Speak to thy mother, boy!" (V.v.51).

Yet she utters her pain with cursing defeat and raging lament. To her, the deed of murdering her son is worse than that of killing Caesar. Her heart "will burst" while she reminds the killers of

How sweet a plant have you untimely cropped!
You have no children, butchers! If you had,
The thought of them would have stirred up remorse.
(V.v.62-64)

Yet the thought of her child did not stir her heart when she butchered York's son. She only knew what pain she had caused York when her own son was slain, and now she was even ready to die after her son; she was even begging his murderers to stab her, for it would be an act of charity to relieve her of her mournful pain. Yet the cruel mother is not punished by relieving death but by staying alive to keep the memory of her murdered son also alive in her, hoping that it would lead her to some remorseful path and purge her stained soul.

A new mother appears in the horizon. Queen Elizabeth gives birth to a prince, and the tragedy ends in the hope that a new mother figure will be born too.

* * *

Richard III

In Richard III Margaret is a "withered hag" (I.iii.215) laying her curse as a widow and deprived mother, and as a once-upon-a-time queen who still thinks she is the rightful queen.

Can curses pierce the clouds and enter Heaven?
 Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!
 If not by war, by surfeit die your King,
 As ours by murder, to make him a king!
 Edward thy son, which now is Prince of Wales,
 For Edward my son, which was Prince of Wales,
 Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
 (I.iii.195-201)

She directs her curse to Queen Elizabeth:

Thyself a Queen, for me that was a Queen,
 Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!
 Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's loss.
 (I.iii.202-204)

She wishes her to "Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen!" (I.iii.209).

Margaret also berates Richard, Duke of Gloucester,
 with

Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb!
 Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins!
 (I.iii.231-232)

The weeping mother appears again in Act IV where she revives her sorrow with Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, each mourning her own children. Margaret blames the Duchess for bringing to life such a monstrous villain:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
 A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death.
 (IV.iv.47-48)

She adds that Richard is the product that "Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves" (IV.iv.54).

Margaret even thanks God for this child who being a "carnal cur/ preys on the issue of his mother's body" (IV.iv.56-57).

Even her images of motherhood are as distorted as she is, and Margaret's reputation lives as a woman with a neverending source for new deadly curses and poisonous words, and she teaches the two women how to find new curses

for those who inflicted their sorrows upon them.

A mother who has lost her child, a wife whose husband is gone, and a queen whose crown has gone to someone else, Margaret is now only left with curses for the whole world. She deservedly becomes "calamity full of words" (IV.iv.126).

* * *

Queen Elizabeth: A Mother Worthy of Respect

In 3 Henry VI and Richard III

Queen Elizabeth: A Mother Worthy of Respect
in 3 Henry VI and Richard III

3 Henry VI

The first time the audience meets Queen Elizabeth is before she is made queen. This occurs in Act III when she is still Lady Grey, a widow and a mother fighting for her sons' rights to their father's land.

King Edward	Now tell me, madam, do you love your children?
Grey	Aye, full as dearly as I love myself.
King Edward	And would you not do much to do them good?
Grey	To do them good I would sustain some harm.

(III.ii.36-39)

But the harm that the lusty King Edward suggests makes her repulsive and willing to give up her sons' rights, to save her own honour. She only agrees to love the King when he offers to make her his Queen.

Therefore Elizabeth is first and foremost a mother. From the beginning, one meets her as a mother and she continues to be a mother throughout 3 Henry VI and Richard III.

One can note that this mother's behaviour and love of her sons is in contrast to Queen Margaret's, although her role in Act III is not intended to furnish such contrast. Lady Grey is the woman and mother who can keep both these identities in harmony, complementing each other through her character, while Margaret is the one who loses her femininity in order to get her son's (Edward) rights into her hands. Lady Grey is willing to sacrifice her three sons' rights in order to save her honor, while Margaret is ready to sacrifice all honor to save her only son's rights.

When Edward decides to marry her, all of the members of the court frown upon this marriage, for they know that Edward is bent upon it, driven only by his lust and not by any balanced thought. When Somerset sees the newly-wedded couple coming and says "here comes the King" (IV.i.7), Gloucester mockingly answers, "And his well-chosen bride" (IV.i.7). While the dissatisfied Clarence says, "I mind to tell him plainly what I think" (IV.i.8).

King Edward senses their discontent and rhetorically asks them:

Setting your scorns and your mislike aside,
 Tell me some reason why the Lady Grey
 Should not become my wife and England's Queen.
 (IV.i.24-26)

3 Henry VI ends with a new beginning; a new Edward is born. The audience all the time is kept aware of the anxiety which everybody feels when the Queen is delivering. They are all awaiting the baby to see if a rival-heir will be born. The baby Edward adds a new competitor who Richard will have to consider eliminating as he paves his bloody way to the throne. Therefore he kisses the new-born Edward as "Judas kiss'd his master" (V.vii.33), for Richard finds the number of heirs who could succeed his brother King Edward IV to the throne constantly increasing, and realizing that he will have to wait for a very long time to get there, thinks aloud:

Is Clarence, Henry, and his son young Edward,
 And all the unlooked for issue of their bodies,
 To take their rooms, ere I can place myself.
 (III.ii.130-132)

The new babe is welcomed by the King and Queen who hope that by him "begins our lasting joy" (V.vii.46). The Queen is made a mother again, and again she will be a

different type of mother from Queen Margaret as we will see in Shakespeare's Richard III.

Richard III

At the beginning of Richard III, Queen Elizabeth is a woman afraid to lose her husband, because she has that feminine intuition that warns her of Richard of Gloucester who will be entrusted with her young son if his father dies. She is a wife praying for her husband so that God may grant him health, because her children and she are dependent on him, while Margaret, in contrast, was always annoyed with her husband and acted independently of him. Queen Elizabeth has that presentiment that makes her aware of something that will come to destroy her happiness:

Would all were well! But that will never be.
 I fear our happiness is at the height.
 (I.iii.40-41)

The audience next sees her as a woman jealous of the Countess of Richmond. In Richard III

there are no women's quarrels at court comparable to that between Queen Margaret and the Duchess of Gloucester in 2 Henry VI, but there is a hint of similar enmity when Elizabeth alludes to the arrogance of Stanley's

wife and Stanley evasively apologizes for her.²⁶

Queen Elizabeth directs her words to Lord Stanley, the Earl of Derby, :

Yet, Derby, notwithstanding she's your wife,
And loves me not, be you, good lord, assured
I hate not you for her proud arrogance.
(I.iii.22-24)

On the other hand, everyone else is jealous of the Queen because of her advancement, and Gloucester accuses her of having incensed the King against Clarence and having caused the imprisonment of Lord Hastings. Margaret comes also to show her hatred of the queen, because she says, "Thy honor, state, and seat is due to me" (I.iii.112). Queen Elizabeth receives all the curses Margaret can offer:

Thyself a Queen, for me that was a Queen,
Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!
(I.iii.202-203)

Then she goes on to lay her curse that wishes Elizabeth to die neither mother, wife, nor Queen. She calls her a "painted Queen" (I.iii.241), but Queen Elizabeth says that she has never done her any wrong. Queen Elizabeth shows

²⁶ Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 99.

no intended harm to anyone although she despises Margaret. She is reconciled with Buckingham and Hastings at King Edward's deathbed, and says

A holy day shall this be kept hereafter,
I would to God all strifes were well compounded.
(II.i.73-74)

She is a woman more ready to forgive than Margaret, maybe not so heartily right away, but she has the willingness to try. She is motherly, forgiving, and pitiful, but in no way lacking in strength and spirit.

When the audience next sees the Queen, she is wailing for her dead husband. The children of Clarence do not weep with her for she has not wept with them in their distress; and Rivers tells her to

Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward's grave,
And plant your joys in living Edward's throne.
(II.ii.99-100)

After her husband's death, she becomes overly concerned about her children, and the first thing she alarmingly asks the messenger, who says he has bad news, is "How fares

the Prince?" (II.iv.39). But when she hears that Lord Rivers and Lord Grey have been taken prisoners by Gloucester and Buckingham, she instantly, with her instinctive feminine sagacity, foresees the scheme on the horizon that is determined upon the utter destruction of her house.

Ay me, I see the downfall of our house!
The tiger now hath seized the gentle hind.
(II.iv.49-50)

She then, knowing that the ruin of her kin and herself has come, hurries to sanctuary with her younger son. Right away the ruin starts because Gloucester and Buckingham meet her son Prince Edward who has come to be crowned, and they start their evil plan. Yet the Prince's words bear a hidden irony of which he is not aware:

An if I live until I be a man,
I'll win our ancient right in France again,
Or die a soldier, as I lived a king.
(III.i.91-93)

He is not aware of how much these words reflect on his near future, or rather on the future of which he will be deprived. He is easily beguiled by his feigning uncle and agrees to

go to the Tower of London. This scene with his uncle brings one's sympathy to a higher pitch when the audience later hears Elizabeth's cries about her two innocent children.

Things start to become gloomy again for Elizabeth when she goes to visit her children at the Tower and is denied entrance. She can not stand to be deprived of her maternal rights, and she says, "I am their mother. Who should keep me from them?" (IV.i.22).

She remains prudent, maintaining her mental powers in balance, even when she is at an emotional crisis. She urges Dorset to run away from the stalking death that is reaping all. Then she feels the weighty burden of Margaret's curse coming true. Her self-restraint keeps her from cursing Anne who is to be crowned Queen and usurp her title, for she knows it is not Anne's plotting.

Go, go, poor soul, I envy not thy glory.

 Poor heart, adieu! I pity thy complaining.
 (IV.i.64,88)

The audience finally sees the complete crisis fall

on Queen Elizabeth's heart. Her two children are murdered and her "gentle lambs" (IV.iv.22) thrown in the "entrails of the wolf" (IV.iv.23). In IV.iv, the three women are wailing their ominous fates, all now sharing the destiny of widowhood and loss of their children. Nevertheless, Queen Margaret keeps cursing while she is lamenting, while the Duchess and Elizabeth have no place for curses in their woe-laden hearts. Queen Elizabeth, like the Duchess, expresses a wish to die, and a longing to be buried where her sorrows will be buried with her. She addresses England's earth:

Oh, that thou wouldst as well afford a grave
 As thou canst yield a melancholy seat!
 Then would I hide my bones, not rest them here.
(IV.iv.31-33)

Margaret is still sober enough, despite her grief, to take advantage of the circumstances and turn the women against Richard. She reminds Queen Elizabeth that her curse is coming true, for the Queen is now

A mother only mocked with two sweet babes,

 For joyful mother, one that wails the name.
(IV.iv.87,99)

Elizabeth, then incensed against Richard, can not bring forth venomous curses similar to those of Margaret. She calls upon the deposed queen to do her cursing for her, and to teach her how to curse effectively:

O thou well skilled in curses, stay awhile,
 And teach me how to curse mine enemies!
 (IV.iv.116-117)

It is then that Queen Elizabeth gathers her courage together and goes with the other two women to boldly face Richard with his crimes. She has cause to curse him but is still unable to come up with such spine-chilling curses as Margarets's:

Though far more cause, yet much less spirit
 to curse
 Abides in me. I say amen to all.
 (IV.iv.196-197)

Despite all her yearning for revenge, Queen Elizabeth can not but stand and watch others doom Richard, for her sweet and sensitive nature will not give her sway to turn vulgar.

Then suddenly we are faced by a shift in Elizabeth's character. She first rejects all Richard's proposals with clever rhetoric, and puts down all his attempts to convince her to give him her daughter Elizabeth in marriage. She

even suggests that, if necessary, she will declare her daughter a fruit of her adultery, if that will save her daughter's life from Richard's claws. But to our amazement, she finally gives in to his pleas and tells him she will woo her daughter Elizabeth for him, and Richard says shrewdly after she has left, "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman! (IV.iv.431).

But Richard does not know that Queen Elizabeth will outwit him because she has already promised her daughter to Richmond whom she is supporting, and who will later become King Henry VII. Thus Queen Elizabeth remains a mother keeping her loyalty and love for her children, and her children alone.

* * *

The Duchess of York: The Mother of a Devil
in Richard III

The Duchess of York: The Mother of a Devil
 in Richard III

A look at Richard III remains incomplete, however extensive, if the character of the Duchess of York is not considered. She is the mother of a devilish monster, Richard of Gloucester, although she openly regrets having brought him to life. One can hardly neglect the differences and contrasts that exist between her character as a mother and that of Margaret who steps into Richard III linking it to the Henry VI plays.

The Duchess of York does not appear in Shakespeare's tetralogy until Richard III although her husband the Duke appears in Henry VI Part II.

In a way it is significant that York's wife does not appear [in Henry VI]; his detachment from the marital constraint that hampers his two rivals [Henry VI and Gloucester] allows him to concentrate on single-minded pursuit of the crown. ... One can hardly conceive of York with a wife, though of course she does turn up in Richard III, when he is safely dead.²⁷

²⁷ Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, pp. 57-58.

The character of the Duchess knows no cruelty. Neither in history nor in the play are there any Margaret-like actions of obsessed and cruel hatred or words of mocking scorn on the part of the Duchess. She is only presented as a weeping mother; she weeps for being the mother of the dead Edward and the murdered Clarence, but also she weeps for being the mother of the living monster Richard:

I have bewept a worthy husband's death,
 And lived by looking on his images.
 But now two mirrors of his princely semblance
 Are cracked in pieces by malignant death,
 And I for comfort have but one false glass,
 Which grieves me when I see my shame in him.
(II.ii.49-54)

The Duchess is a woman tender enough to weep for her enemies in their miseries as when she tells Margaret who is rejoicing in the Duchess's sorrows:

O Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes!
 God witness with me, I have wept for thine.
(IV.iv.59-60)

The Duchess of York, a mother of two kings, Edward IV and Richard III, was never queen herself although

She held receptions with the state of a queen, a title she had once had reasonable hope of enjoying when her husband was declared heir to Henry VI. . . . Walpole says she was a "princess of spotless character", thus refuting the cruel slur of Richard III who, as indicated in the play, tried to prove that he alone was a legitimate son of the Duke of York.²⁸

This woman who was never queen behaves in a much more stately manner than does Margaret who is a queen deposed in Richard III. The Duchess reflects more often on herself and her sorrows than does she curse her enemies, while Margaret, on the other hand, has more of a rash temper that can not be subdued although it is unfit for her position as former queen.

We first see the Duchess in Act II, scene ii, with the fatherless children of Clarence who has been mercilessly killed by his brother Richard's agents. The Duchess detects the deceit of the young children by their mean uncle and says:

²⁸W. H. Thomson, Shakespeare's Characters: A Historical Dictionary, (Altrincham, Great Britain: John Sherratt and Son, 1951), p. 320.

He is my son - yea, and therein my shame -
 Yet from my dugs he drew not this deceit.
 (III.ii.29-30)

The Duchess keeps repeating to herself and to the audience that she is unwillingly the mother of such a Richard, for she has not that fox-like nature in her. She calls him the "false glass which grieves me when I see my shame in him " (II.ii.54). Though still a mother, she feels she has more reason for sorrow than Queen Elizabeth when King Edward dies:

Thou art a widow, yet thou art a mother,
 And hast the comfort of thy children left thee.
 But death hath snatched my husband from mine arms,
 And plucked two crutches from my feeble limbs.
 (II.ii.55-58)

The Duchess feels she is no more a mother after the loss of Clarence and Edward, and she tells Elizabeth that she (Elizabeth), though a widow now, still has the blessings of motherhood to console her. The passage in which Elizabeth laments her husband, while the children of Clarence lament their father, brings out the combined misery of this mother:

Alas, I am the mother of these moans!
 Their woes are parceled, mine are general.
 (II.ii.80-81)

When Richard comes in and asks her for her blessing, she gives it him, but he feels that it comes not from her heart but from her lips alone. How can a mother bless a child who was born a monster and said to have teeth when he was less than two hours old?

York: Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast
 That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old.
 (II.iv.27-28)

Instead of blessing him, she curses her womb that brought him to life:

O my accursed womb, the bed of death,
 A cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world.
 (IV.i.54-55)

She says she should have intercepted his birth "By strangling thee in her accursed womb " (IV.iv.138).

This sorrow-nourished mother never forgets to bless those around her. She blesses Dorset with "good fortune"

(IV.i.92) to guide him, Anne with "good angels" (IV.i.93) to tend her, and Queen Elizabeth with "good thoughts" (IV.i.94) to possess her. Yet she is unable to give her maternal blessing to her own son, because she can not share his evil thoughts and plotting and can not partake in the bloody scheming he carries out.

The Duchess uses words in her woe that reflect her agony and her wish that England's earth, flooded with innocent blood will receive her and put an end to her pains:

Blind sight, dead life, poor mortal-living ghost,
 Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due by life usurped,

 Rest thy unrest on England's lawful earth,
 Unlawfully made drunk with innocents' blood.
 (IV.iv.26-27, 29-30)

Here she again wishes that death would come to her to close her eyes and save her from more bloody sights, for she has already expressed a wish to die, saying:

I to my grave, where peace and rest lie with me!
 Eighty odd years of sorrow have I seen,
 And each hour's joy wrecked with a week of teen.
 (IV.i.95-97)

Yet this old Duchess still has more to face. She has to lay her curse on her own son so that his decline might start. It has become a tradition in Shakespeare that curses often foreshadow events and prophesy things that come true later, especially when they are curses such as the ones in Richard III, where the mother is cursing her wicked son Richard, or where the curses of the bereaved mothers, Margaret and Elizabeth, also fall on him. These curses seem to set his doom and to define his future, forecasting his downfall.

The Duchess's passive weeping before was not frowning enough upon Richard; she has now to pronounce her indignant maternal anger on him. She has to put more strength and restraint in her words. She draws on her sorrow-laden heart for new words with which to damn her own son. But when she starts to speak and calls him "thou toad" (IV.iv.145), he orders trumpets to sound to drown her "exclamations" (IV.iv.153). She then starts to pour forth her accusations upon him who came to life to make the earth her hell ever since he was born:

I have stayed for thee,
 God knows, in anguish, pain, and agony
 A grievous burden was thy birth to me.
 (IV.iv.162-163,167)

She then pronounces her curse, the haunting curse of a mother on her son, predicting a doom that will follow him to death:

Therefore take with thee my most grievous curse,

 Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end.
 Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.
 (IV.iv.187,194-195)

She tells him that his enemies will bear her blessing and that "the little souls of Edward's children" (IV.iv.191) will "whisper the spirits" (IV.iv.192) of his enemies and "promise them success and victory" (IV.iv.193), and all this comes true later to add torture to his hell-tormented soul.

There ends her role as a mother, and there ends her misery because Richard will suffer under her curse and see all that she pronounced come real before his own eyes. Although Margaret had cursed Richard before, yet

He is undaunted and apparently unharmed by her curses; after all she is an old enemy, a Lancastrian. But when the Yorkist women, members of his own family, curse him, his complete isolation becomes clear.²⁹

It is only when the sound of the drums will no more stop his mother's curse from reaching his ears that Richard's decline begins, because Margaret's curse was not enough to start him moving towards the edge of the mountain on top of which he believed he will stand forever.

Richard was in conflict with the women who opposed his conduct. He not only had to face the raging Margaret, his enemy, but also the three silent women of his own family, the Yorkist Duchess his mother, Anne his wife, and Queen Margaret, who were all forced from their silence because of his continued malignancy.

The women of that family express the values that he opposes, and through the looming presence of Queen Margaret their grief is invested with power. She brings the Senecan power to curse, but she is after all outside the York family and besides is tainted with her own past crimes. She can represent the

²⁹ Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 114.

Senecan vengeance that pursues crime, but not the nobler idea of a ruling Providence. Only when Richard's wife and mother are moved to curse him is his doom sealed.³⁰

So the last words of this mother are a maternal curse on her son. After that she makes her final exit from the play and from his life.

Thus the Duchess is a figure of the tender mother who was engulfed with sorrow for her dead children and with suffering because of the one still living. She is the noble mother who can discern truth and speak it out even against her own son. This forces out our respect for her because one can not but admire such a mother whose impartiality and sense of justice transcend the weak emotions that govern her motherly love. The Duchess of York ranks high in the series of mother figures in Shakespeare's history plays.

³⁰Ibid., p. 109.

Queen Elinor: The Mother in Charge

In King John

Queen Elinor: The Mother in Charge in
King John

King John begins with Queen Elinor ranting against "that ambitious Constance" (I.i.32) who "would not cease" (I.i.32)

Till she had kindled France and all the world,
 Upon the right and party of her son?
 (I.i.33-34)

Yet Queen Elinor still has the honesty and the courage to admit that her son's throne is acquired by "strong possession" (I.i.40) much more than by right, though she admits this only in the presence of her son, and when no other person is present, whether enemy or friend. She is a strong woman who likes the forward character of Philip Faulconbridge, and knighted as Sir Richard, asks him to follow her, for she is going to France as "a soldier" (I.i.150). He swears allegiance to her and promises to follow her faithfully "unto the death" (I.i.154).

We next see Richard with his mother, Lady Faulconbridge. Shakespeare harps on the theme of bastardy and Richard faces his mother with the fact, insisting on knowing who his real father is. In many of Shakespeare's plays, men exchange accusations and call each other children

of adulterous mothers, so that mothers are always accused, whether rightfully or not, of being unfaithful to their husbands' beds. When Richard knows his real father, King Richard Coeur-de-Lion, he does not blame his mother for being unfaithful to her husband but rather tells her:

And they shall say, when Richard me begot,
If thou hadst said him nay, it had been sin.
(I.i.274-275)

Richard loves his mother and takes care of her, and is proud to introduce her to his kin without a wink of shame despite knowing that he was born in bastardy.

This is the one and only time where we meet Lady Faulconbridge; consequently she is just a mother who is brought into the play to identify Sir Richard as a bastard, and after having served her role she disappears from the rest of the action.

Queen Elinor is a capable woman controlling and guiding her son in all his affairs. She is the one who urges him to acquiesce to the marriage of Lewis the Dauphin of France and Lady Blanch, so that he would solve peacefully

the problem that is threatening his throne, and solve it soon before anybody suggests another way of settling matters that might bring Arthur's right to the question again. King John takes the advice his mother offers right away for he is quite dependent on her.

Queen Elinor is a woman easily capable of controlling the kingdom, through her son, with her

strong intellect and love of power, unbridled by conscience or principle, surviving when other passions were extinguished, and rendered more dangerous by a degree of subtlety and self-command to which her youth had been a stranger.³¹

From historical evidence, we can also note that Queen Elinor was a woman who could be entrusted with great responsibility.

Queen Elinor preserved to the end of her life her influence over her children, and appears to have merited their respect. While entrusted with the government, during the absence of Richard I, she ruled with a steady hand,

³¹Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, p. 325.

and made herself exceedingly popular; and as long as she lived to direct the counsels of her son John, his affairs prospered.³²

Of the relation between Queen Elinor and Constance much can be said. These two mothers deserve a study from both their points of view.

Constance and Queen Elinor know no amity. The Queen's

personal and avowed hatred for Constance, together with its motives, are mentioned by the old historians. Holinshed expressly says that Queen Elinor was mightily set against her grandson Arthur, rather moved thereto by envy conceived against his mother, than by any fault of the young prince, for that she knew and dreaded the high spirit of the Lady Constance.³³

When Constance rejoices, and a new sparkle of hope for her son's cause comes alive when King Philip of France declares allegiance to the Pope - and thus becomes enemy to England - she happily says: "Oh, fair return of

³²Ibid., p. 326.

³³Ibid., p. 325.

banished majesty!" (III.i.321). Queen Elinor, ever-alert to this woman's clever words, quickly exclaims: "Oh, foul revolt of French inconstancy!" (III.i.322).

This hatred and jealousy between these two tigresses fighting over the same den, and these two lionesses competing for the same prey, is reminiscent of that enmity between Margaret and Queen Elizabeth and of that between Margaret and the Duchess of York. Yet "the nature of Elinor, though violent, had no tincture of the baseness and cruelty of her son".³⁴

As for Elinor's love for her son, we can see that she is a woman capable of love for others who are as loyal to her as her own son. The bastard is constantly showing respect to his "grandam" Elinor:

Grandam, I will pray,
 If ever I remember to be holy,
 For your fair safety; so, I kiss your hand.
 (III.iii.14-16)

³⁴Ibid., p. 326.

Elinor always treated him gently too: "Farewell, gentle Cousin." (III.iii.17).

King John loved his mother well and spoke to her respectfully, while she always bestowed her motherly blessing and love on him:

King John. Madam, fare you well,
I'll send those powers o'er to your
Majesty.

Elinor. My blessing go with thee!
(III.iii.69-71)

King John shows constant concern for his mother and is always consciously working for her safety and her satisfaction. Not until he knows his mother is secure can he turn to other matters:

King John. My mother is assailed in our tent
And ta'en, I fear.

Bastard. My lord, I rescued her.
Her Highness is in safety, fear you not.
(III.ii.6-8)

John is

genuinely fond of his mother and dependent on her advice, as his aimlessness after he leaves her in France suggests. When he hears of her death, his first reaction is a selfish concern with the state of his French territories, but some fifty lines later he is still brooding on the news: 'My mother dead!' (IV.ii.181)³⁵

Queen Elinor is a loving mother, but more of her character will be revealed in the next chapter which discusses Constance as mother and her relationship with Queen Elinor.

³⁵ Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 139.

Constance: A Mother Strong in Her Helplessness

In King John

Constance: A Mother Strong in Her Helplessness
in King John

Constance is the ever-raging mother whom we first meet in Act II. She introduces herself to us in a clash between her and Queen Elinor, both exchanging insults and hurling accusations at each other.

Elinor. Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?
Constance. Let me make answer. Thy usurping son.
Elinor. Out, insolent! Thy bastard shall be King,
That thou mayst be a Queen and check
the world!

(II.i.120-123)

The two sharp-tongued women, accusing each other of infidelity to their husbands and of the bastardy of their sons, cleverly try to turn Arthur against each other with their natural eloquence and persuasive skills, until everyone is deafened by their quarrel and Arthur helplessly cries out to his mother Constance:

Good my Mother, peace!
I would that I were low laid in my grave.
I am not worth this coil that's made for me.
(II.i.163-165)

Arthur says so with his own naïveté, not knowing that the two tigresses are fighting over their own grip on the throne, and that he is merely the issue involved in that ferocious struggle for survival of the stronger and more shrewd. They both do not lack the ability to throw each other with the meanest of charges and to put their scolding verbosity to use: Elinor calls Constance a "monstrous slanderer of Heaven and earth" (II.i.174), while Constance calls her a usurper of her son's right and a woman with a "sin-conceiving womb" (II.i.182). Constance here reminds us of Margaret whose incessant flow of curses has to be checked, more often than once, or she will go on endlessly. King John impatiently stops Constance with a "Bedlam, have done" (II.i.183), but she still has more to say. It is then that Elinor calls her with the name that befits her most - "a scold" - (II.i.191), so she again starts to pour forth her intolerable words, but is quickly ordered to "pause or be more temperate" (II.i.195).

Robert Pierce says that

Constance is like the Duchess of York in her moral dignity and like Queen Anne in her helplessness; Shakespeare's conception of the mother and son is abstract, based on the idea of right without power . . . That they

are mother and son is important, yet they have practically no direct contact. Even when they are together, Constance talks past her son in fiery quarrels for his sake, and he responds to her only by revealing a shy embarrassment at her emotion.³⁶

When Constance hears of what happened in France and of the intended wedding that will bring peace between King Philip of France, her only aid, and King John, her main enemy, she becomes frantic and madly angry. She sees in this union of peace the utter death of her son's cause and rightful claim. It is at this moment that we see Constance in her utmost fury. She goes mad when her son tries to calm her and she starts to show him his real worth:

But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune joined to make thee great.
Of Nature's gift thou mayst with lilies boast.
(III.i.51-53)

Anna Jameson says this of Constance:

It is the power of imagination which gives so peculiar a tinge to the maternal tenderness of Constance; she not only loves her son with the fond instinct of a mother's affection, but she loves him with her poetical imagination,

³⁶Ibid., p. 132.

exults in his beauty and his royal birth . . .
 Her proud spirit, her ardent enthusiastic fancy,
 and her energetic self-will, all combine with
 her maternal love to give it that tone and
 character which belongs to her only.³⁷

She, in blaming his fortune, uses the ever-recurring metaphor
 of the adulteress:

But Fortune, Oh,
 She is corrupted, changed and won from thee.
 She adulterates hourly with thine uncle John.
 (III.i.54-56)

Her sorrow is huge, her grief fills the world.
 She is as proud in her indignation as the proud Volumnia
 when Constance says:

I will instruct my sorrows to be proud,
 For Grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.
 To me and to the state of my great grief
 Let Kings assemble; for my grief's so great
 That no supporter but the huge firm earth
 Can hold it up. Here I and Sorrows sit.
 (III.i.68-73)

Jameson adds:

³⁷Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women,
 p. 320.

Whenever we think of Constance, it is in her maternal character. All the interest which she excites in the drama turns upon her situation as a mother of Arthur. Every circumstance in which she is placed, every sentiment she utters has a reference to him; and she is represented through the whole of the scenes in which she is engaged, as alternately pleading for the rights and trembling for the existence of her son.³⁸

Driven by her son's loss, she curses in the manner of the established curser Margaret:

This day, all things begun come to ill end,

 Arm, arm, you Heavens, against these perjured Kings!
 A widow cries. Be husband to me, Heavens!
 (III.i. 94, 107-108)

Austria again has to put an end to this never-ceasing termagant, or else her tongue would never grow weary; yet she, stating it is lawful that she has "room with Rome to curse awhile" (III.i.180), bursts into a new series of curses, this time raging against Austria who has allied himself with her enemies:

Thou wear a lion's hide! Doff it for shame,
 And hang a calf's skin on those recreant limbs.
 (III.i.128-129)

³⁸ Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women,
 p. 312.

Pierce says:

The imagery is full of references to the family as a victim of disorder. When the French king, succumbing to the ethic of commodity, betrays Constance and Arthur, she suggests that all children born on that day will be monstrous. At least in her frenzied imagination, corruption of justice in the state will disrupt the whole order of nature, including the process of generation.³⁹

Following the same line of imagery, where mothers are sacrificed in the process of restoration of order, Salisbury in Act V, scene ii uses the "familiar image of children revolting against their mother. Later in the same scene Faulconbridge intensifies the same figure to picture the rebels as 'bloody Neroes, ripping up the womb/Of your dear mother England' (V.ii.152-53)." ⁴⁰

King John assigns Hubert to accompany Arthur and kill him secretly, and after that we see Constance in her greatest motherly sorrow when she is so distressed at her son's fortune that she invokes death as her bridegroom:

³⁹Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 127.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 128.

Death; Death! O amiable lovely Death!

.
 Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smilest
 And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,
 Oh, come to me!

(III.iv.25,34-36)

Her words are charged with true humility and self pity, for she sees no redress to the wounds that King John has engraved in her soul with his usurping hand, and with the help of the woman she detests most - his mother Elinor. Constance, over-aware of the power of her tongue, wishes to put it even to more effective use:

Oh, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!
 Then with passion would I shake the world.

(III.iv.38-39)

Pandulph then tells her that she is uttering madness and not sorrow, but again with the use of her tongue, she proves she is not mad. Upon hearing that her son is a prisoner, she starts bewailing him as dead. When Pandulph tells her that she holds "too heinous a respect of grief" (III.iv.90), she ironically replies: "He talks to me that never had a son" (III.iv.97).

Constance knows that no one could ever understand her

suffering if he had no children, because the love of a parent for a child can never be felt or judged by someone who has not had the experience of parenthood. No mental process or calculation can measure the amount of a mother's pain at losing her child, although Constance here only assumes that Arthur is dead already. She therefore starts a new address to her grief in a beautiful piece of lamentation:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child;
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.

(III.iv.93-98)

This pitiful mother now makes us totally forget that she was once a scold, and we only go down with her into her deep well of sorrow to drink her tears that flow with every word:

O Lord! My boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!

(III.iv.103-105)

She easily conveys her heartbreaking affliction and the sorrow throbbing in her veins to us and we are ready to

forgive her previous bad temper and believe, along with her, that Arthur is already dead and that she is now a widow and a bereaved mother as well.

Arthur has the cleverness of his mother's tongue except that he speaks in more eloquent innocence so that he moves Hubert to repentance and is set free, only to die a short while later. Therefore all the weeping sorrow of this mother was not in vain, for a mother's heart can always tell.

* * *

Queen Isabel and Katharine: Two Mothers

In The Background

in Henry V

Queen Isabel & Katharine: Two Mothers
 In The Background
 in Henry V

Actually in Henry V we do not have much of a mother figure and the two mothers who are mentioned serve only to complete the picture and the cast of the play.

Queen Isabel of France is Katharine's mother. She appears towards the end of the drama in Act V, scene ii only to speak a few words that do not mean much in themselves, and from which we can not judge her as a character. She tries to create a peaceful and friendly atmosphere between the two age-old enemies, England and France, yet the words she employs have a tinge of ironical double-punning as when she tells King Henry V:

Your eyes, which hitherto have borne in them
 Against the French, that met them in their bent,
 The fatal balls of murdering basilisks.
 (V.ii.15-17)

Therefore we can perhaps derive that she is a woman with a keen intellect, using it diplomatically to serve her husband's (Charles VI) and her purpose of establishing

peace with, rather than being trodden upon by the English.

We hear the echo of Queen Elizabeth's words when she was reconciled with her enemies by the dying King Edward in Richard III:

A holy day shall this be kept hereafter.
I would to God all strifes were well compounded.
(Richard III. II.i.73-74)

This echo resounds in Queen Isabel's soothing words:

So happy be the issue, Brother England,
Of this good day and of this gracious meeting
.....
..... and that this day
Shall change all griefs and quarrels into love.
(Henry V. V.ii.12-13,19-20)

Queen Isabel's diplomacy again appears when she remarks that she also would like to be present at the meeting where King Henry's demands were going to be discussed, because

Haply a woman's voice may do some good
When articles too nicely urged be stood on.
(V.ii.93-94)

Queen Isabel disappears for the moment giving King Henry V a chance to woo her daughter Katharine. The Queen

never speaks to her daughter in this drama, so one can not even try to do any guess work at the nature of the relationship between the mother and her daughter.

The wooing scene is quite amusing, and King Henry V tries his best to win Katharine when he had refused her as a gift (Prologue III.30-31). He wants her to be totally convinced of his true love and faithful nature because he plans to make her his queen and mother to his children. He tells her plainly "I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in protestation " (V. ii.148-149) .

Henry goes on to define her primary duty when she becomes his queen:

Thou must therefore needs prove a good soldier-breeder. Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard?
(V.ii.217-222)

Henry already imagines what kind of offspring this future mother will give him. He tells her to "endeavor for your French part of such a boy, and for my English moiety take the word of a king and a bachelor " (V.ii.228-230).

We can trace other instances where Henry often employs the idea of "mother" in his words, as when he sends a threat to the French Dauphin, he brings in the effect of his vengeance on mothers and sons:

For many a thousand widows
 Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands,
 Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;
 And some are yet ungotten and unborn
 That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn.
 (I.ii.284-288)

Henry again uses mothers in talking of war, but now not to show the effect of war on mothers, but rather the effect of mothers on war. He wants his English men to be their fathers' proud sons, and encourages them to fight bravely telling them

Dishonor not your mothers. Now attest
 That those whom you called fathers did beget you.
 (III.i.22-23)

King Henry V also uses the reference to mothers in talking to the Governor of the town of Harfleur, asking him for the last time to surrender peacefully or his soldiers will go about "mowing like grass / Your fresh-air virgins and your flowering infants" (III.iii.13-14). The soldiers will

perform their bloody duty on

Your naked infants spitted upon pikes
 Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
 Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
 At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.
 (III.iii.38-41)

When the Duke of Exeter (uncle to King Henry V) reports the death of the Duke of York (the king's cousin) to King Henry V, he uses the word mother in a beautiful expression:

But I had not so much of man in me, eyes
 And all my mother came into mine eyes
 And gave me up to tears.
 (IV.vi.30-32)

When Katharine's father, the French King Charles VI, agrees to give her in marriage to King Henry V, he also talks of her with a projection into the future when she would become mother to his grandchildren. Charles VI says to King Henry V:

Take her, fair son, and from her blood raise up
 Issue to me, that the contending kingdoms

 May cease their hatred.
 (V.ii.376-377,380)

Charles VI and King Henry V are both thinking of Katharine as a mother, but each with respect to her bearing his issue and his descendents. Therefore the role of motherhood serves, in the royal context, to perpetuate thrones and establish inheritances, not only in this instance, but in all of Shakespeare's history plays.

Queen Isabel finally blesses the marriage that will bring a union between England and France. "Henry V progresses toward a marriage that both effects and symbolizes union (a momentary one) between the two ancient rivals, France and England. Queen Isabel makes this symbolism explicit at the end of the play:"⁴¹

God, the best maker of all marriages,
Combine your hearts in one, your realms in one!
As man and wife, being two, are one in love,
So be there 'twixt your kingdoms such a spousal
That never may ill office, or fell jealousy,
Which troubles oft the bed of blessed marriage,
Thrust in between the paction of these kingdoms
To make divorce of their incorporate league.
(V.ii.387-394)

The Chorus in the Epilogue proclaims Katharine, now

⁴¹Ibid., p. 228.

Henry's Queen, a mother already. "The warrior son that Henry and Katharine are to breed is the weakling Henry VI."⁴² We leave this new mother at this point and never see her again in Henry VI, so she serves only as a link between the two generations.

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⁴²Ibid., p. 231.

Katharine and Anne: Two Condemned Mothers

in Henry VIII

Katharine and Anne: Two Condemned Mothers
in Henry VIII

Henry VIII presents us with two mothers: Katharine of Aragon and Anne Bullen. Yet both of these mothers are condemned by the king, each in her turn, to meet their deaths because of him.

Katharine of Aragon

Katharine as a female was known to have a gentle and pious nature. She preferred her needle and her books to all the festivities of the court. Yet she is firm in her gentleness and powerful in her meekness.

She inherited a tincture of Queen Isabella's haughtiness and obstinacy of temper . . . that extraordinary mother had implanted in her mind the most austere principles of virtue . . . The natural turn of her mind was simple, serious, and domestic, and all the impulses of her heart kindly and benevolent.⁴³

Such a woman is naturally expected to be gentle with her husband and faithful to him, and Katharine certainly was. Though a Queen, she never deliberately displayed that power with which she was crowned, but rather always spoke in a

⁴³Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, p. 342.

humble manner. This drove the king himself to appreciate her more, as when we first see her kneeling before him so that her suit may be granted, he says:

Arise, and take place by us. Half your suit
 Never name to us. You have half our power.
 The other moiety ere you ask is given.
 Repeat your will, and take it.
 (I.ii.10-13)

Even to the Surveyor of the Duke of Buckingham she speaks thus:

Take good heed
 You charge not in your spleen a noble person
 And spoil your nobler soul. I say, take heed;
 Yes, heartily beseech you.
 (I.ii.173-176)

King Henry loved his wife dearly and knew how lucky he was to have such a wise woman for his wife. "He was fond of openly displaying his respect and love for her; and she exercised a strong and salutary influence over his turbulent and despotic spirit."⁴⁴

As a mother, Katharine was also gentle and loving. Shakespeare only alludes to her children without making

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 344.

them involved in the action of the play. Henry VIII mentions the early death of the two sons Katharine bore him:

I stood not in the smile of Heaven, who had
 Commanded nature that my lady's womb,
 If it conceived a male child by me, should
 Do no more offices of life to't than
 The grave does to the dead; for her male issue
 Or died where they were made, or shortly after
 This world had aired them.

(II.iv.187-193)

Yet unlike in the other history plays, this is not the main issue here. This is not the reason for his divorce. Her failure to give him a male heir does not in any way cause or provide a reason for the divorce.

Katharine also bore him a baby girl, Mary, whom she was concerned about all the time. To the very last minute of her life she was thinking of her daughter and of how she would be treated by her father who now claims she is illegitimate, after his marriage with his brother's wife "has crept too near his conscience" (II.ii.18), or rather "too near another lady" (II.ii.19). Katharine reminds him of their children when she and the King meet face to face at the Blackfriar's Hall for the final

judgement of the lawfulness of their marriage:

Sir, call to mind
That I have been your wife, in this obedience,
Upward of twenty years, and have been blest
With many children by you.

(II.iv.34-37)

Yet this patient queen loses her temper with Cardinal
Wolsey:

Wolsey.	Be patient yet.
Queen Katharine.	I will when you are humble

	I utterly abhor-yea, from my soul
	Refuse - you for my judge.
	(II.iv.73-74, 81-82)

Mrs. Jameson comments:

The character, when analysed, is, in the first place distinguished by truth. . . . truth as a quality of the soul; this is the basis of the character. . . . It is by this integrity of heart and clearness of understanding, this light of truth within her own soul, and not through any acuteness of intellect, that Katharine detects and exposes the real character of Wolsey, though unable either to unravel his designs or defeat them.⁴⁵

Katharine says to Wolsey

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 350.

My lord, my lord
 I am a simple woman, much too weak
 To oppose your cunning.

(II.iv.105-107)

After she indignantly leaves the court room, King
 Henry VIII confesses, rather to himself:

The man i' the world who shall report he has
 A better wife, let him in naught be trusted.

 The Queen of earthly queens. She's noble born,
 And like her true nobility she has
 Carried herself towards me.

(II.iv.134-135,141-143)

When the two Cardinals come to see Katharine, she
 says something that only adds to our admiration of her
 pure soul:

There's nothing I have done yet, o' my conscience,
 Deserves a corner. Would all other women
 Could speak this with as free a soul as I do!

(III.i.30-32)

We pity her in her affliction and all her words
 reveal deep sorrow and hurt feelings. To the very end she
 keeps reminding the king of their daughter. "She pined
 in her loneliness, deprived of her daughter, receiving no

consolation from the Pope, and no redress from the emperor
 . . . for the rest, I commend unto you Mary our daughter,
 beseeching you to be a good father to her, as I have here-
 tofore desired."⁴⁶ Katharine asks Capucius to bear to the
 king her letter:

In which I have commended to his goodness
 The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter-
 The dews of Heaven fall thick in blessings on her! -
 Beseeching him to give her virtuous breeding -
 She is young and of a noble modest nature;
 I hope she will deserve well - and a little
 To love her for her mother's sake that loved him,
 Heaven knows how dearly.

(IV.ii.131-138)

Katharine who "in this play is properly the heroine,
 and exhibited from first to last as the very 'queen of
 earthly queens'"⁴⁷ passes away quietly, giving way to the
 new queen to take her place, first in joy and later in death.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 364.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 348.

Anne Bullen

Anne is the beauty who replaces Katharine's wisdom. When King Henry meets Anne at Wolsey's banquet, he becomes so desirous of her that he sacrifices his marriage to Katharine in order to get her maid of honour. Anne does not say anything in reply to Henry's

The fairest hand I ever touched! O Beauty,
Till now I never knew thee;
(I.iv.75-76)

Similarly Anne does not say anything all through the play, except when we see her with the old lady in Act II pitying Queen Katharine, not knowing that she will be the cause of her ruin.

By my troth and maidenhead,
I would not be a queen.
(II.iii.23-24)

The Lord Chamberlain, delivering the King's generous message, foresees that

But from this lady may proceed a gem
To lighten all this isle.
(II.iii.78-79)

and that is what actually happens when Anne Bullen becomes queen. Her coronation takes place in great flourish and pomp and is described with great detail, but all this is reported about her and she never appears personally or speaks. The earthly coronation of Anne Bullen provides a sharp contrast to the heavenly serene coronation of Katharine. "The description of Anne Bullen's triumphant beauty at her coronation is placed immediately before the dying scene of Katharine; yet with equal good taste and good feeling Shakespeare has constantly avoided all personal collision between the two characters."⁴⁸

Once Katharine is dead, a new baby is born: Anne's daughter Elizabeth. We hear that the new Queen is delivered and that "'Tis a girl, promises boys hereafter " (V.iii.166).

Mrs. Jameson says:

In making the death of Katharine precede the birth of Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare has committed an anachronism, not only pardonable, but necessary. We must remember that the construction of the play required a happy termination; and that the birth of Elizabeth,

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 354.

before or after the death of Katharine, involved
the question of her legitimacy.⁴⁹

The new-born babe brings the Lord Chamberlain's words
to life, for she is a gem who

Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings.
(V.v.19-20)

Anne has now reached the stage Queen Katharine had
occupied before her. A Queen and a mother now, she will
later, though not in the play, meet her death upon the
king's command, who, accusing her of unfaithfulness, ordered
her beautiful head to be cut off and to be put to death, the
second mother of his children.

* * *

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 348.

ENGLAND AND ROME AS MOTHER FIGURES

The Mistreated Mothers

England and Rome as Mother Figures: The Mistreated Mothers

England

England is the mother figure that occurs in each and every play Shakespeare wrote dealing with British history. She is the symbolic mother whose spirit hovers constantly over her children, loving and protecting them, although she is always repaid with blood.

One might think of England as a father figure since England, very often, stood for the ruling figure, the King. The Queen was always the complementary part with no real power, unless she deliberately managed to take over the reign from her husband, as Queen Margaret perhaps tried to do. Yet despite this, one can still look at England as a mother to all those kings, a mother ill-treated by her children.

England did have children although many of them proved "unnatural" to her, and many characters in these plays identify themselves as England's sons. Falstaff says, "Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses?" (1 Henry IV, II.iv.452). England's children are

again mentioned in

Chorus: O England! Model to thy inward greatness,
Like little body with a might heart,
What mightst thou do that honour would thee do
Were all thy children kind and natural!
(Henry V. Prologue II. 16-19)

England has always been a mother nursing her children with love and faith, but the obedient children become too mature to be controlled. They, in their constant struggle for the throne, are like children fighting to secure the love of their mother, each jealously for himself alone, and to have all her attention centered on him, thus leading to his desire for the elimination of his rival brothers and sisters. It is the possessive and selfish love in a child that drives him to become irritated when his mother's affection is shared by his other brothers, and this kindles his jealousy and in many cases his hatred for them. There is clear evidence in Richard III of these actions, and this is what all this play revolves about.

All through the history plays, England has been loved by her children. But these children never know how to show their love except by bloodshed and wars to make others love England too:

King Philip of France: England we love, and for
that England's sake
With burden of our armor
here we sweat.
(King John, II.i.91-92)

This loving mother becomes only the scene of murder
and deceit, and that is why she is always pitied for the
way her children mistreat her.

Richmond: And make poor England weep in streams
of blood!
Let them not live to taste this land's
increase
That would with treason wound this fair
land's peace!
(Richard III, V.v.37-39)

The children pity the mother who is tortured by
her ungrateful royal offsprings:

Hastings: O bloody Richard! Miserable England!
I prophesy the fearfull'st time to thee.
(Richard III, III.iv.105-106)

The bleeding wounds undeservedly inflicted in the
heart of this ever-loving mother are alluded to more
than once: "Chorus: That they lost France and made his England
bleed" (Henry V, Epilogue.12).

England's soil was loved by all her children who found it extremely hard to part with, it being the loving and comforting bosom on which they shed their tears, and the only place where they could open their hearts and be listened to and ease their burdened souls:

Bolingbroke: Then, England's ground, farewell.
 Sweet soil, adieu -
 My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet!
 (Richard II I.iii.306-307)

England's soil provides a fertile womb from which springs many a king:

York: For I had hope of France
 Even as I have of fertile England's soil.
 (2 Henry VI.I.i.237-238)

Gaunt: This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
 this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,

 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear
 land.
 (Richard II.II.i.50-51,57)

England, to her children, was not only a fertile
mother, but also a fair woman:

Queen Margaret: And even with this I lost fair
England's view.
(2 Henry VI.III.ii.110)

Salisbury: Or banished fair England's territories.
(2 Henry VI.III.ii.245)

England's face is described in:

King Richard II: Ten thousand bloody crowns of
mother's sons
Shall ill become the flower of
England's face,
Change the complexion of her maid-
pale peace
To scarlet indignation, and bedew
Her pastures' grass with faithful
English blood.
(Richard II.III.iii.96-100)

This beloved mother will never kneel before a
usurper; her children will not allow it:

Bastard: This England never did, nor ever shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror.
(King John.V.vii.112-113)

Yet these same loving children are mercilessly
ripping apart the womb that gave them life:

Bastard: You bloody Neroes, ripping up the womb
Of your dear mother England, blush for shame.
(King John.V.ii.152-153)

This womb will still receive them, despite their
cruelty, when the time comes for them to go back to it:
"Arthur: Oh, me! My uncle's spirit is in these stones./
Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones." (King John.
IV.iii.9-10)

Similarly others find in England's loving earth their
last resort from the never-ending sorrows of life:

Duchess of York: Rest thy unrest on England's lawful
earth
Unlawfully made drunk with
innocents' blood.
Queen Elizabeth: Oh, that thou wouldst as well afford
a grave
As thou canst yield a melancholy
seat!
(Richard III. IV.iv.29-32)

England remains throughout the plays a devoted
mother forgiving all her children's mistakes in return for

a word of love or a sign of affection from them, and finally entombing them with as much love as that which they received when they were alive.

* * *

Rome

Rome is certainly a mother. One never thinks of Rome as a male figure in the Roman history plays. Rome is a maternal figure; in every word her Roman children speak lovingly about her.

The audience tends to associate Rome with the famous mother figure of Volumnia in Coriolanus. She is undisputedly the Roman mother who embodies Rome the female. When she appears, the impression can not be repressed and she is greeted by:

1st Senator: Behold our patroness, the life of Rome!

· · · · ·
Cry "Welcome, ladies, welcome!"
(Coriolanus.V.v.1,6)

Rome has many if not all of the qualities of this Roman patroness. Rome gives birth to noble heroes only, and will be ashamed if her sons prove to be cowards:

Volumnia: Come on, you cowards! You were got in fear,
Though you were born in Rome.
(Coriolanus.I.iii.36-37)

The ungrateful sons of Rome sometimes accuse her of being ungrateful herself as in: "Titus: Shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome." (Titus Andronicus IV.iii.17) and in

1 Goth: Whose high exploits and honorable deeds
Ingrateful Rome requites with foul contempt
(Titus Andronicus.V.i.11-12)

But Rome was never really ungrateful; it is her children who sometimes have not lived up to her expectations, and we again hear of some of Rome's children who have not been true to their birth and identity:

Cassius: Age, thou art ashamed!
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble
bloods!
(Julius Caesar.I.ii.150-151)

Rome is also, like Volumnia, a wise woman guiding her young children along the path of victory and heroism. She is addressed with

Wolsey: Rome, the nurse of judgment.
 (Henry VIII.II.ii.94)

Rome is also embodied in Volumnia's curses. The motherly Rome can be a source of curses for all ages, just as Volumnia laid her deadly curse on Romans who caused her son's banishment. Cursing becomes allowable in the bosom of Rome:

Constance: O lawful let it be
 That I have room with Rome to curse awhile.
 (King John.III.i.179-180)

Rome is also a source of a serious curse when compared to the frowning of England upon France. It is the patronage and love of their mother Rome about which England and France are fighting, and France can only stay under her mother's wing and go back to her love, for a friend's loss is easier than the loss of a mother's blessing (though this blessing comes through the father figure of the Pope).

King Lewis: Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome
 Or the light loss of England for a friend.
 (King John.III.i.205-206)

Like Volumnia, Rome is in sorrow, sad and hurt
inside, yet proud and keeping her stamina on the outside:

"Titus: Hail Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!"

(Titus Andronicus.I.i.70).

We see Rome sad in more than one place. She is the
mother whose sons are suffering and she consequently
becomes unhappy too:

Marcus: You sad-faced men, people and sons of Rome.
By uproars severed, as a flight of fowl.
(Titus Andronicus.V.iii.67-68)

But Rome's sons, out of their love for their mother,
keep thinking of making up those bad days for her:

Lucius: Thanks, gentle Romans. May I govern so,
To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe!
(Titus Andronicus.V.iii.147-148)

Rome is a mother who remains loved by her children
even when they joined her enemies, and her maternal spirit
revives their hopes and devotion, and returns them to her
loving heart pleading for forgiveness.

* * *

Both England and Rome have been suffering mothers. They both give birth to noble children, kings and heroes, but some of their children prove unworthy of their mothers' love. The loving mothers' wombs were torn by civil war and personal conflicts, and both mothers are subjected to torture and are fed innocent blood in return for their love.

Some of those children fight selfishly for their mother's love as does Richard III, or turn against her in times of humiliation as Coriolanus does in his indignant banishment, but they always return to her kneeling for her sacred blessing and longing to be buried in her forgiving bosom when they go into eternal sleep, and the loving mother is always ready to forgive with her open arms.

* * *

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

In looking back at all the mother figures we have examined, we can certainly discern a wide range of variety among the characters. We have seen Roman mothers who were guiding their sons, as Volumnia was (Coriolanus), and we have also seen that in Elinor (King John) who was in charge of her son's affairs. We have met mourning mothers in plenty, especially in Richard III, and we have also glanced at mothers who do not deserve to bear the name because of their cruelty to others' children, as Tamora (Titus Andronicus) and Margaret (1, 2, 3 Henry VI and Richard III) can demonstrate in their actions that one shudders to think of. We have also come across a mother who was deprived of the gift that God gave generously to her servants: Calpurnia (Julius Caesar). And last but not least, other categories of mothers have appeared as we have witnessed in those women whose role was only limited to their physical function as mothers providing heirs to the throne, as Katharine was in Henry V.

It has been pointed out that in many instances, if not in most, mothers have appeared either actually, or

through the use of images, to be subjected to the evils of war, wailing their children and suffering under the yoke of death that deprives them of their beloved ones.

Another series of images brings an opposite and grotesque effect that is common in many of the history plays. It is the iterated images of mothers rejoicing in their sons' death. These "unnatural" mothers were reacting abnormally under great stress due to the loss of their husbands and children, which turns their tears into mad laughter and enjoyment of bloody sights.

There is also a

darker use of the family to express the horrors of war. In the first tetralogy civil war destroys not only love and family loyalty but also wives and children, innocent victims of the conflict. If Henry V glorifies the victory at Agincourt, it does so without concealing any of the violence and corruption that taint the English triumph.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 234-235.

Mothers were thus the lamenting commentators on the end of survival but at the same time the regenerators of new life.

It is significant that Shakespeare always concentrated more on the father figure in these plays. The mother figure was either absent or repressed in the shadow, except when he willingly emphasized it to serve the purpose of the play. Yet despite this fact, Shakespeare still kept a small window open from where we could see mothers giving new offsprings to enlighten the dark evil world of war, hatred and bloody ambition.

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