

"BECOMES A WOMAN BEST": FEMALE PROPHETIC FIGURES
IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that female characters in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *1 Henry VI* function as prophets in the style of the Old Testament. In a culture that venerates Holy Writ but also devalues women, a dramatic exemplar wrapped in the mantle of a biblical prophet becomes a potential model for playgoers as well as an embodied critique. Paulina, Katherine of Aragon, and Margaret of Anjou condemn injustice, uphold the cause of the vulnerable, challenge the abuse of royal and spiritual authority, and frequently echo aspects of biblical figures such as Moses, Isaiah, and Amos. In so doing, these women and the plays of which they are a part highlight the ability of women to point out the misuse of political power as well as women’s vulnerability to marital wrongdoing—and their capacity to resist it. However, the plays also demonstrate that women, like men, are subject to the temptation to use force and power wrongfully; in yielding to that temptation, they compromise their ability to speak out credibly. In addition to female prophetic figures who “speak truth to power,” Shakespeare also creates characters who act as “false prophets”—Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters, and Joan Puzel promote the veneration of ambition and press the cause of political upheaval. Aside from clarifying the possibility of greater female agency and pointing out its potential pitfalls, this reading of the plays also underlines the complex

picture of Catholicism that emerges on Shakespeare's stage. Although *1 Henry VI* and *Macbeth* echo fears of "popery" as a theological and political threat to an officially Protestant England, *Henry VIII* presents a positive view of a Catholic and Spanish-born queen, and Joan Puzel is a French antagonist capable of engendering respect. This study thus enlarges academia's understanding of the intersection of stage and Scripture, contributing to scholarship on women and religion in the early modern world.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: "Haply a woman's voice may do some good"

The phrase "prophecy in Shakespeare" might conjure up a number of images: the Roman Soothsayer shouting, "Beware the Ides of March" (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.18); Richard of Gloucester smiling villainously over political suspicions induced by "drunken prophecies, libels and dreams" (*Richard III* 1.1.33); the unheeded Cassandra shrieking, "Cry, cry! Troy burns, or else let Helen go" (*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.112); Jupiter's cryptic message to Posthumus: "When as a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find . . ." (*Cymbeline* 5.4.138–39); or Hotspur rolling his eyes about Owen Glendower's talk of "the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies . . . And such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff / As puts me from my faith" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.146, 150–51). Likely to make an appearance, of course, are the Weird Sisters and their salutation: "All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be King hereafter" (1.3.50). Far less certain to come to mind is Paulina's assertion to Leontes that his mistreatment of Hermione "savours / Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you, / Yea, scandalous to the world" (*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.117–19); or Katherine of Aragon's plea to her king and husband: "Sir, I desire you do me right and justice, / And to bestow your pity on me, for / I am a most poor woman and a stranger . . ." (*Henry VIII* 2.4.11–13); or Joan Puzel's declaration to the French Dolphin that "God's mother deigned to appear to me / And, in a vision full of majesty, / Willed me to leave my base vocation / And free my country from calamity . . ." (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.78–81). The modern reader, perhaps drawing on images of cartoonish "The End Is Near!" protesters or ministerial speculations about the Book of Revelation, is likely to equate prophecy with prediction: a prophet is one who foresees the future. And as Cassandra and the Soothsayer indicate, this concept of prophecy was familiar to Shakespeare's audiences. Yet this dissertation argues that Paulina, Katherine, and Joan—as well as

Margaret of Anjou, Lady Macbeth, and the Three Witches—function as prophets in a broader sense, one that sometimes includes a predictive aspect but is not limited to it, one that would have spoken in familiar terms to early modern playgoers immersed in biblical word and image. As performed by these female characters, the role holds out possibilities to early modern women, but the possibilities are two-edged: on one side is potential affirmation for greater female agency and influence in personal and societal life, but on the other side is the declaration that not all exercises of agency are constructive—that some are destructive of the self and the commonwealth.

For the inhabitants of Renaissance England, the prophet was a known figure in more than one context. In an era marked by political and religious upheaval—the Wars of the Roses, the Henrician break with Rome, the back-and-forth of the English Reformation, the Elizabethan Settlement, the ascension of the Stuarts, and the run-up to the Civil War—cryptic writings attributed to ancient (and sometimes not-so-ancient) authors frequently were pressed into the service of various causes. “[D]espite state legislation,” Diane Watt writes, “popular political prophecies, such as those attributed to Merlin or the astrological prognostications of Nostradamus, were popular during the sixteenth century, especially in the late Tudor period, and continued to flourish right up to the mid-seventeenth century” (86). The originator might be cited as Bede, Geoffrey Chaucer, Savonarola, James I, or others; some of the pronouncements featured animal motifs, while others played with numbers or letters (Thomas 462–65). “Many manuscript collections of prophecies were compiled to advance the claims of some participant in the Wars of the Roses,” Keith Thomas writes—noting, for example, that predictions “played an important part in the revolts led by Owain Glyndwr against Henry IV” (471). Shakespeare’s First Tetralogy reflects such activity in the prophecies produced for Eleanor Cobham by Margery Jourdain’s conjuring—“The duke yet lives that Henry shall

depose . . .” (2 *H6* 1.4.30)—and in Richard’s snaring of his brother George, Duke of Clarence, via a prophecy “which says that ‘G’ / Of Edward’s heirs the murderer shall be” (*R3* 1.1.39–40). Similarly, the playwright portrays Hotspur carping about Glendower’s talk of “a dragon and a finless fish, / A clip-winged griffin and a moulted raven, / A couching lion and a ramping cat . . .” (1 *H4* 3.1.147–49). According to Shakespeare’s contemporary Francis Bacon, such prognostications were good only for “winter talk by the fire-side,” but jurist Edward Coke mourned the fact that they had fueled “lamentable and fatal events” and proved “how credulous and inclinable our countrymen in former times to them have been” (quoted in Thomas 469–70). Early modern England was open—sometimes too open, so the criticism went—to proclamations presented as wisdom or information from a higher source, even when the proclamation, the proclaimer, or both were obscure.

However, in this Christianity-saturated world, the prophet was a thoroughly (and probably even primarily) biblical figure.¹ Readings from the Old Testament—the textual home of Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others—were a regular part of the Morning and Evening Prayer services.² The prayer *Te deum laudamus*—to be said “in Englyshe dayly throughe the whole yere,” according to a rubric in the Book of Common Prayer (106)—reads in part, “The glorious company of the Apostles prayse thee. / The goodly felowship of the Prophetes prayse thee” (*BCP* 106).³ Each day, then, Anglicans recalled the “Prophetes” during worship, linking these ancient worthies’ key place in the spiritual universe with that of the early church’s leadership, in an echo of Paul’s declaration to the Ephesians that Christians are part of “the housholde of God, And are

¹ According to Alison Shell, “religious titles have recently been estimated to comprise around half the total output of material printed between 1475 and 1640 . . .” (6).

² The readings from the Old Testament historical books (e.g., 1 and 2 Kings), which contain many narratives about prophets, tend to fall in the first half of the year in the liturgical calendar. The readings from the Major and Minor Prophets (e.g., Isaiah and Hosea), which are dominated by prophetic oracles, tend to fall in the latter half of the year.

³ In *Henry V*, the king orders the singing of the *Te deum* after the victory at Agincourt (4.8.124).

built vpon the foundation of the apostles and prophetes . . ." (*Bishops' Bible* Eph. 2:19–20). Together, the Old Testament readings and the regular mention in the *Te deum* of the prophets would have instructed the worshipers about the lives and messages of these figures and their foundational religious role. Further, Paul's words would have pointed out that ordinary Christians, those praying "in Englyshe dayly throughe the whole yere," were part of the same spiritual structure as these august folk of antiquity.

In the Old Testament, the prophet is traditionally the messenger of the God of Israel, the ambassador of the heavenly King—the signature phrase is "Thus saith the Lorde." Among their number are some of the most famous figures and episodes in Scripture: Moses and the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, Jonah and the great fish, Nathan and his confrontation of the adulterous King David, Isaiah and his vision of the enthroned God. Others are less well known: Amos, Micaiah, Zechariah. They are frequently but not always associated with the Hebrew monarchs, with whom their relationships can be contentious or even hostile. As biblical scholar Victor H. Matthews writes, "their role was to challenge the establishment and the social order, to remind the leadership and the people of their obligation to the covenant with Yahweh, and to warn the people of punishment that would surely ensue if they violated this covenant" (21).⁴ They are thus guardians and advocates of biblical orthodoxy—particularly in terms of rejecting idolatry and honoring the Sabbath—but their concerns also are often those of orthopraxy: the doing of justice and the avoidance of oppression. In the language of classical rhetoric, they employ *parrhesia*, in which one is "humbly respectful or, if necessity demands, courageously outspoken in addressing those whom he ought to

⁴ "Yahweh" is the traditional scholarly rendering of the personal name of God in the Jewish Scriptures, written in the consonantal Hebrew text as "YHWH." In English translations, it is sometimes rendered as "Jehovah" but more often as "the LORD," sometimes in expanded phrases such as "the LORD of hosts."

reverence or fear in a matter which concerns them or those near to them” (Rauh 273). In modern parlance, the idea is to “speak truth to power.”

This dissertation argues that female characters in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *1 Henry VI* function as prophets in the Old Testament style, condemning injustice, upholding the cause of the vulnerable, challenging the abuse of monarchical and spiritual (and, in the event, masculine) power, and frequently echoing aspects of the biblical figures’ lives. Paulina confronts Leontes over his paranoid rejection of his queen and their infant daughter; Katherine fights for the preservation of her marriage to Henry VIII; Margaret of Anjou, bereft of husband, son, and throne in the Wars of the Roses, calls down judgment on Richard and his Yorkist kin for their bloody-handed power plays. Yet just as the Hebrew Scriptures have their human representatives of pagan deities as well as those of the God of Israel, so Shakespeare has his female prophets of darkness: Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters call the thane to an illicit veneration of the Scottish crown, and Joan Puzel invokes demonic supernatural power in her leadership of the enemies of righteousness (i.e., the French).

In the presentation of these reimagined biblical figures, the plays project, and to some degree authorize, new possibilities for early modern women—but they also warn that not all days should be seized. In the Jacobean era, named for a monarch known for his high view of kingly authority and his participation in church concerns, *The Winter’s Tale* foregrounds a woman who openly challenges her liege’s handling of the royal household and guides his subsequent moral reformation—thus establishing a theatrical reference point for a societal discussion of a greater role for women in the domestic, political, and spiritual spheres. In *Henry VIII*, a foreign-born queen is implicitly valorized over an English king who turns her into collateral damage in his quest for marital bliss—a valorization that interrogates a societal system in which women are second-class citizens

(or even aliens) in their own households, vulnerable to the whims of male overlords and to ecclesiastical malfeasance. Like *The Winter's Tale*, *Richard III*, in the person of the deposed Queen Margaret of Anjou, posits a vigorous female condemnation of misused power at the highest level, reiterating the possibility that a reigning house can be called to account by a dispossessed woman—even a blatantly self-interested one. And in these theatrical presentations, the fact that these women echo the deeds, experiences, messages, and motifs of the biblical prophets potentially lends to their actions a scriptural imprimatur for societal action and change, including change in legal and political spheres in which women were often forced to exist as shadows attached to the men in their lives. In a culture that both venerates Holy Writ and devalues women, a dramatic exemplar wrapped in the mantle of a biblical prophet becomes a potential model for individual action as well as an embodied critique. However, human agency can disrupt destructively as well as constructively, and the biblical prophet is not a univocal figure. *Macbeth* and *1 Henry VI* invoke the specter of prophetic counsel and leadership in the service of ruthless ambition and the national foe—empowerment and devotion can turn to bad ends as well as good ones. And because of England's decades-long internal ecclesiastical war—sometimes colder, sometimes hotter—between Protestants and Catholics, the female characters in these last two plays call up anxieties about the Roman threat to the theological soul and political body of Albion.

To view Shakespeare's women as biblically prophetic is not to say that they present themselves as female versions of John the Baptist, going forth "in the spirit and power of [Elijah] . . . to make ready a perfect people for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Joan is the only one who claims a literal mandate from heaven—falsely, according a straight reading of *1 Henry VI*—and although Margaret invokes God and the title of "prophetess" (R3 1.3.300) in her furious cursing of Lancaster's foes, she never actually portrays herself as

a handmaiden of the Lord. In some instances, it would be easy to read these characters as mere variants on the hoary pattern of the scold—a view that the plays themselves can encourage, given Leontes’s description of Paulina as a “callat / Of boundless tongue” (*WT* 2.3.89–90), Margaret’s labeling of Richard as an “elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog” (*R3* 1.3.227), or Joan’s impudent assessment of the Duke of York: “Changed to a worser shape thou canst not be” (*1 H6* 5.2.57). Yet there are more things here than are dreamt of in the theatrical philosophy of shrew-taming. Paulina may threaten, in good fishwife form, to scratch out the eyes of any courtier who tries to boot her from the king’s presence (*WT* 2.3.61–62), but her challenge to Leontes involves not only the issue of feminine “honesty” (one of the most prominent concerns of early modern society) but also monarchical absolutism and the implications of royal family life for national stability. Here is a king misusing his powers to be rid of a wife (in part by attempting to enlist the aid of religious authority) and, in the process, endangering his own line of succession. Shakespeare’s audiences were familiar with such matters, not only from Henry VIII’s domestic history, James I’s high view of kingly prerogative, and England’s long absence of a clear successor to Elizabeth, but also from biblical stories of King David’s chaotic household and the prophets who dealt with high-handed Israelite rulers. Likewise, Katherine of Aragon, upon Cardinal Wolsey’s admonition to be “patient yet,” unhesitatingly gives him the back of her verbal hand: “I will, when you are humble—nay, before, / Or God will punish me” (*H8* 2.4.71–73). The quickness of the queen’s tongue is worthy of her *Taming of the Shrew* namesake. Yet the rhetorical fencing between queen and cleric not only involves the Tudor marital history that created early modern England but also evokes the Old Testament prophets’ concerns about faithfulness between husband and wife as well as that between God and a people frequently afflicted with a wandering spiritual eye.

This is not to argue that the plays are deliberate reworkings of biblical narratives or conscious explorations of ecclesiastical concerns. Alison Shell sees the playwright as “a writer supremely interested in exploiting past and present religions for intellectual and emotional effect . . . someone whose prime motivation, judging by his work, was not religious but literary and dramatic” (19). Likewise, commenting on scriptural echoes in the Roman histories, Hannibal Hamlin writes: “Shakespeare is finally less interested in the theology of the Apocalypse, or the interpretation of Revelation, or even of millennial thinking in early Jacobean England, than he is in the last days of Antony and Cleopatra” (230). As with the Roman dramas, so with those examined here: the play’s the thing. Yet if indeed playwrights cannot help but draw from their society’s life and times, those psychic sources will tint their work—and early modern England was colored by Scripture. Protesting the contempt of some twentieth-century critics for the idea of Shakespearean Christ-figures, Hamlin remarks: “To see Christ-figures everywhere in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture is not a delusion nor the result of ‘neo-Christian’ bias. Christ was everywhere The same is true, to a lesser degree, for other familiar biblical characters and stories” (71–72; emphasis in original). Is it surprising, then, that one catches sight of Moses, Hosea, or Deborah in Shakespeare’s lines, like the glimpses of an old text on a palimpsest? Hamlin’s final sentence is the point of departure for this dissertation. Which of those other scriptural stories and characters peep through the lines of the plays? What aspects of the prophetic office and experience come into play in the theater’s versions of Sicilia, Scotland, England, and France? To what degree do Shakespeare’s seers come out on the side of darkness, light, or ambiguity? The answers to such questions promise to enlarge scholarly understanding of the intersection of stage and Scripture, especially in an era in which the dramatization of religious material was officially curtailed.

An examination of how Shakespeare's women wrap themselves in the mantle of the biblical prophets offers much to the study of the plays and the society in which they originated. First, this study contributes to feminist scholarship a new view of how the playwright's female characters function in their fictional and fictionalized settings, and how they comment upon Elizabethan and Jacobean England. For a woman to challenge or subvert power is one thing; to do it in the manner of honored religious figures, in a world in which almost all formal political and spiritual power rests in male hands, is another. The interpretative molds of shrew, scold, and saint are familiar; although that of prophetess is already somewhat familiar (being explicitly invoked in the cases of Margaret and Joan), this dissertation enlarges on that category by elaborating upon the plays' scriptural echoes and mulling the implications. In a society in which both political and religious interests scrutinized the stage because of its perceived power to influence audiences, female characters who echo the lives of heroes of the official faith while challenging the abuses of established male authority embody potent possibilities for modeling. Early modern women were generally "subject to the power of [a] patriarchal system as either daughters or wives," Theodora A. Jankowski writes (24); "the wife, of whatever class, was expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient" and "had little opportunity or space within which to exercise any *personal* autonomy" (31; emphasis in original).⁵ Women were prohibited from "voting in elections, sitting in parliament, acting as judges or lawyers or serving on [most] juries," Tim Stretton observes (41).⁶ On the

⁵ However, Jankowski immediately notes that all women were expected to run their homes, noblewomen might have acted as regents in their husbands' absence, and those in merchants' households would have been involved in the business (31). Thus, the assertion of a lack of space for "any *personal* autonomy" must be understood with the pertinent qualifiers.

⁶ As with Jankowski, Stretton's essay points out that a legal system that in theory thoroughly disenfranchised women did not necessarily do so in any given instance, often because of "the crucial importance of property ownership" or similar pragmatic matters. "The dynastic concerns of the monarchy, for example, were sufficiently powerful to allow Mary I and Elizabeth I to sit on the throne, despite deeply held reservations about female rule" (41).

other hand, early modern churchgoers—women as well as men—were enjoined to imitate what is found in Scripture. *The Book of Homilies*, the official (and required) sermon collection of the Church of England, states: “If some man will say, I would have a true pattern and a perfect description of an upright life, approved in the sight of God; can we find, think ye, any better, or any such again, as Christ Jesus is . . . whose virtuous conversation and godly life the Scripture so lively painteth and setteth forth before our eyes . . .” (340). Of course, the homilist admits that the “godly men” of Scripture nevertheless “could not by their own strength keep themselves from committing horrible sin” (346), but the idea of taking one’s cues from the ancient worthies remains. Thus, biblical prophets such as Moses and Nathan (who challenge official wrongdoing), Malachi and Hosea (who condemn disloyalty to spouses), or Deborah (who leads a military venture) become potential role models for female Christians. “Language is power in the Bible,” Michele Osherow writes, “and it is a power frequently bestowed upon women. Though the early modern era enforced silence upon the gentler sex, that silence could be challenged through references to biblical heroines and their potent discourse” (149). And to the degree that the actions and qualities of biblical heroines and heroes are echoed in the lives of Shakespeare’s women, these theatrical characters in turn present themselves as life examples with an authority derived from those heroic scriptural figures. Hamlin points to Richard Dutton’s idea that “English audiences had a ready capacity for ‘analogical reading,’ for recognizing and interpreting parallels between historical or fictional plots and characters and those making news in England” (182). It is only one short step between recognizing such likenesses to the realization that the past can serve as a model for oneself. The examination of certain biblical and Shakespearean figures thus promises to expand scholarly understanding of the early modern psyche.

In addition, this study lends scholars yet another lens through which to study the Bible-Bard nexus. “After several decades when questions of religion have been downplayed within Shakespeare studies,” Shell writes, “no topic has attracted more recent speculation, both inside and outside the academy, than Shakespeare’s religious views and the effect they might have had on his writing” (80). It is a critical commonplace to consider, for instance, how dramas such as *Richard III* or *1 Henry IV* draw from the medieval morality plays, to ask to what degree Richard and Falstaff are reincarnations of the Vice. In the same way, Old Testament figures and narratives serve as potential templates for Shakespeare’s characters and their actions. In her cursing of the House of York, old Queen Margaret acts as the quintessential prophet of doom, calling down judgment on England’s rulers for their sins—yet she also acts out of an unblinking focus on self that is at serious odds with the biblical prophetic tradition. Lady Macbeth is subject to feelings of inadequacy similar to those expressed by Isaiah and Moses and, like them, is (or at least seeks to be) supernaturally empowered—yet her goal is not the preaching of righteousness or the rescue of the oppressed but rather the murder of a king. Just as we can see York’s paper-crown humiliation and death in *3 Henry VI* as echoing the Passion of Christ, or perceive the shadows of Roman Catholic practice cast by the statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale*, a comparison of biblical and Shakespearean characters can sharpen our understanding of how the playwright reshaped the narratives that colored early-modern English thought. And, obviously, such a study will help color in the blank corners of the plays themselves. Jean-Christophe Mayer, for instance, observes that “most of the critics interested in religion have concentrated on the tragedies . . . or on Shakespeare’s romances”—*Macbeth* and *The Winter’s Tale* among them—but that “no extended study has been devoted to religion in the [English] histories,” which “contain the

most allusions to religion in the whole of the Shakespeare corpus” (9).⁷ This study, especially through its examination of *Henry VIII*, *Richard III*, and *1 Henry VI*, will shrink that gap in scholarly consideration.

This dissertation’s basic methodological approach is that of close reading; given the study concentrates on particular secondary characters rather than the plays per se, the scenes in which these women are the most prominent receive the most attention. The order of the treatment of the characters describes an arc that might be described as moving from “light” to “darkness.” The study begins with Paulina, who fights from the moral high ground in the interests of another person, and moves to Katherine of Aragon, who also occupies a position of high principle but advocates for herself. The outspoken Margaret is a woman who has been grossly wronged but has committed great wrongs herself. Last come Lady Macbeth and the Witches, whose prophet-style activity promotes political rebellion and murder, and the anomalous Joan Puzel, who trafficks with dark spirits and yet retains a hint of the tragic antiheroine. I analyze these women’s scenes in light of various passages in the Old Testament, generally from Genesis, Exodus, the historical books of Samuel and Kings, and the Major and Minor Prophets. (The chapter on Joan and *1 Henry VI* also draws from the Book of Judith in the Apocrypha as well as passages from the New Testament.) The scriptural sections may be narrative or oracular; for example, the study of the relationship between kings and prophetic figures features stories about Israelite monarchs and seers as well as oracles that were pronounced against political leaders. I have chosen to quote from the Bishops’ Bible on the grounds that this was the version used in Anglican services, and thus a text that would have been familiar to English churchgoers as a whole—even those who preferred the Geneva Bible

⁷ Mayer finds the female characters in *Henry VIII* so neglected that he asserts, “Katherine and Mary, Anne and Elizabeth—the role played by these four women in *Henry VIII* is seldom mentioned” (137).

for private study.⁸ Other material provides insight into Elizabethan and Jacobean thought on religion and other subjects. The Book of Common Prayer sets out the official liturgical language of the period as well as the schedule for public reading of Scripture; the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, included within the prayer book, provides a theological touchstone on matters such as Scripture and Catholicism. Similarly, *The Book of Homilies*, as required pulpit material, enshrines the official voice of the early modern Church of England and also serves as a record of the doctrinal views in which parishioners would have been catechized. The 1599 Geneva Bible's marginal notes and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* embody the Reformed theology that greatly influenced spiritual life in Renaissance England. In addition, the written works of King James I—*Dæmonologie*, *Basilikon Doron*, *The True Law of Monarchies*—reveal the thinking of one of Shakespeare's patrons. And to mention only one secondary source, Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* provides much information about early modern views of the supernatural. The dissertation also employs a feminist lens in its critical probing of what Shakespeare's use of biblically colored motifs says about his female characters and the place (and potential place) of women in early modern society.

The study begins with Chapter 2, " 'He must be told on't': Paulina and *The Winter's Tale*." Paulina has a paradigmatically prophetic relationship with Leontes, the Sicilian king who is suddenly convinced that Hermione, his queen, has cuckolded him and that her infant daughter, Perdita, is illegitimate. In her opening scene, the noblewoman presents herself as a would-be deliverer in the mold of Moses. Depending on the powers of verbal and non-verbal rhetoric, she assumes the task of advocating for

⁸ The Bishops' translation was "never as popular as the Geneva for personal use," Hamlin observes. "Nevertheless, it was the Bishops' Bible that most English men and women heard read in church every week, and this is no doubt primarily how Shakespeare came to know it" (12), even though most of his allusions that can be traced to a specific version smack of the Geneva Bible (16). The Psalter of the Book of Common Prayer, however, was that of the old Great Bible (16).

the queen and princess in the belief that (as another female character says in a different play) “[h]aply a woman's voice may do some good” (*Henry V* 5.2.93). The ensuing confrontation with Leontes, however, reproduces the strained and potentially violent relationship between prophets and kings so typical of the Jewish Scriptures. In her championing of Hermione and Perdita, Paulina raises the issue of the righteous treatment of vulnerable women and children, a major ethical concern in the Old Testament; like the Israelite prophets who call monarchs and people to the standard of the Torah, Paulina reminds her king that he is answerable to standards beyond himself. In her reaction to the death of the prince Mamillius, the seeming death of Hermione, and the repentance of Leontes, she stands as a harbinger of doom and witness of judgment, but her final act is to imitate her prophetic forebears in “resurrecting” Hermione and renewing life in the Sicilian court.

Chapter 3 (“‘A most poor woman, and a stranger’: Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*”) examines the Tudor queen’s role as both defender and defended. In her initial scene, Katherine establishes herself as an outsider-advocate for the English people. At the divorce hearing, however, she becomes both the outsider prophet and the “stranger in a strange land”—the object of concern in repeated biblical warnings against societal oppression of sojourning aliens. In addition, Katherine’s opposition to Henry’s efforts to void their marriage recalls the biblical prophets’ condemnation of spousal disloyalty on both the domestic and spiritual levels; whereas a standard scriptural metaphor portrays the Lord as a caring husband and an idolatrous Israel as a cuckolding wife, the play ironically gives us Katherine as the faithful wife and Henry (“lord” in both marital and political terms) as a husband with a wandering eye. (In its motif of a female challenge to a maritally destructive husband, *Henry VIII* is a twin to *The Winter’s Tale*, with the twist that there is no redemptive end for the spousal relationship.) In addition, Katherine echoes

Old Testament critiques of failed spiritual leadership with her fierce criticism of Cardinal Wolsey. Finally, the queen enters the ranks of visionaries like Isaiah with her dream of welcoming angels, but the nature of the dream—in its focus on the former queen’s personal spiritual state rather than an outward-focused message or task—keeps the biblical parallel from being too precise.

Chapter 4 (“‘Say poor Margaret was a prophetess’: Margaret of Anjou in *Richard III*”) focuses on Shakespeare’s most stereotypical prophet-of-doom character. The banished Lancastrian queen reappears—unhistorically, perhaps in order to take advantage of her stature as an avatar of the Lancastrian regime—to curse the Yorkist regime and in so doing re-creates the ominous summoning of the dead Israelite prophet Samuel at the behest of the ill-fated King Saul. In her later conversation with Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, Margaret adopts a calculated, declamatory style of speech that not only recalls the artful elements of Hebrew rhetoric but also reveals a subtle likeness to her arch-foe, Richard. In her condemnation of Yorkist wrongdoing, the former queen steps into the familiar prophetic role of announcer of disaster, echoing biblical oracles against nations for their violent quests for dominion and power. However, Margaret’s prophetic activity is marked by the personal—a trait that distances her from the ambassadorial role, with its implicit disinterestedness, typical in Scripture. Even in the biblical material, however, instances of such self-involvement can be found—notably in instances of persecution and the so-called imprecatory psalms—so that Margaret does not fall completely outside the paradigm. Nevertheless, her degree of self-interest goes beyond that of Katherine and ultimately renders her something of a prophetic antihero.

Chapter 5 (“‘Spirits that tend on mortal thoughts’: Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters as False Prophets”) analyzes the Three Witches of *Macbeth* as early-modern versions of the pagan prophets who call Israel to the worship of false gods, with the

Scottish crown (or even Macbeth himself in a godlike capacity) serving as the chieftan's idol. The question of why the Thane of Glamis yields to the temptation may be partially answered by looking to *Hamlet* and its Ghost—whereas the Danish prince questions the nature of the spirit appearing to him, Macbeth seems little concerned with the Weird Sisters' motives. (Macbeth himself, in fact, is something of a witch in his willingness to go to unnatural lengths to achieve his ends.) Ironically, however, the Witches also are counterparts of Israelite prophets who act as witnesses or facilitators of dynastic change. The Apparitions episode creates a parallel between the Weird Sisters' revelations and certain biblical texts in which orthodox and heterodox prophetic activity seem to mingle strangely, raising the question of how the responsibility for Macbeth's actions can be divided between him and the Witches. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth perversely takes on the biblical role of prophet as guide and adviser (and, in marital terms, the task of helpmate) in the service of murderous ambition. She also echoes the experience of Old Testament figures in their feelings of inadequacy—a lack that she attempts to fill by invoking the powers of darkness to alter her, in the process raising questions of gender expectations. Ultimately, *Macbeth* declares that women as well as men can sire chaos.

Chapter 6 (“Joan Puzel: Deborah, Judith, and the Maid of Orleans in *1 Henry VI*”) analyzes Shakespeare's depiction of Joan of Arc as a French version of Deborah, one of the deliverers of the Book of Judges, and Judith, the heroine of the eponymous book in the Apocrypha. Actually described as a “holy prophetess” (1.4.101), Joan is marked by the (darkly) supernatural and her affiliation with England's enemy and thus, like the women in *Macbeth*, becomes a false-prophet figure. Yet even though the easiest reading of the play's portrait of Joan is that of a lampoon, she can also be viewed in a tragic mode, as a female version of the biblical figures Balaam and Samson. Her story's similarity to that of Judith raises the question of God's perceptible presence in the human

world; at the same time, the cloudy status of her physical appearance places her in radical contrast to the Jewish heroine, whose physical beauty is key to Judith's narrative. In addition, the supernatural elements of Joan's story link her to New Testament images of false prophets that were likely to resonate in a society in which Catholicism was an official theological enemy.

Review of literature

A survey of recent relevant scholarship indicates that although multiple intersections of Shakespeare's work, early modern women, and religion have been scrutinized, the nexus of the playwright's female characters and Old Testament personalities has been comparatively neglected. In terms of the influence of Scripture on the dramatist's work, a major touchstone is Naseeb Shaheen's massive *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays* (1999), which methodically goes through the theatrical canon and correlates passages with their possible biblical sources. Shaheen notes that the material falls into various categories, ranging from lines that are "clearly based on Scripture"—for instance, Hamlet's reference in 5.2 to a sparrow's fall, which corresponds to Jesus's discussion in Matt. 10:29—to some that may involve "nothing more than a parallel idea, a resemblance rather than a reference," such as Iago's declaration of love for Othello in 3.3, which closely tracks Peter's words to Christ in John 21:15–17 (68, 70). Shaheen's interest, however, is not interpretive but documentary; his appointed task is to nail down any source as closely as possible (including which version of the Bible might have been in mind), not to tease out the implications of the echo or allusion, or to focus on any particular play or motif. A similar but quite limited study is Peter Milward's *Biblical Influences in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies* (1987). Milward's work covers *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, essentially providing annotations on the plays' lines, along with a brief preface for each individual work "as an indication of

the general direction in which the Biblical echoes seem to be pointing” (xiii). There is thus little explication of the roles of Lady Macbeth or the Witches.

In contrast, Hannibal Hamlin’s *The Bible in Shakespeare* (2013) goes beyond the fact of reference to the application, examining the general practice of scriptural allusion and then exploring “how allusion functions in specific plays and how this affects their meaning” (4)—a statement that correlates with this dissertation’s intent to some degree. Hamlin’s play-specific material, however, concentrates on multiple motifs rather than one. One chapter traces themes from Gen. 1–3 in various plays. “If *The Winter’s Tale* is in one sense about the consequences of the Fall—the rift between men and women, betrayal and sexual jealousy, pain, sorrow, and death—it also [in Act 4] contemplates the possibility of reversing the Fall” (177). Another chapter studies references to the Crucifixion and the Book of Revelation in the Roman dramas; still another deals with *Macbeth*, which Hamlin sees as pervaded by the apocalyptic atmosphere of (again) the Crucifixion and Revelation. The Weird Sisters “set the tone of the play and set its plot in motion with their cryptic prophecies,” which have been read as “a kind of ‘equivocation,’ ” he writes (286). Hamlin considers the trio’s likeness to the biblical “witch of Endor” and her ominous interaction with Israel’s King Saul (288–93); however, he does not thoroughly explore the idea of the Three Witches as prophetic figures, and he conducts no extended examination of Lady Macbeth.

Steven Marx’s *Shakespeare and the Bible* (2000), like Hamlin’s work, takes a thematic approach but without the general background material on biblical allusions that opens the 2013 book. “The allusion is the sign at which two meanings intersect The alluding text may be consonant with the evoked text’s original meanings or it may subvert them by distorting their form and changing its context” (13). In the chapter “Historical Types: Moses, David, and Henry V,” Marx argues that the First and Second Tetralogies

echo providentialist and political elements in the Old Testament's histories of Israel, a theoretical approach similar to that of this dissertation. However, Marx's book focuses primarily on *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*; it seldom refers to *Richard III* or *The Winter's Tale* and has no index entries for *Henry VIII*, *1 Henry VI*, or *Macbeth*. Alison Shell's *Shakespeare and Religion* (2010) also works thematically but gazes beyond the plays to a greater extent than Marx or Hamlin, examining antitheatricalism, Catholic thought, moralism, and predestination/fate. *The Winter's Tale* is the only play of those under scrutiny that receives more than fleeting attention; in the fact that a repentant Leontes regains much of what he lost but Antigonus dies gruesomely while obeying the king's unjust order, "the play invites us to rejoice at exceptional grace, but in passing—and perhaps with a dangerous compassion—it also deplores the fact that grace is exceptional" (215). However, Paulina's role is essentially unexplored.

The Gospel According to Shakespeare by Piero Boitani (2009; translation 2013) argues for a theological project—the dramatist is "engaged in developing his own Gospel" (xi). Boitani proceeds "from *Hamlet* to *King Lear* . . . where faith, salvation, and peace are only glimpsed at from far away, and on to *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, where the themes of transcendence, immanence, the role of the deity, resurrection, and epiphany are openly, if often obliquely, staged" (xi). In the chapter "Resurrection," the author argues that *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* are "parables" that "in feminine mode" proclaim "the resurrection of the flesh . . . on the basis of the most human kinds of affection, on love that is apparently ordinary and banal yet is the most profound: that between husband and wife, between fathers, mothers, and children" (86). However, Boitani focuses comparatively little on Paulina's role, nor does he explore *Macbeth*, *1 Henry VI*, or *Richard III*; *Henry VIII* is mentioned in a single endnote. In the

2007 work *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare, 1592–1604*, Beatrice Groves engages Shakespeare's use of "the linguistic wealth of the English Bible and the theatrical splendour of liturgy, images, and mystery plays from England's recent Catholic past" (6). Groves opens with material on Scripture's influence on early modern drama as well as the echoes of Catholicism and the mystery plays in Shakespeare's work; she then proceeds to close readings that examine how "the religious consciousness of the time and the relics of medievalism in early modern England affected his dramaturgy" (6). The comedic aspects of *Romeo and Juliet* are affected by a low-key reference to Easter; the "crypto-religious quality" that the sources for *King John* give to the monarch is transferred to the young character Arthur instead; *1 Henry IV* and *Measure for Measure* deal with incarnational and Christological aspects of the divine right of kings (7–8). However, Groves's only study of *The Winter's Tale* is a brief explication of the problematic reunion of Leontes and Hermione as re-creating the *Noli me tangere* moment between Mary Magdalene and the resurrected Christ in the Gospel of John, and the other plays examined in this dissertation receive either short shrift or none.

These studies, then, tend to work at the level of theological theme rather than the biblical text. David N. Beauregard's *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays* (2008), which argues that motifs in various dramas have a strongly Roman flavor, employs a narrower theological focus than does Groves's work but devotes more attention to the plays in question here. The structure of *The Winter's Tale* tracks that of penance: "contrition, confession, and satisfaction" (109); the play's conclusion is comparable to a miracle play, "with Paulina taking the place of the Virgin Mary or Christ in producing a wonder-filled 'miracle' " (119). Examining *Henry VIII* along with *King John*, Beauregard argues that the cardinals in the two dramas come off better than the eponymous "flawed monarchs of questionable character" (124). Katherine of Aragon appears before Henry as

“the spokeswoman voicing the ‘great grievance’ of her subjects” against Cardinal Wolsey’s tax scheme (137), and she later voices “powerful speeches that invite our sympathy” (138). The book thus gives some attention to *The Winter’s Tale* and *Henry VIII* and to Paulina’s and Katherine’s vital roles, but the two women receive no extended examination; *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *1 Henry VI* are mentioned only in passing.

In contrast, Jean-Christophe Mayer’s *Shakespeare’s Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (2006) includes chapters focusing on *1 Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VIII*. Mayer sees efforts at pinning Shakespeare’s personal theological beliefs on a labeled card as misguided: “religion for Shakespeare was not so much a matter of systematic allegiance as one of *constant* debating and questioning” (5; emphasis in original). In “Theatre, Witchcraft and the Crisis of Faith in *King Henry VI, Parts 1 and 2*,” however, Mayer concentrates on the supernaturally tinged events in *2 Henry VI*, such as the prophecy of Suffolk’s death and the “healing” of a supposedly blind man, and spends very little time on the alleged witch Joan Puzel. Shakespeare “leaves us to wonder . . . at the reality of Joan’s supernatural powers,” Mayer writes. “It seems that both the French and the English have had to believe in the reality of her magic, so as to exorcise their own quarrels” (32–33). In the chapter on *Richard III*, Margaret is a ghostly, liminal figure, one “who lives between heaven and hell in the . . . otherworld of the play” (47) and who contributes to the drama’s purgatory-esque atmosphere. Katherine receives perhaps the most attention of the three women, but Mayer, focusing on *Henry VIII* as a Reformation-oriented drama, is most interested in her status as “a faithful *English Catholic*” (138; emphasis in original) rather than her confrontations with Henry and Wolsey. In the collection *Shakespeare’s Christianity: The Protestant and Catholic Poetics of Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet* (2006), Milward’s essay “Meta-drama in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*” argues that the latter play’s backdrop contains images of the Passion of Christ

and the era's Protestant-Catholic strain; Robert S. Miola's " 'I Could Not Say "Amen" '": Prayer and Providence in *Macbeth*" asserts that the thane's blocked desire to say amen testifies simultaneously to "hypocrisy and sinfulness" as well as a "deep and deeply denied need for grace" (61); in addition, the play assumes a Catholic rather than Calvinist view of free will (69). Neither essay, however, has much to say about the drama's female characters. Meanwhile, Richard C. McCoy presents a secularized vision in *Faith in Shakespeare* (2013): in the plays he examines, "the characters invoke higher powers or magic or miracles, but our belief is sustained solely by poetic and dramatic techniques" (xiv). The chapter on *The Winter's Tale* depicts Paulina as a practitioner of "deliberately beneficent" lying who helps birth Leontes's "transition from bad faith to good faith" (137).

In other studies that focus on theology, Craig Bernthal's *The Trial of Man: Christianity and Judgment in the World of Shakespeare* (2003) includes the chapter "Judgment and Grace: Women in Court in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*." However, Bernthal is interested in the advocated-for rather than the advocates—not Paulina and Katherine as female prophetic figures but Hermione and Katherine as women who "must endure unjust trials brought against them by their husbands" yet later become "recipients and vehicles of heavenly grace" (186). However, Bernthal does note, "We first see her [Katherine] as a petitioner for the realm" and later for Buckingham (215)—i.e., in a mode of advocacy, one of the aspects of the prophetic office studied here. Two other, older volumes also take up the topic of (divine) justice: *Crime and God's Judgment in Shakespeare* by Robert Rentoul Reed Jr. (1984) and *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments* by Robert G. Hunter (1976), both of which deal with *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Hunter studies Margaret, but in the context of her implicit view of God and retribution rather than more broadly; Lady Macbeth and the Witches are examined (although not at terribly great length) in terms of the working of the human will and the

nature of the future, respectively. For Reed, Margaret is chiefly of interest vis-à-vis Richard's fulfillment of her curses. In his consideration of *Macbeth*, he portrays the Weird Sisters as involved in a demonic conspiracy against the soul of the thane and perhaps against Scotland itself (196–97); the Witches receive more scrutiny than does Lady Macbeth, who is “bold and unswerving in crime” but “a person of less moral substance” than her spouse (171). Stephen Greenblatt's 2001 *Hamlet in Purgatory* devotes some attention to *Richard III* and *Macbeth*—to the former for the macabre dreams of Clarence and Richard, and to the latter for the appearance of the murdered Banquo and the Witches, whose key attribute is that “they traffic in prognostication and prophecy” (192). However, Greenblatt has little real interest in the Weird Sisters here; the book's most important prefiguring of this dissertation is its exploration of how a major theological theme—in this case, purgatory and the Catholic cult of the dead—can be seen in a particular play.

Moving away from Shakespeare per se, Michele Osherow's *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (2009) examines how accounts of women such as Deborah and Judith acted as points of reference in Renaissance society. Noting that the Bible contains both the Pauline injunction for Christian women to remain silent in the church assembly as well as passages that approve of female speech, Osherow writes that readers were aware of this nuanced situation: “Biblical stories featuring rhetorically powerful women complicated the cultural requirement for female silence and facilitated early modern women's words” (4). The author dwells briefly on Joan Puzel as a Deborah figure, focusing on the idea that both women are noted for their powers of speech: “Casting Joan in Deborah's image entitles her to rights of language,” the author writes, “but at the same time reliance on language makes her suspect and vulnerable” because of the societal link between chastity and speech (89). Judith, too, is a woman of powerful

words: “Wise and clever speech fuels Judith’s victory [over the enemy general Holofernes] from the start” (150). However, Osherow makes no comparisons between Joan and Judith, as this dissertation does.

Turning to modern understandings of the place of women and drama vis-à-vis religion, Kimberley Anne Coles’s *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing in Early Modern England* (2008) concentrates on several female authors, including poets Aemilia Lanyer and Mary Sidney Herbert as well as Katherine Parr, the final wife of Henry VIII, and argues that such women were “central to the development of a Protestant literary tradition” (1). Coles points out that whereas sales of Shakespeare’s poem *Venus and Adonis* probably had not reached 5,000 copies before the 1500s were over, one of Parr’s books sold around 19,000 copies (2); the *Examinations* of Anne Askew, who was executed in 1546, went through six editions before being included in John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* in 1563 (17). Parr was influential during the early Reformation (47). Coles’ material indicates that outspoken, even defiant female voices on ethical, moral, or religious topics would have had their place during this era. Another 2008 historical study, Paul Whitfield White’s *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660*, points out that early modern drama was sometimes seen specifically as a sort of official catechist—“up to the midpoint of Elizabeth’s reign, the provinces were visited by touring troupes of royal and noble sponsorship mandated with the purpose of advancing the Crown’s Protestant religious policies” (174). White writes that the degree to which drama succeeded in molding belief cannot be definitively ascertained, although its power probably lay more in “reaffirming popular patterns of piety and attitudes toward religious belief than formally shaping it” (195). White’s volume, however, provides evidence that even early modern audiences in rural areas would be unsurprised by plays with theological antecedents. Together, Coles’s and White’s work suggests that early modern

audiences would have been receptive to dramas with strong female characters whose actions fit biblical patterns of confrontation, although Coles barely alludes to Shakespeare; White does so more often but still briefly.

Two fairly recent historical studies examine early-modern female prophets, with the activity under scrutiny being of the traditional “Thus saith the Lorde” variety. Diane Watt’s 1997 *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* concentrates on Margery Kempe (late fourteenth/early fifteenth century), Elizabeth Barton and Anne Askew (first half of the sixteenth century), and Eleanor Davies (first half of the seventeenth century). The staunchly Catholic Barton declared God’s opposition to Henry VIII’s divorce of Katherine of Aragon, making Barton a real-life (and ill-fated) forebear of the fictional Paulina; Watt is particularly interested in rebutting the idea that the young nun was “a victim of [male] clerical exploitation rather than . . . an active political agent” (52). In somewhat similar fashion, the chapter on Askew, a Protestant victim of Henry’s regime, is preoccupied with how her tale was shaped by publisher/editor John Bale, who was “concerned not with Askew as an individual but as a type of the godly woman” (107). The aristocratic Davies at various points likened Charles I to the ill-fated biblical king Belshazzar (131) and identified Oliver Cromwell with the first of the Four Horsemen of Revelation 6 (135); in 1636, she “entered Lichfield Cathedral, sat on the Bishop’s throne and declared that she was Primate and Metropolitan, and then, pouring tar over the altar, told worshippers ‘that she had sprinkled holie water upon the same against their Communion there next’ ” (137). Watt’s text thus provides in-depth information about certain Englishwomen who saw themselves as “God’s secretaries”; however, as the dates for these women indicate, their activities fall outside the Shakespearean period. Likewise, Phyllis Mack’s massive *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (1992) opens with general information about

women and religion, but she concentrates on the mid-to-late 1600s and the Quakers. “Of the nearly three hundred visionary women who wrote and prophesied during that early [mid-century] period,” Mack writes, “over two hundred belonged to the Society of Friends” (1). This dissertation is not so denominationally focused, working instead on a more general level of Anglicans (Reformed or not) and Catholics as well.

The temporal spotlight used by Mack also is seen in two shorter introductory works. In the essay “Prophecy and Religious Polemic” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing* (2009), Hilary Hinds writes that the texts she examines are “palpably driven by a vision of, and a longing for, a different kind of world . . . whether that desire be for a different kind of social organization, [or] for retribution against unjust oppressors . . .” (239)—precisely the kind of mind-set that this dissertation examines. However, Hinds’s focus is specifically post-Shakespearean: “the mid seventeenth-century eruption of prophetic and polemical discourse by women,” a product of a “general ferment precipitated by the outbreak of the civil war, together with the breakdown of censorship” (236, 238). Similarly, Elaine Hobby’s essay “Prophecy” in *A Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing* (2002) makes a point that is certainly pertinent to the current study: the women in question “lived in a culture very different from our own, one where knowledge of Bible stories could be assumed, and where religious and political questions could not be discussed in isolation from one another” (269–70). However, as with Hinds, Hobby is specifically concerned with figures and texts from the mid-1600s.

Under the more general heading of Shakespeare and women, Katherine Eggert’s *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (2000) asserts that in the First and Second Tetralogies, the characters “who are the most theatrically compelling are, initially, those who most threaten [an] orderly succession of male rulers” (53–54). Margaret of Anjou is “a creature

entirely of language”—one who can curse but not truly influence, “a hectoring Cassandra, doomed always to be right but never to be heeded” (70). But Joan, whom Eggert describes in a New Testament allusion as a “prophesying daughter of Saint Philip” (67), possesses “theatrical power that depends upon her verbal, physical, and dramaturgical presentation of herself, one that unveils itself as unmistakably female” (58). The material on *The Winter’s Tale* (not unexpectedly) focuses on Hermione rather than Paulina, but the book does not cover *Henry VIII’s* Queen Katherine, and Lady Macbeth goes almost unmentioned. In *Shakespeare and Women* (2005), Phyllis Rackin asserts that analyses of early modern society that depict women as utterly trammled do not necessarily represent the whole story: “repressive prescriptions should not be regarded as descriptions of actual behavior” (19), and “the variety of their [women’s] roles in life and in the scripts of plays too often goes without notice” (25). Social rank and status constituted a hierarchy as established as (and intersecting with) that of gender, so that blanket statements about a woman’s place are difficult to make (27). Such views bolster the likelihood that the women in Shakespeare’s audiences perceived his female characters as socially and theologically viable role models. Rackin also asserts that Lady Macbeth, with her talk of milk and child-suckling, has been part of a “historical production of femininity as naturally grounded in women’s roles as wives and mothers” (123); indeed, Rackin writes, “the domestication of women appears to be a major part of this play” (131). The precise gender implications of Lady Macbeth’s actions constitute one of the matters discussed in this study.

Turning specifically to the history plays, Rackin’s *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles* (1990) deals with three of the dramas treated here: *Henry VIII*, *1 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*. In *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare foregrounds “Katherine’s virtue even as he depicts her fall,” so that “the entire plot seems calculated

to demonstrate that the ways of providence are inscrutable" (62); Rackin is more interested in the briefly appearing infant Elizabeth than the adult Katherine. Joan Puzel embodies "the disorderly objects of present fears, the forces that threatened the patriarchal order" (151); although the earlier part of *1 Henry VI* validates tales of Joan's miraculous deeds, the later part depicts her as a sorceress, thus allying the play with "a historiographic tradition that was at once masculine, elite, and English" (220 fn). In *Richard III*, the former "destructive French interloper" Margaret becomes "the voice of divine vengeance, descending upon the guilty Yorkists to purge England and make it ready for the glorious Tudor accession" (176). Rackin's concern is the presentation of history; my own study considers how elements of biblical history re-emerge in these and other plays.

As indicated previously, a major focus of this dissertation is the juxtaposition of women and authority. Cristina León Alfar's *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (2003) argues that characters like Lady Macbeth become "evil" via "a simple double standard, by arrogating for themselves behaviors that would be laudable or at least condoned in men," thereby "transgressing orthodox notions of gender and power" (25). Alfar writes that Shakespeare's depiction in *Macbeth* of a woman who uses power in the *Realpolitik* fashion of "suspicion, deception, and death" rather than the stereotypically feminine mode of "mercy and reconciliation" makes clear the dark side of absolute monarchy (112–13). Although Shakespeare does not condone the royal couple's bloody acts, "in his examination of a patrilineal order dependent on women's renunciation of desire, he parodies early modern conceptions of 'appropriate' femininity" (118–19). *The Winter's Tale*, in contrast, shows two women resisting Leontes's paranoid accusations of cuckoldry and feminine rebellion —"female evil" is thus "unmasked as a masculinist fantasy" (164–65). Any assumption "that female

power is effaced in *The Winter's Tale*," Alfar writes, "is to discount the power of Paulina," who seeks a throne "informed by values other than suspicion, paranoia, and absolutism" (164, 182)—the type of moral reform long associated with prophetic figures. Given the book's focus on tragedies, Joan Puzel goes unexamined when she might otherwise be a logical topic for Alfar. Janet Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (1992) likewise examines *Macbeth* and *The Winter's Tale*. The former play "represents in very powerful form both the fantasy of a virtually absolute and and destructive maternal power," of which the Witches and Lady Macbeth are the primary representatives, "and the fantasy of absolute escape from this power" (131). Where Adelman sees the shadow of frightening maternity, however, this dissertation detects that of idolatry and pagan prophets. In *The Winter's Tale*, Adelman sees a Paulina who facilitates the shift of "a sterile court in which the maternal body and the progeny who bear its signs must be harried to death to a court in which that body can be restored, its regenerative sanctity recognized and embraced" (222). This dissertation particularly examines Paulina's role as an agent of renewal and resurrection.

Two older volumes also touch on aspects of this study. Peter Erickson, in *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (1985), echoes Alfar's statement about Paulina's aim: "The dramatic action [in *The Winter's Tale*] consists partly in the fashioning of a benign patriarchy—in the transition from a brutal, crude, tyrannical version to a benevolent one capable of including and valuing women" (148). However, Paulina is a mother figure, and therefore her "challenge to Leontes's tyrannical authority is sharp, but it is also limited. . . . [S]he does not seriously violate the code for appropriate gender behavior" (162). In *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (1981), Irene G. Dash sees *The Winter's Tale* as "dominated by the conflict between the irrational and the rational where women represent the latter. Thus the language of

Paulina . . . [is] vital to an understanding of the play” (151). Dash depicts Margaret as a “seer and sibyl” in *Richard III*, the last of four dramas in which women “seek to exert power but discover its elusiveness” (193, 206). The two books thus work with issues of gender roles and speech that this dissertation will examine.

The current study, then, seeks to examine the back side of the tapestries of *The Winter’s Tale*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *1 Henry VI* and to discover more about how the threads of political and domestic authority, gender roles, biblical narrative and oracle, the supernatural, early modern theology, and the English Reformation twist themselves around one another to create figures whose actions subject power to critique both onstage and outside the theater. Of the narrative elements involved in such tales, two of the most fundamental are the advocate-prophet and the confronted king—a juxtaposition that is central to the play with which we begin: *The Winter’s Tale*.

Chapter 2

“He must be told on’t”: Paulina and *The Winter’s Tale*

A pregnant woman in a palace, a king guilty of great wrong, a confrontational member of the royal entourage, a man killed in the course of obeying his liege’s orders, a prince dead in fulfillment of a supernatural prediction, the possibility of redemption—such is a tidy summary of *The Winter’s Tale*. Yet as many an early modern churchgoer knew, that précis also encapsulates the Old Testament story of David and Bathsheba: the monarch blindsided by passion, the murder-by-proxy of the husband Uriah, the face-off with the prophet Nathan, and the episode’s half-tragic, half-hopeful aftermath. When Nathan confronts David with a parable of a heartless rich man who takes what is not his, the prophet thunders to the adulterous king: “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:13). After Shakespeare’s Leontes inexplicably decides that his queen, Hermione, has cuckolded him, the noblewoman Paulina likewise decries his behavior in righteous anger:

I’ll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen,
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savours
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world. (*WT* 2.3.114–19)

Like Nathan, Paulina becomes aware of an abuse of royal power and will not let it go unopposed; Leontes, she declares, is guilty of abusing another human being, and his deeds border on “tyranny.” Unlike the Hebrew prophet, the Sicilian noblewoman has no divine orders to rebuke her liege; at no time does she declare, “Thus saith the Lorde.” But in her challenge to a head of state, Paulina—“Shakespeare’s greatest crone” (Roberts 132), the “archetypically unruly woman” (Adelman 232)—acts as an early modern female counterpart to the Israelite man of God, calling for justice in the wake of wrongdoing by authority. In so doing, she raises the question of personal identity; whereas the office of the Hebrew prophet was that of divine ambassador or emissary of God, Paulina initially

presents herself as coming in her own person rather than as a representative of another. As with the Israelite seers of old, much of her power is rooted in language, although (as with her biblical counterparts) the rhetoric may take non-verbal as well as verbal forms. In addition, *The Winter's Tale* reproduces Scripture's presentation of the prophet as intimately involved with the monarchy—a relationship that is sometimes strained and in which kings are often called to account in the name of a higher law. In her advocacy for Hermione and Perdita, Paulina echoes an ancient concern about the well-being of vulnerable children and women, and she also finds herself fulfilling the classic prophetic role of harbinger or witness of doom. Yet her final role is that of an agent of resurrection rather than disaster. In her audacious defiance of the monarch, Paulina represents a major challenge to early-modern mores, not only those governing subjects but especially those regulating women—a challenge all the more startling given the play's presentation before the Jacobean court in 1613 (Pitcher 92). In such a light, especially considering King James's elevated view of the monarchy, Paulina becomes a particularly provocative example of the female prophet.

“You know me, do you not?": The question of identity

Paulina's entrance in *The Winter's Tale* presents a subtle but provocative contrast to the opening of the play as a whole⁹. “If you shall chance, Camillio . . . ,”

⁹ In *The Bible in Shakespeare* (2013), Hannibal Hamlin argues that *The Winter's Tale* is taken up with the Genesis narrative and the doctrine of the Fall; for David N. Beauregard (*Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*, 2008), the play's action reflects the sacrament of penance: “contrition, confession, and satisfaction” (109). Pietro Boitani (*The Gospel According to Shakespeare*, 2013) hears “the resurrection of the flesh” being announced via human affection (86). Richard C. McCoy asserts that poetic rather than religious faith undergirds the drama (*Faith in Shakespeare*, 2013). Phebe Jensen's *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (2008) argues for an iconoclasm in the initial acts that ultimately is countered by an affirmation of Catholic aesthetics (197); Aaron Laudau makes a similar argument in a 2003 article (“‘No Settled Senses’”). Marion O'Connor (“‘Imagine Me, Gentle Spectators,’” 2003) sees the play and its statue scene as informed by the era's debates on religious imagery; Jeffrey Johnson (“‘Which 'longs to women of all fashion,’” 2004) views the scene as a “delayed churching service” (76) that marks Hermione's escape from danger. Sean Benson (“The Resurrection of the Dead,” 2008) argues that Shakespeare uses the Resurrection motif to dramatize the human longing for reconciliation and

Archidamus says as the curtain rises (1.1.1)—a remark ensuring that the audience knows, by name, at least one of the two characters conversing as the scene begins. By contrast, Paulina's arrival onstage in 2.2 (and, in fact, her time throughout the scene) is unaccompanied by any reference to her name—and indeed, one of the questions at work is that of identity. To what or whom does the character anchor her selfhood? Attempting to visit Hermione, who has been confined after the onset of Leontes's attack of jealousy, Paulina tells the Gentleman accompanying her: "The keeper of the prison, call to him. / Let him have knowledge who I am" (2.2.1–2). In her instructions, however, she does not give her name, and the subsequent brief conversation between the two men occurs offstage, so that the audience does not know precisely what is said. When the Gaoler arrives, she asks, "Now, good sir, / You know me, do you not?," to which he replies, "For a worthy lady, / And one who much I honour"—although he rejects her request to see Hermione (2.2.4–6). The exchange depicts an identity that is simultaneously

reunion (21). Shelly Jansen's "The Economy of Appearance" (2011) studies the drama through an economic lens and also argues for its classification as a tragicomedy of reconciliation rather than a comedy of forgiveness. In a 2010 article (" 'Boy Eternal' "), Gina Bloom explores the yen of Leontes and Polixenes for childhood play. Catherine Belsey considers the fairy-tale-vs.-realism question (*Why Shakespeare?*, 2007). For Cristina León Alfar (*Fantasies of Female Evil*, 2003), the drama ends with a political system in which men remain in charge but "[f]emale power no longer equals female evil" (185). Kathleen Kalpin theorizes that the early modern idea of the "curtain lecture" given by wives to husbands helps to explain Leontes's sudden jealousy ("Framing Wifely Advice," 2008). Amy L. Tigner explores the role of the garden and the possibility that the play's final scene, with its moving statue, occurs in such a site, thus redeeming a locale linked to the original rift between king and queen ("Gardens and the Marvels of Transformation," 2006). Constance Jordan portrays Leontes as a king mesmerized by the mirages of parthenogenesis and absolute rule and rescued by pastoral and theater (*Shakespeare's Monarchies*, 1997). Adam McKeown argues that Leontes is fixated on rhetorical dominance ("Rhetoric and the Tragedy of *The Winter's Tale*," 2000); Lynne Enterline connects the play's view of female rhetoric to the Pygmalion story (" 'You Speak a Language,' " 1997). Janet Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers* (1992) perceives a movement from "an idealized male pastoral" to one that values "the generative potential of the female body" (222). A. E. B. Coldiron (" 'Tis Rigor and Not Law,' " 2004) discovers a series of trials of women that in fact critique patriarchy. Jean E. Howard's introduction for the Norton edition sees the king's jealousy as rooted in the vulnerabilities of Jacobean patriarchy (2876); David Schalkwyk makes a similar point in a 1992 article (" 'A Lady's 'Verily' "). Peter Erickson likewise focuses on male power, seeing it as reformed but still in place (*Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama*, 1985), and Marilyn L. Williamson asserts in *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (1986) that the dramatist's late work uses romance and familial elements to "mythologize patriarchal power, making its structures seem innocent" (112).

unquestioned (Paulina feels no need to give her name or link herself in relationship to anyone else, nor is she asked to do so) and inadequate (her attempt to act as her own lever to pry open Hermione's door fails). Yet the setback is only momentary; refusing to be balked, Paulina asks to see one of the queen's attendants and proceeds to lay her plans of deliverance.

The question of identity also is integral to the narratives and messages of the biblical prophets. The overall depiction of the prophet is that of emissary or ambassador; the prophet is repeatedly portrayed as one who is sent by God or proclaims his word. The archetypal Old Testament prophet, Moses, is born to Hebrew slaves in Egypt and then adopted by a daughter of Pharaoh; he eventually flees to Midian after killing an Egyptian for beating an Israelite. But years later he encounters God in a burning bush at Mount Horeb: "Come thou therefore," the Lord tells him, "and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10) The former member of the Egyptian court is to confront the monarch personally and deliver the Israelites from their bonds. Moses's immediate response, however, is: "what am I to go unto Pharaoh, and to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (3:11). The newly appointed messenger clearly feels his credentials are lacking, not only to face the king but also to lead the slaves. The Lord answers this question by replying, "For I will be with thee . . ." (3:12). When Moses appears before Pharaoh, his first words are: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: let my people go . . ." (5:1). His mission is freedom for others; his prophetic identity derives from the One who commissions him. In similar fashion, Isaiah recounts a vision of the divine throne: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord on this manner: whom shall I send, and who will be our messenger? Then I said, Here am I, send me. And he said, Go and tell this people . . ." (Isa. 6:8-9). God issues a call for a representative, Isaiah volunteers, and the Lord gives him a message to proclaim.

Likewise, a traditional opening of the Old Testament prophetic books is some variant of “The worde of the Lorde came vnto . . .” (Hos. 1:1, Joel 1:1, Jon. 1:1, Mic. 1:1, Zeph. 1:1, Hag. 1:1, Zech. 1:1). The message is given to the prophets rather than being originated by them. Indeed, biblical scholar David L. Petersen goes so far as to say that in the role of what he calls the “holy man,” the prophet “personifies the deity in the midst of the profane world” (6).

In her opening scene, Paulina acts as a Sicilian Moses in that her prophetic mission is to come to the aid of a woman in bondage, one who is oppressed by an unjust ruler.¹⁰ However, her adoption of this role is complicated by the fact that she does not present herself as an emissary of some other person or power; she essentially comes in her own name. Paulina “functions as an independent, a woman with a staff of her own”; she is not introduced “as a lady-in-waiting to the Queen or as a member of Hermione’s staff,” Irene G. Dash writes (*Wooing* 144). Nor does she refer to herself as the wife of one of Leontes’s courtiers, thereby drawing gravitas from her husband, Antigonus. Such a ploy might have been expected in a society in which a woman’s identity was thoroughly wrapped up in that of her husband. In the early modern family, “power resided in the male head, who was expected both to represent his family to the outside world and to govern all those in it so that it was orderly and peaceful,” Susan Dwyer Amussen writes (86).¹¹ Nor was this merely a matter of unwritten societal expectation. “At the heart of the legal system’s view of women rested the long-standing legal principle of coverture, a set of ideas built around the doctrine of ‘unity of person,’ ” Tim Stretton observes. “Just as the Bible suggested that a husband and wife were one flesh, the common law said they were one person: they shared a single legal personality and that personality was the

¹⁰ Furthering the parallel is the fact that, like the Israelites in Egypt, Hermione is an alien—the daughter of the Russian emperor (3.2.117).

¹¹ Leontes later accuses Antigonus of failing in this role: “What, canst not rule her?” (2.3.45).

husband's" (42). And in fact, Paulina's implicit appeal to her own authority is fruitless; she has been pre-emptively barred from the queen's chamber. Yet faced with this barrier, she still does not invoke her nobleman husband; rather, she dodges Leontes's prohibition by working through a female go-between. The scene simultaneously warns women that their own identities may not open all doors and hints that a key may be found nonetheless.

Given the play's pagan setting, Paulina clearly cannot (on the theatrical level) ground her mission of deliverance explicitly or implicitly in the name of the God of Israel. However, neither does she claim the authority of the Greco-Roman heaven or invoke her spouse to identify herself; she is, in a sense, self-defined. In her instructions to her attendant, she does not give her name; she merely commands the Gentleman to let the Gaoler "have knowledge who I am" (2.2.2). Nor does the Gaoler cite her given name; rather, he refers to her in terms of a personal quality ("worthy") and his own estimation of her ("one who much I honour").¹² In a society in which wives (at least in theory) perpetually move in the shadow of their husbands, Paulina's opening lines gesture toward the fact that women's agency is not always and everywhere curtailed, even in Renaissance England—that they can act efficaciously and with authority, moral and otherwise. Phyllis Rackin points out the "both/and" nature of the era: universities and certain professions barred women, the property rights of wives were limited, and wife-beating was an option for husbands—yet "aristocratic women managed great estates and

¹² Irene Dash writes that when Paulina enters Leontes's room in 2.3, "the range of her capacities is still a mystery to us," and it "will remain so until the play's closing scene" ("Pendant" 276). Ironically, Leontes's identity is perhaps the one most beclouded in the play, by his own perverse choice. Threatened by the pregnant Hermione's body, Janet Adelman argues, the king latches onto an identity as the cheated-upon husband: "Naming himself a cuckold, insisting on his identity as cuckold . . . he finds in the culturally familiar fiction of female betrayal in marriage both an acceptable narrative for his sense of primal loss and a new adult selfhood" (224). This selfhood he is willing to defend to the death, but that of others rather than his own. It is only when his identity alters again, and not by his choice—when he is left "utterly alone . . . apparently no longer a royal father or a royal husband" (Bergeron 211)—that he will rediscover what his identity should be.

wielded economic power comparable to that of the head of a large modern corporation,” and other women participated in “traditionally male” trades (*Shakespeare and Women* 7). Paulina’s seemingly unilateral decision to come to Hermione’s aid—the text does not indicate any prompting on the part of others—is that of a woman determined to enter the right door whether or not a man opens it for her.

“If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister”: Rhetoric

For Paulina, the decision to act is the decision to speak. Janet Adelman writes that the noblewoman’s entrance brings to the play “a new voice—shrewd, self-assured, funny—strong enough to provide an authoritative countervoice to Leontes’s” (228). Paulina’s plan is to use that voice to beard the king in his den¹³—a plan that re-creates the actions of Moses in his efforts to win the release of his fellow Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Stewing over Leontes’s emotional madness, Paulina declares to Hermione’s lady in waiting:

If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister
And never to my red-looking anger be
The trumpet any more. Pray you, Emilia,
Commend my best obedience to the queen.
If she dares trust me with her little babe,
I’ll show’t the king and undertake to be
Her advocate to th’ loudest. We do not know
How he may soften at the sight o’th’ child. (2.2.32–39)

Paulina admits no doubts that she can deliver the necessary message; indeed, she says, if she falls into flattery, “let my tongue blister” and forever be unable to express future ire. One of early modern culture’s venerable bogey (wo)men, of course, was the unruly wife. “Greek and Roman comedy and satire, Eastern legend, medieval estates literature . . . all contain representations of garrulous, determined and ingenious women,” Lisa Jardine observes, with a “disturbing consensus” as to the “unacceptable, emasculating . . . nature

¹³ The “very name ‘Leontes’ . . . involves connotations of leonine pride and ferocity,” Daryll Grantley remarks (240).

of such female attributes. If the definition of the virtuous wife is as chaste, obedient, dutiful and silent, then the definition of the wife without virtue is as lusty, headstrong and talkative” (104). Determined, ingenious, headstrong, talkative—one might think that the description was written with Paulina specifically in mind. Ironically, in defending Hermione’s reputation for virtue, Paulina endangers her own. Yet as she decides to confront not merely a man but a king, she registers remarkably little concern about turning herself into “my Lady Tongue” (*Much Ado* 2.1.252); in modern parlance, she opts to reclaim the title of “scold,” or at least the idea behind the word.¹⁴ As Juliet Dusinberre writes, “Shakespeare demonstrates in this play almost more than in any other, that conventions of femininity have no relevance in the tribunal of right and wrong” (220). Ladylike silence at the wrong time is not a virtue.

However, the weight of Paulina’s scheme does not rest merely on her own oratorical ability; shrewdly considering the potential affective effect of the newborn princess, she plans to use the nonverbal rhetoric of the infant Perdita’s body. “I’ll show’t the king We do not know / How he may soften at the sight o’th’ child,” she tells Emilia. “The silence often of pure innocence / Persuades when speaking fails” (2.2.37–41).¹⁵ Her assertion is particularly striking in the context of the Reformation battle over religious imagery. Paulina posits the potential superiority of the visual over the verbal—seeing the unspeaking child may persuade when eloquence does not. Roman

¹⁴ Diane M. Dixon cites Paulina as an example of older women, “unencumbered by childbearing and child rearing,” who “often move beyond restrictive cultural scripts and speak out against prevailing norms”—a quality that Dixon calls “postmenopausal zest” (35).

¹⁵ Adam McKeown writes that modern readers, cynical about persuasion, might accept unquestioningly that “silent innocence is more touching than rhetorical force”; however, for “a Renaissance poet who learned to read and write by practicing and mastering rhetoric, the idea is considerably more revolutionary . . .” (128). Nevertheless, Marjorie Garber points out that “as so often in Shakespeare, this argument [for the power of silence] fails . . . communication among human beings requires more: silence, subject to interpretation, is insufficiently eloquent to plead the case” (*After All* 836).

Catholicism, of course, argued for the catechetical and devotional value of imagery: stained-glass and painted depictions of Christ and other biblical figures could instruct the illiterate, and statues of the saints could serve as aids to veneration and prayer. Yet for many Protestants (and especially the more Reformed kind), imagery was an idolatrous snare and a trap. The focus of faith should be the word written and preached—the pulpit rather than the altar. Paulina’s statement thus has a faintly Roman accent. As becomes clear in the next scene, she sees the royal infant as an incarnate indicator of the queen’s faithfulness to Leontes:

Behold, my lords,
Although the print be little, the whole matter
And copy of the father—eye, nose, lip,
The trick of’s frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,
The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger. (2.3.96–101)

Like a notice in an old paperback that it contains the unabridged text of the hardback edition, Paulina’s words compare the baby to a printed copy of a written work (212 fn): this child who resembles Leontes from face to fingernail can have been produced only by the king. “If Leontes should be brought to read the baby as Paulina does,” writes David Schalkwyk, “this would invalidate his prior reading of Hermione. . . . If it is his [infant], then Hermione has not been unfaithful, and all the signs of infidelity with which her body and behavior have been marked for him require reinterpretation” (244).¹⁶ To borrow a phrase from the 1604 Book of Common Prayer, the princess’s flesh is the “outward and visible signe” (*BCP* 429) of Leontes’s fatherhood and, thus, Hermione’s virtue.

In Paulina’s plan to employ language (verbal and nonverbal) to rectify injustice and free those under bondage, the audience sees a re-creation of the call narrative of

¹⁶ Schalkwyk’s conclusion from this is that “signs, even the ones in which one has put most faith, cannot be trusted” (244). However, a more sustainable conclusion would simply be that human interpretation of signs is not infallible.

Moses and its dealings with rhetoric. As is already clear, speech and language are foundational to the Old Testament concept of the prophet; the phrase “Thus saith the Lord” is almost the *sine qua none* of the office. In the divine commissioning of Moses, the topic is foregrounded. After God describes his task, Moses objects: “Oh my Lord, I am neither yesterday nor yer yesterday a man eloquent . . . but I am slowe mouthed, & slowe tounded. And the Lorde sayd vnto hym: who hath made mans mouth? or who maketh the dumbe, or deafe, the seyng, or the blynde? Haue not I the Lorde?¹⁷ And nowe go, and I wyll be with thy mouth, and teache thee what thou shalt say” (Ex. 4:10–12). Faced with the prospect of changing a king’s mind, Moses objects (truthfully or not) that he is oratorically challenged. However, God counters by reminding his interlocutor that he created the human mouth and thus is fully capable of empowering Moses to say the right thing at the right time.

Nevertheless, the new prophet will not be wholly dependent on words. Even before Moses tries to sidle out of the job on the grounds of inarticulateness, he asks what he will do if people reject his heavenly mandate. In a memorable sequence, God obligingly turns Moses’s staff into a snake and back into a staff and then makes his hand “leprous, euen as snowe,” and heals it, indicating that Moses can perform these same wonders for any doubters. “Therefore yf they wyll not beleue thee, neither heare ye voyce of the first signes,” the Lord tells the presumably shaken shepherd, “yet wyll they beleue for the voyce of the seconde signes” (4:1–8). The two metamorphic miracles—plus a third, described but not then demonstrated, of turning river water into blood (4:9)—constitute a means of persuasion (a “voyce”) without words. Notably, one of the signs

¹⁷ The text puts speech on the level of hearing and sight. C. M. Woolgar points out that medieval sources sometimes treat speech as one of the human senses (10). John Calvin writes in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that bestowing “the faculty of speech” is the “peculiar province” of God (vol. 1 123).

involves the prophet's own body. David Petersen notes that "prophetic prose often focuses on the person of the prophet The word can no longer just be spoken (a la poetic speech); it must be embodied" (31). Ezekiel, for instance, is told to lie on one side of his body for 390 days and on the other for 40 days in an enacted parable about the sins of Israel and Judah (Ezek. 4:4–6). In any given instance, the prophet may be orator, actor (in the sense of one who physically performs), or prop. Prophecy becomes theater.

Paulina's initial scene is a reminder for playgoers familiar with Moses's call narrative that the One who "made mans mouth" also made the mouths of women, both sexes being subject to the summons (whether extrinsic or intrinsic) to oppose unrighteousness. Wayne Rebhorn notes that although rhetoric has masculine associations in Renaissance thought, "the rhetoricians themselves frequently pronounce the discipline a queen or lady," and "illustrations of rhetoric as one of the liberal arts continue the medieval tradition of representing it as a woman. Usually she is represented as a queen or matron, sometimes even placed in a niche much as a saint might be on the façade of a church . . ." (181). The matronly Paulina fits this pattern of thought well. Paulina, in fact, has far more confidence in her rhetorical abilities than does the male Moses; whereas the former member of the Egyptian court protests that he is "slowe mouthed, & slowe tounded," the Sicilian noblewoman calls down a curse on herself: "If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister . . ." Yet like her biblical counterpart, Paulina is not above the need for something to help support her rhetorical siege tower; in her case, rather than her own body (a la Moses or Ezekiel), the prop is Perdita. The play declares that the weapons of prophetic rhetoric can fit a woman's hands as well as those of a man. Nevertheless, the biblical parallel also hints that such weapons do not guarantee immediate victory. Early modern audiences would have been well aware that Paulina's scriptural counterpart faced immediate and repeated rebuff from Pharaoh. As

will be discussed in the course of this chapter, Leontes vociferously rejects Paulina's verbal and non-verbal arguments. Indeed, in the subsequent scene, the child becomes the (literal) embodiment of a semiotic dispute between the noblewoman and the king. Paulina essentially uses Leontes's own flesh against him; for her, the signifier of Perdita's body is tied to the signified of Leontes's parenthood: "Behold, my lords, / Although the print be little, the whole matter / And copy of the father . . ." Yet for the king, "Perdita" signifies "the issue of Polixenes" (2.3.92).¹⁸ Marion O'Connor writes that "within the dramatic fiction of *The Winter's Tale*, visual signification generally seems to be more treacherous than verbal. Leontes misreads the gestures of Hermione and Polixenes; Antigonus doubly misconstrues his dream . . . as evidence that Hermione has died and had been an adultress By contrast, Apollo's oracle is altogether unequivocal . . ." (381).¹⁹ Ironically—as with the Pharaoh of Exodus who accepts Moses's message only after the death of the firstborn—the body that will prove most effective in convincing Leontes of the error of his ways is not that of his live daughter but that of his dead son.

"Haply a woman's voice may do some good": Feminine persuasion

Even as Paulina acknowledges the difficulty of her task, she feels compelled to take it on. "These dangerous, unsafe lunes i'th' king, beshrew them!" she fumes. "He must be told on't, and he shall. The office / Becomes a woman best; I'll take't upon me"

¹⁸ Adelman, in fact, argues that Paulina's Perdita-as-rhetoric plan is doomed from the outset: Leontes, who is already nostalgic for his male-oriented youth and threatened by a pregnant Hermione who represents an alternative "masculine identity originating in the female" (223), can only see a daughter resembling him as a "final blow Paulina's strategy must therefore backfire: the more convincingly she can represent the baby as his likeness, the more desperately he will need to dissociate himself from her . . ." (227). Leontes's rejection of Perdita and Hermione also represents a repudiation of the words spoken by Adam upon meeting Eve: "this is nowe bone of my bones, and fleshe of my fleshe . . ." (Gen. 2:23). The king refuses to acknowledge the part of himself (literal and metaphorical) that Perdita and Hermione embody. According to Jean E. Howard, one sign of Leontes's ultimate reform is that he perceives "the unslandered image of his wife in the young girl before him" when he meets the grown Perdita ("The Winter's Tale" 2881).
¹⁹ However, "the difference is one of degree, not kind," O'Connor later argues. "Verbal signification is not to be trusted either, not in a play which deploys dialogue of disturbing opacity, obscurity, and indeterminacy . . ." (383).

(2.2.29–31).²⁰ If Dusinberre is correct in her view that the women of Shakespeare's era "had not been educated to form independent moral judgments" (93), Paulina seems to be an exception. But why is the job most fitting for a woman? This is, after all, a world in which "[p]iety was grounded in obedience, humility, patience and silence. Advice books enjoined women from all forms of public speech, whether preaching, public writing or forms of gossip" (Willen 27). Susan Dwyer Amussen notes the existence of "great anxiety" among men about forthright women: "While this anxiety is not new and is certainly not unique, it appears to be more common and widespread in this period than other periods" (87). Wishing to demonstrate the rhetorical figure *conversio in eadem* (and echoing Paulina's words), Thomas Wilson writes: "What becometh a women best, and first of al? Silence. What seconde? Silence. What third? Silence. What fourth? Silence. Yea if a man should aske me til dowmes day, I would stil crie, silence, silence, without the whiche no woman hath any good gifte . . ." (quoted in Luckyj 42). Such societal attitudes bode ill for Paulina's success, and as it turns out, she seems to be horrendously mistaken about her suitability as an ambassador. Dusinberre observes that Leontes has no use for female oratory; for instance, he "interprets her [Hermione's] eloquence as effrontery, urging condemnation of her not for what she says, but for saying it at all. Fearless speech spells shamelessness, a masculine disregard for feminine propriety" (220). This disdain is fully on display during Paulina's initial meeting with Leontes; not only is it unsuccessful, but the king repeatedly spurns her in specifically misogynistic terms. "A mankind witch!" he barks. "Hence with her, out o' door; / A most intelligencing bawd" (2.3.66–67). Jeanne Addison Roberts remarks that in early modern drama, "old women, when they have power, are typically, at least superficially, frightening and

²⁰ The play hints that Hermione may have come to the same conclusion; Emilia tells Paulina that the queen "but to-day hammered of this design" (2.2.48), although whether "this design" is that of a female advocate, the presentation of the child, or both is unclear.

disturbing of patriarchal order” (119)—an assessment with which Leontes seems to agree, even though Paulina has little power beyond the rhetorical. Nor is the king’s aversion limited to the specific petitioner. Even as his “dangerous, unsafe lunes” rise while he jealously watches Hermione and Polixenes converse in 1.2,²¹ Leontes mutters that women “will say anything” (1.2.131), implying that they can hardly be believed. And the greener his eyes turn, the more his view of women becomes discolored:

And many a man there is even at this present,
Now, while I speak this, holds his wife by th’arm,
That little thinks she has been sluiced in’s absence,
And his pond fished by his next neighbour . . .
.....
. . . Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves. (1.2.191–95, 197–99)²²

Given Leontes’s descent into full-blown paranoia, one is surprised that he settles on such a low percentage of the male population.

In light of Leontes’s ultimate reaction, Paulina’s assertion that it is a woman’s office to plead Hermione’s cause appears catastrophically mistaken. The irony is that the play’s central plot line springs from Leontes’s original belief in the (benign) power of feminine persuasion. After Polixenes says in 1.2 that no one can make the case for extending his months-long visit as well as Leontes—and since the Sicilian king has not succeeded, the matter is implicitly closed—the royal host immediately calls upon

²¹ Although Leontes not only presses Polixenes to remain in Sicilia but enlists Hermione to help persuade him, A. L. Rowse argues the king is already “insanely jealous” of the two—“this has been simmering in his mind for some time, and we begin rapidly in the middle of things” (425). Stanley Wells, however, writes that an onstage reading of this kind “requires a quantity of acting between the lines which is more than the text should be asked to bear” (193).

²² Terence Hawkes points to this speech as an example of the power of Elizabethan theater, with its intimate structure, to draw patrons into the drama: “The context . . . established by ‘now’ and ‘this’ in these lines includes the whole theatre, and thus men currently holding their wives by the arm in the present audience” (294–95).

Hermione: “Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you” (1.2.27).²³ Leontes issues not merely a request but a (mild) command, with the clear expectation that his spouse can aid his effort. And after she succeeds, Leontes underscores that achievement by prodding the nobleman Camillo into confirming that Polixenes changed his mind at “the good queen’s entreaty” after Leontes’s attempts fell short (1.2.218). Deepening the irony further, Hermione herself remarks on feminine rhetorical power; in response to Polixenes’s statement “I may not [stay], verily,” she ripostes: “Verily, / You shall not go. A lady’s ‘Verily’ is / As potent as a lord’s” (1.2.45, 49–51).²⁴ According to her, a woman’s language is as efficacious as that of a man.

The Winter’s Tale is hardly the only Shakespearean play that alludes to women’s persuasive abilities. In the aftermath of the Battle of Agincourt in *Henry V*, Queen Isabel of France tells the victorious English monarch that she will attend the discussion of the peace treaty: “Haply a woman’s voice may do some good, / When articles too nicely urged be stood on” (5.2.93–94). Male warriors and politicians, she hints, are prone to stubbornness when it comes to matters “advantageable for [their] dignity,” in Henry’s phrase (5.2.88); in such situations, feminine counsel can be effective. In contrast to Leontes, who anticipates and attempts to bar Paulina from his presence (*WT* 2.3.41–43), Henry diplomatically creates a rhetorical space for Isabel: “Will you, fair sister, / Go with the princes, or stay here with us?” (*H5* 5.2.90–91). Male egos are in play in both dramas, but Henry clearly feels unthreatened by the French queen; indeed, his offer that she remain in the room suggests that he views her as a potential ally in his wooing of Katherine. The scene thus acknowledges feminine rhetorical power. However, the

²³ The king’s words ironically recall Moses’s protest that he is “slowe mouthed, & slowe tounge’d” and God’s dismissal of that objection. In this case, Hermione acts as the heretofore reticent prophet, and Leontes is the Lord.

²⁴ John Pitcher notes the possible meaning of virility in “potent” (153 fn).

potency of such counsel is not limited to Shakespeare's noble characters. After Claudio is condemned to death for fornication in *Measure for Measure*, Lucio tells the prisoner's sister Isabella, "All hope is gone, / Unless you have the grace by your fair prayer / To soften Angelo" (1.4.68–70). The only chance of reprieve from the ducal deputy's sentence, he says, lies in a woman's appeal. When Isabella wonders "what poor ability's in me / To do him good," Lucio urges her to "[a]ssay the power you have" (1.2.75–76):

Go to Lord Angelo,
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,
Men give like gods; but when they weep and kneel,
All their petitions are as freely theirs
As they themselves would owe them. (1.4.79–83)²⁵

Lucio intimates that men are helpless in the face of feminine appeals—and, interestingly, he does not ground this pliability (as might be expected) in sexual desire but rather in empathy. The plays in question thus present a positive view of women's rhetoric, one expressed by both male and female characters.

In her assertion that the task of appealing to Leontes "[b]ecomes a woman best," Paulina may thus be banking on a societal presumption that women are better persuaders. "The proverb, 'words are women, deeds are men' reminds us that one of women's greatest strengths resided in discourse, which they were apt to employ as a mode of direct and vigorous action," write Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford (215). It is also possible that Paulina believes that a woman's best defender is another woman. Frances Teague and Rebecca De Haas, writing about an anti-seduction pamphlet by "Jane Anger," state that the attribution (whether true or not) of the work to a female author "implicitly suggests that a woman's identity lends strength to an attack on a man. . . . In these sixteenth-century polemics, female voice and affiliation become important"

²⁵ Naseeb Shaheen notes no specific scriptural echoes in this passage (251). However, the Epistle of James declares that the "feruent prayer of a ryghteous man auayleth much" (5:16–18).

(254). In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, the focus of the becomingness may be less the lures of the king (the one being attacked) than the person of the queen (the one being defended). However, a far more pragmatic calculation may also be at work: the idea that the risk of such a confrontation is less for a woman than a man. Commenting on the female characters who blister the air in *Richard III*, James R. Siemon observes, "Were they not female, the railing mothers would be risking death alongside those men who balk even slightly at Richard's tyranny"; as it happens, the scheming monarch simply shrugs them off. "[P]resumptions of reduced agency could also lessen criminal culpability" (23–24). Thus, second-class status in a patriarchal society could be a blessing as well as a curse; those who possess less power and influence pose a reduced threat to those who have more. Pointing out that the (relatively silent) male courtiers of the Sicilian court suffer from "ethical paralysis," Diane M. Dixon remarks, "It is a woman's job not to be 'honey tongued' " (39). Paulina inhabits a liminal area; she does not have a male courtier's influential position, but she also is free in certain ways from the attendant inhibitions. Lisa Jardine roots the semi-immunity in question in cultural precedents, pointing to "recognizable literary types of disorderly behavior" such as Desiderius Erasmus's *Dame Folly* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* (116). "The female shrew/scold/prophet acquires . . . the verbal (and at times the physical) licence of the fool in motley, or the acerbic melancholic," Jardine writes. "She utters (and acts) with impunity, under the extended privilege of the Misrule carnival" (117).²⁶ Craig Berntal gives the issue a half-a-loaf spin: "The tongue-lashing she [Paulina] gives Leontes may be discounted by him and his court as female meddling . . . but at least she gets the chance to give it . . ." (202–03). Leontes is more than willing to accuse people of treason;

²⁶ However, Jardine specifies that any protection lies in the "recognisable literary types" rather than the sex.

he hurls the word “traitor” or “traitors” three times during 2.3. However, he never directs the dread accusation specifically and individually at Paulina—speaking once directly to Antigonus (2.3.129) and twice more broadly (2.3.71, 80)—and despite a threat of death at the stake (2.3.112), nothing happens to the older woman.²⁷ If the idea behind Paulina’s plan is that a woman risks less than a man in such a situation, this gamble at least does pay off.

The Bible is hardly rife with examples of specifically female prophetic appeals, but an episode in 2 Sam. 14:1–24 presents some parallels. King David’s son Absalom is in exile after killing his half-brother Amnon. The military commander Joab, aware of David’s desire for reconciliation, summons a “wyse woman” from the town of Tekoa (14:2) and has her approach the king in the persona of a widow whose sole surviving son is threatened with execution for killing his brother. After the woman rebukes David for keeping Absalom at arm’s length, the king agrees to bring the prince back to Jerusalem. The episode is marked by concerns about both family and political stability; not only is David estranged from his son on a parental level, but the situation threatens Israel’s national life: “The impasse which left Absalom, now the heir presumptive, in exile could not be permitted to continue indefinitely . . . ,” writes biblical scholar Joyce G. Baldwin (*1 and 2 Samuel* 253). Also in play are matters of rhetorical strategy. The Machiavellian Joab is part of the king’s inner circle, yet he chooses to make his appeal not merely through an outsider but through a woman. His reason for this goes unexplained, although one possibility is the *pathos* value of a widowed mother—something that Joab could hardly provide. In addition to describing the woman as “wyse,” the narrative portrays her as persistent and “blunt” (Baldwin *1 and 2 Samuel* 254). “Wherefore then hast thou

²⁷ “How ready the people are for their own matters to slay the true Prophets . . . ,” the Geneva Bible declares in a gloss on Ex. 17:4 (78).

thought such a thing against the people of God?" she asks the king about his keeping Absalom at arm's length (14:13). Although Joab coaches the woman in what to say (14:3), the episode implies an appreciation for feminine persuasiveness. The parallels with *The Winter's Tale* are marked: an older woman forthrightly challenging her king over a fraught familial situation that involves the threat of political upheaval as well as strained personal ties. In Paulina's case, the idea that confronting the king is a task that "[b]ecomes a woman best" does not represent making a virtue of a necessity but rather making a virtue of a "vice"—the stereotypical vice of female outspokenness. In both cases, the narratives suggest to audiences the value of the words of an older woman, a source that in early modern society ran the risk of being shrugged off.

"These dangerous, unsafe lunes i'th' king": Royal relations

Paulina's confrontation of Leontes in 2.3 engages several of the key themes of the biblical office of prophet: its relationship with and proximity to the throne; intercession and counseling; the shadow of persecution; accountability to a standard beyond the king himself; and a concern for vulnerable women and children. The motif of the scene's opening is that of illness and physical unrest—"Nor night nor day, no rest," Leontes frets (2.3.1),²⁸ while Mamillius has "declined, drooped," and "languished" (2.3.13, 16)—and upon entering the chamber, Paulina fittingly announces herself as a metaphorical court physician, one incensed by the courtiers' current treatment plan:

I come to bring him sleep. 'Tis such as you,
That creep like shadows by him and do sigh
At each his needless heavings—such as you
Nourish the cause of his awaking. I
Do come with words as medicinal as true,
Honest as either, to purge him of that humour
That presses him from sleep. (2.3.32–38)

²⁸ Pointing to Macbeth and Richard III, among others, Garber observes that insomnia is "the Shakespearean symptom of a diseased conscience" (*After All* 836).

According to Paulina, the nobles are timorous and indifferent to justice. “Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas, / Than the queen’s life?” she asks (2.3.27–28). The nobles have weighed probity for Hermione against placation of Leontes and have wrongfully chosen the latter. Describing herself as one who brings “[h]onest” and “medicinal” words that will “purge” the choleric king, Paulina sees the courtiers as timid yes-men rather than the determined doctors whom the situation requires; they have unadvisedly humored the monarch’s ill humor. “You that are thus so tender o’er his follies / Will never do him good, not one of you,” Paulina tells them (2.3.126–27).²⁹

Yet despite her rebuke of the courtiers (and, indeed, her own irate mood in the previous scene), Paulina’s initial appeal to Leontes is less than scolding:

Good my liege, I come—
And I beseech you hear me, who professes
Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
Your most obedient counsellor, yet that dares
Less appear so in comforting your evils
Than such as most seem yours—I say, I come
From your good queen. (2.3.51–57)

Paulina does not depict herself merely as physician. Like the lords, she serves the king, yet her loyalty (unlike theirs) does not shrug off unworthy actions but rather seeks to engender virtue in the throne. And like the nobles, she is a “counselor”—and one who risks the appearance of rebellion in refusing to enable the king’s evils. Masculine and even royal authority are not irreproachable. Paulina bears a remarkable resemblance to Kent in *King Lear*; according to Bernthal, she is the latter’s “female doppelganger”—“the only one of Leontes’ subjects who is doing her duty as a courtier ought, giving wise, if ill-

²⁹ In the Book of Jeremiah, God says of Jerusalem that “sorowe and woundes are euer there in my sight,” yet the priests and prophets “heale the hurt of my people with sweete wordes, saying, Peace, peace: when there is no peace at all” (6:7, 13–14). Paulina condemns the courtiers in similar fashion—they are guilty of moral malpractice. Calvin cites Jer. 6:13 to argue against misplaced Catholic faith in church leaders.

received, counsel" (202).³⁰ Like Paulina, Kent avows fealty to his monarch: "Royal Lear, / Whom I have ever honoured as my king, / Loved as my father, as my master followed, / As my great patron thought on in my prayers— . . ." (1.1.141–43). At the same time, he (like Paulina) adopts the role of doctor and vows to use any bald words necessary despite the potential consequences from his furious liege: "Do, kill thy physician, and the fee bestow / Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift, / Or whilst I can vent clamour from my throat / I'll tell thee thou dost evil" (1.1.164–67).³¹ For both speakers, the cause is the honor of a royal woman: for Kent, his king's youngest daughter; for Paulina, the infant princess and the "good queen."

Leontes, however, can see no further than Paulina's skirt. She is a "mankind witch" (2.3.66), a "most intelligencing bawd" (2.3.67), "Dame Partlet" (2.3.74), a "crone" (2.3.75), a "callat / Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband" (2.3.89–90), a "gross hag" (2.3.106)—insults specifically related to age, sex, and speech. "Paulina's rejection of silence not only as the proper response of a loyal subject but of a woman makes her an unnatural woman in Leontes' eyes," Cristina León Alfar writes; her sin springs from "the power she attempts to wield over him as the bearer of truth, a truth that ought (under early modern conceptions of monarchy) to reside only with him" (180). In Paulina's defiantly "boundless tongue," Leontes sees the marks of a "witch" and a "hag" who attempts to set herself over him as the arbiter of Sicilian reality. Leontes' slings and

³⁰ Dusinberre likewise accuses the courtiers of "cowardly silence" (221). In contrast, Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino argue that Leontes is "blessed with wise and good counselors—there is not one 'yes' man in the group, each defending Hermione to Leontes' face . . ." ("Introduction" 21). They add: "That they are rhetorically ineffective points to the limits placed on counsel in a court—like that of James I—ruled by an absolutist king" (*WT* New Cambridge 21 fn). That Paulina's jaundiced view of the nobles is so persuasive points to the sheer power of her personality, and also to the fact that her vigorous defense of the queen leaves others in her shadow. Her view also is underscored by her own husband's capitulation to Leontes's demand that Perdita be abandoned to the elements.

³¹ Sister Miriam Joseph Rauh cites this conversation between Lear and Kent as an example of *parrhesia* on the part of the latter (276–77).

arrows are remarkable mostly for their near-complete lack of any substance except ill temper, stereotype, and misogyny. During his earlier conversation with Camillo, he at least attempts to cite evidence, however flimsy, of the perfidy of Hermione and Polixenes: "Is whispering nothing? / Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses? / Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career / Of laughing with a sigh?" (1.2.282–85).³² Now, however, he resorts to mere insult and calls for his accuser's ouster from the chamber. Paulina, for her part, says that Leontes "betrays to slander" the "sacred honour of himself" and his whole family (2.3.83–84) and that the "root of his opinion" is "rotten" (2.3.88). To the degree that Perdita resembles him, " 'tis the worse," and the child stands in need of a "better guiding spirit" (2.3.96, 125). Implying that Leontes is a "most unworthy and unnatural lord" and a metaphorical "heretic" (2.3.111, 113), Paulina then winds up her bill of particulars:

I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen,
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savours
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world. (2.3.114–19)

The firefight between the two characters might well be seen as an implicit debate on who is the true gender monster. The king's view of Paulina's speech appears to be the same as that summarized by Christina Luckyj: "Such cacophony was considered not only

³² Both Pitcher (174 fn) and Stanley Wells (196) point out the potential double entendre of "nothing" as referring to female genitalia, although this presumably would be subconscious on Leontes's part even if present. Terry Eagleton takes the idea and runs with it: "The whole world becomes the female genitals; female sexuality is either in one place—the male's private possession—or it is everywhere" (66). Pitcher writes that "Leontes' conviction that Hermione has had sex with Polixenes and is pregnant by him is entirely solipsistic" (38). Obviously, however, the staging of the conversation in 1.2 can significantly affect the plausibility of the king's rhetorical questions; the greater the animation and intimacy of the conversation, the less paranoid the king seems. Anthony J. Lewis argues that although Hermione is "undeniably flirtatious" and "peppers her speeches with sexual double entendres," she "never does stray from the Elizabethan/Jacobean party line on behavior appropriate to her sex" (66).

irritating but also dangerous, since it threatened the order of the household and ultimately of the state" (45). Paulina's unfeminine manner makes her a "witch" and "traitor." Yet in Paulina's view, no true man would betray his personal and familial honor; no good prince would act like a tyrant.³³ Theodora A. Jankowski provides additional insight into the tensions implicit in the conflict: "Man, the thinker and doer, was often imaged as the representative of reason. Woman . . . was often imaged as emotion or passion. In most works, women were the representatives of such irrational emotions as anger, jealousy, or fear" (59). Further, Jankowski notes Erasmus's statement that "you cannot be a king unless reason completely controls you. . . . It is the mark of a tyrant—and womanish, too—to follow the unbridled will of your mind" (59; ellipsis in original). By this early modern light, Leontes has feminized himself by yielding to and nurturing his irrational jealousy; Paulina represents the "masculine" rationality so clearly lacking in the tyrannical Leontes, who has failed to live up to his proper nature.³⁴ The woman is a force against chaos; M. Lindsay Kaplan and Katherine Eggert state that "rather than destabilizing the

³³ Jean E. Howard, tallying the ways that Leontes "oversteps his just authority" as monarch and husband, sees his ultimate offense as putting Hermione on trial before her lying-in period is finished—a specifically gender-related deed. "This," Howard declares, "is domestic tyranny of a hideous sort" ("The Winter's Tale" 2878–79). Brian Vickers argues: "Leontes has something of the character of the stage-tyrant, whose outbursts do not really frighten. Indeed, when Paulina stands up to him he becomes a comic figure, a version of the hen-pecked husband . . ." (339). A comic staging of 2.3 (or at least parts of it) is possible but hardly the most natural interpretation, especially given the overall tragic sense of the first three acts. James Kuzner likewise sees Leontes as ineffective, noting that he is rebuffed at various points by Camillo, Antigonus, and Paulina; alluding to the apostle Paul's view that the Mosaic law actually provokes sin, Kuzner writes that "the king's commands work as they normally do for Paul: by soliciting subjects to transgress. In fact, his commands make transgression the only option" (268–69). Although I disagree with the view of Paul outlined in Kuzner's article, Leontes's situation is in fact an ironic reversal of Paul's theology. For the apostle, the righteous law of God leads to sin because of human depravity; in contrast, Leontes's decrees provoke disobedience because his subjects are morally superior to him.

³⁴ Irene Dash also sees a reversal of stereotypes, writing: "Thematically the play is dominated by the conflict between the irrational and the rational where women represent the latter" (*Wooing* 151). Anthony J. Lewis sees a somewhat different and more productive turnabout at work toward the end of the play: Leontes "appears passive, that is, patient and restricted," and Paulina "active intellectually and physically"—"it is important to recognize that Shakespeare demands a reversal of sex roles as a prerequisite for the happy ending" (154–55).

social order, Paulina's 'offenses' serve, ultimately, to restore order and succession to Leontes's realm" (110)—again, an approach marked by “masculine” rationality.³⁵

The showdown between Paulina and her liege touches on one of the hallmarks of the office of prophet in Scripture: its relationship with kings. This link between king and prophet is established in the Bible as early as Genesis, when Joseph, a son of the patriarch Jacob, is brought to Pharaoh to interpret a strange dream that features healthy and unhealthy ears of grain as well as well-fed and lean cattle. Joseph declares that the dream is a message from God: “Beholde there come seuen yeres of great plenteousnes throughout all the lande of Egypt. And agayne, there shall aryse after them seuen yeres of famine . . .” (Gen. 41: 29–30). Divine providence provides both the nighttime warning of upcoming disaster as well as the interpreter who makes the warning plain (41:16). The Joseph narrative establishes an early instance of a biblical pattern: The prophetic figure delivers a divine message to the ruler, who then must decide whether to heed the message.³⁶ The confrontation between Moses and a later Pharaoh in Exodus functions similarly. Upon his arrival in Egypt after the burning bush episode, Moses's first words to Pharaoh are: “Thus sayeth the Lorde God of Israel: let my people go . . .” (Ex. 5:1). His mission is freedom for others. Again, the king must choose whether to heed the prophetic proclamation. Biblical scholar Victor H. Matthews in fact sees the royal court as the prophets' primary audience: “Prophets always challenged the monarchs of Israel and

³⁵ Similarly, Marguerite Hailey Rippy asserts that Emilia's shrewishness in *Othello* is seen in a negative light until the murder of Desdemona, at which point it “becomes sanctioned as the only means of restoring order” (106). Anthony Lewis writes, “Like Benedick, Leontes comes under the tutelage of a woman and accepts the vision and point of view of women before he is transformed into a husband” (155); Northrop Frye memorably describes the relationship between Paulina and Leontes as “that of a nanny and a child in a screaming tantrum” (163). Schalkwyk points out that by supervising the heirless king's marital status, Paulina assumes “a royal and patriarchal prerogative”—“one of the most important instances of power in the management of the patriarchal state, control over marriage and the bloodline, passes into the hands of a woman” (258).

³⁶ Joseph's Pharaoh does heed the warning, setting up a food storage program and putting Joseph in charge of it.

Judah, even when they were speaking directly to the people” (22). David Petersen argues that “there is a strong correlation between Israel’s existence as a monarchic state and the presence of prophets in its midst”; historically speaking, king and prophet flourish at roughly the same time (8). Further, Petersen writes, it was not unusual for prophets to be “located in or near the circles of power. . . . Such proximity to the king or prince symbolizes the prophet’s close connection to political power during many periods of ancient Israelite history” (13).³⁷

Shakespeare’s portrayal of Paulina dovetails neatly with this aspect of biblical prophethood. Her primary dramatic function is to challenge the king, a fact underscored by her lack of a counterpart in Robert Greene’s *Pandosto*, the primary source for the play—the character is Shakespeare’s invention (Howard “Winter’s Tale” 2875).³⁸ Paulina is clearly part of the Sicilian “circle of power”: wife of a noble, intimate of the queen (such that Hermione entrusts the newborn princess to her), and able to enter the royal presence despite Leontes’s wish not to see her. And in her challenging of the king, she reminds the early modern world that despite the thunderous warnings against political rebellion of the Elizabethan-era homilies or King James I’s dizzyingly high view of the rights of kings,³⁹ the occupant of the throne is not proof against rebuke—a fact attested not merely by the latest scribblings of an upstart Stratford crow but also by the foundational narratives of the nation’s official faith. Scripture repeatedly recounts

³⁷ R. N. Whybray, however, emphasizes their potential outsider position, writing that “it is unlikely that prophets generally enjoyed an official status in either the religious or the political establishment” (622).

³⁸ Interestingly, Simon Forman’s summary of a performance of the play on May 15, 1611, mentions Leontes by name and several other characters by description but says nothing about Paulina (Frey *Shakespeare’s Vast Romance* 10).

³⁹ In a speech to Parliament, James likens the powers of kings to those of God: “they make and vnmake their subjects: they haue power of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death: Iudges ouer all their subjects and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God onely. They . . . make of their subjects like men at the Chesse . . .” (*King James* 181).

instances in which an individual confronts a monarch with an unpalatable message. Joseph predicts years of plenty followed by years of need; Pharaoh responds by instigating a food storage program under Joseph's direction, and the nation survives. Centuries later, Moses calls upon the Egyptian ruler to free the Israelites; Pharaoh resists, and the country suffers the famous ten plagues. Over the course of the Old Testament, a theme emerges: Kings ignore prophetic warnings at their peril. Thus, when Paulina calls upon Leontes to do right by his wife and child, the scene might have sparked a sense of *déjà vu* for Shakespeare's original audiences, many of whom would have been familiar with the fates of biblical kings who brush aside such admonitions.

“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?": Tension and disorder in the court

Not unexpectedly, and as is already clear, Paulina's performance of a prophetic office is characterized by the same strained relationship between speaker and royal hearer that is often depicted in Scripture. The conflict is foreshadowed almost immediately in Paulina's opening scene; when she asks that she be taken to Hermione, the Gaoler replies: "I may not, madam. / To the contrary I have express commandment" (2.2.7–8). The text does not specify whether this directive was general or tailored to Paulina, but Leontes's later statement that he ordered Antigonus to keep her away (2.3.41–43) reveals an anticipation of trouble from her quarter. No sooner has she entered than the king snaps, "Away with that audacious lady!" (2.3.41)—the first of several demands that Paulina be ejected. Although the noblewoman initially attempts to keep the conversation on a respectful keel, it soon escalates into accusations of "intelligencing bawd" and "unworthy and unnatural lord" (2.3.67, 111), with Antigonus becoming collateral damage in the exchange of fire: "Thou dotard," Leontes calls him, a man who is "woman-tired, unroosted / By thy Dame Partlet here" (2.3.72–74).

Watching the king and his blunt and unwelcome challenger, the original audience of *The Winter's Tale* might have recalled a biblical episode involving King Ahab. In 1 Kings 18, Israel has suffered from a years-long drought invoked by Elijah. When the prophet eventually appears before the monarch, Ahab says, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Elijah replies, "It is not I that haue troubled Israel, but thou and thy fathers house, in that ye haue forsaken the commaundements of the Lorde . . ." (18:17–18). For Ahab, the prophet is an unwelcome troublemaker, instantly identified as such; Elijah, in contrast, declares that the king has disgraced the nation by departing from moral standards that he should have upheld. "The classic power struggle in [1 and 2] Kings is that between prophet and king," George Savran observes, "and the former is always shown to be the person of greater authority, even though political and military might resides with the monarch" (161–62). The tension between the critical Paulina and the imperious Leontes echoes that which occasionally emerged between ruler and ruled in early modern England. Writing about a 1576 discourse by a member of Parliament on the right of free speech, David Harris Sacks describes the argument as "grounded in the firm conviction that one of the functions of the House [of] Commons . . . is the giving of 'sound counsel' to the monarch, which the monarch in turn has the duty to receive . . ." (123). The nation as a whole, Sacks notes, was characterized by "widespread participation by the English in their own rule at every level, from the parish and the village to the town and the county to the Parliament and the royal court" (119–20). However, Queen Elizabeth had her own ideas about the potentially boundless tongue of Parliament; in 1571, in the wake of previous pressure from lawmakers for her to marry, she essentially "declared that on the everyday business of legislation, the Commons could freely offer their advice," but "on the great matters of state—matters falling within her royal prerogative—they had no right to give counsel . . ." (124). King James likewise told Parliament that "it is sedition in

Subjects, to dispute what a King may do in the height of his power I wil not be content that my power be disputed vpon . . .” (*King James* 184). *The Winter’s Tale* and the biblical episodes of prophet/ruler tension that the play echoes thus reflect the political reality of the day, but they also hint to audiences that right is not necessarily on the side of might; the narratives subvert James’s assertion that “what a King may do in the height of his power” is not a matter for disputation or criticism.

Among the more historically conscious members of Shakespeare’s audiences, the sword-crossing between Paulina and Leontes might have recalled the case of Elizabeth Barton, the sixteenth-century “Holy Maid of Kent” who vocally opposed the dissolution of Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon. After becoming known as a miracle-working prophetess, as Diane Watt writes, Barton’s star rose to the point that by one friar’s account, “the King offered to make her an abbess, and Anne Boleyn asked Barton to remain at the Royal Court in attendance on her” (67). However, the Benedictine nun wrote to Clement VII arguing against Henry’s marital case; during an interview with the monarch, she reportedly “attempted to discourage him from pursuing the course he had taken, for the safety of his soul and the preservation of the realm”; and she told Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and Archbishop William Warham that God’s judgment would fall on them if they backed the king’s plan (67, 69). Not surprisingly, Barton was convicted of treason, and she was hanged on April 20, 1534—the same day that the Oath of Succession was demanded for London residents (76). As with Barton and Henry, the relationship between Paulina and Leontes frays severely when Paulina denounces the king’s marital morality.

Early modern playgoers might also have recalled Anne Askew, who was tortured and burned in 1546; her case was described in *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe* and *The latter examinacyon of Anne Askewe*, both edited by John Bale, and

subsequently in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Like Barton, Askew comes in for lethal attention from high officials; her questioners include the bishops of Winchester and London, and Lord Chancellor Thomas Wriothesly personally participates in her torture (Watt 82–83). However, her challenge to authority takes a shape different from Barton's. Whereas the Maid of Kent boldly intervenes in Henry's "Great Matter," Askew is arrested after being accused of rejecting the Real Presence (82). "Throughout both her accounts she claims for herself the roles of prophet, preacher and author, able to interpret God's word, to teach and dispute with learned men on theological matters," Watt writes (99). Yet Kimberly Anne Coles describes Askew's response to interrogation as "silence or scripture," a "system of evasion by which she keeps her meaning indeterminate" (20)—she "does not use the occasion of her trial to assert the tenets of the early Protestant community" or to "enter the arena of sermonizing" (21). Askew is thus less publically provocative than Barton, although she was quite willing to fence with her foes. When asked "if I did not believe that the sacrament hanging over the altar was the very body of Christ really," Askew writes, she in return asked, "Wherefore was St. Stephen stoned to death? and he said he could not tell. Then I answered that no more would I assoil his vain question" (Foxe vol. 5 538). Upon being asked another question, she writes, "I answered, I would not throw pearls amongst swine, for acorns were good enough" (538). Despite her wit, Askew's employment of the prophetic office seems far more low-key than Barton's, although the end result is tragically the same.

Nor was Askew the only woman who found herself at odds with the ecclesiastical regime over Eucharistic theology or similar matters. During Mary I's reign, Elizabeth Warne and others were questioned about the Real Presence and accused of "speaking against the mass" and "despising their ceremonies and new found sacraments." Warne was executed in July 1555 after declaring, "Do what ye will; for if Christ were in an error,

then am I in an error" (Foxye vol 7. 343). A few months later, Warne's daughter Elizabeth also was imprisoned. Upon being "exhortcd by the bishop to return to the catholic unity of the church," Foxye writes, Elizabeth replied: "If ye will leave off your abomination, so I will return; and otherwise, I will not." She was burned at the stake in January 1556 (Foxye vol. 7 749–50). Unlike Askew, Barton, Warne, and her daughter, Paulina manages to avoid execution—but for Shakespeare's audiences, aware of possible fates of outspoken women, the risk that Paulina runs is not an academic one.

"Stand betwixt you and danger": Prophetic intercession

Before her vindication later in the play, Paulina must defend herself, disputing Leontes's assertions about her honesty and loyalty (2.3.68–70, 81–82). Yet such, obviously, is only an impromptu, tangential task for her—her primary objective is to intercede for Hermione and Perdita. Even aside from the plans laid in 2.2., her action in 2.3 is foreshadowed by the final lines in her initial scene. When the Gaoler points out that he has no explicit authority to allow Perdita out of confinement, Paulina reassures him: "Do not you fear. Upon mine honour, I / Will stand betwixt you and danger" (2.2.63–64). The noblewoman is ready to defend one who enables her defense of others. During her confrontation of Leontes, she insists on Hermione's virtue in the face of Leontes's assertions to the contrary: "Good queen, my lord, good queen, I say good queen, / And would by combat make her good, so were I / A man, the worst about you" (2.3.58–60). Metaphorically, Paulina is willing to wager her life on Hermione's honesty.⁴⁰ Likewise, her final words to the king defend Perdita's place as a legitimate daughter: "Look to your babe, my lord, 'tis yours . . ." (2.3.124). In so doing, her actions reproduce those of the

⁴⁰ Cf. Beatrice's fuming after Claudio has similarly defamed her cousin in *Much Ado About Nothing*: "O, that I were a man! . . . I would eat his heart in the marketplace" (4.1.302, 305). The similarities in the two women's words highlight the fact that Paulina is implicitly challenging Leontes to a duel. To his discredit, the king cannot even claim the mitigating circumstance of being gulled, as happens with Claudio and Othello.

biblical prophets in their occasional role of intercessor. Discussing the various Hebrew terms used for such figures, David Petersen sees the “one element common to all prophets” is their “function as intermediaries between the human and divine worlds” (7). Most often, this function is fulfilled in the proclamation of divine messages. However, the pipeline runs both ways, so that the prophet sometimes represents people to God as well as vice versa.

Again, the classic figure is Moses. When God plans to destroy the Israelites in the wake of the golden-calf episode at Mount Sinai, Moses intercedes for his people: “Turne from thy fierce wrath . . . Remember Abraham, Isahac, and Israel thy seruantes, to whom thou swarest by thy owne selfe, and saydest vnto them: I wyll multiplie your seede as the starres of heauen, and all this lande that I haue spoken of wyll I geue vnto your seede . . .” (Ex. 32:12–13). Moses calls upon the Lord to relent from his anger and remember the oath sworn to the patriarchs that their descendants would thrive and inherit the Promised Land. Shortly thereafter, he appeals again: “And nowe forgeue them their sinne: or if thou wylt not, wype me I pray thee out of thy booke whiche thou hast written” (32:32). Moses specifically casts his lot with his people: If God will not forgive them, may his fate be oblivion as well.⁴¹ Perhaps the most striking aspect of Paulina’s performance as prophet-intercessor is its radical inversion of the standard biblical portrayal. In Scripture, this picture involves an advocate representing a wrongdoer to a righteous deity. Moses’s intercession occurs against a background in which God has graciously performed mighty deeds for Israel in delivering the nation from oppression. Biblical texts present God as the powerful Lord who has dealt generously with the Israelites, rescuing them and providing them with security—yet Israel has committed

⁴¹ Other instances of the intercession motif involve Jeremiah (Jer. 7:16), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:19–23), and the previously mentioned episode of the wise woman from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:1–14).

idolatry. In contrast, Paulina's "client" is innocent of wrongdoing.⁴² Furthermore, the lord to whom she appeals in 2.3 deals in oppression rather than deliverance and forces Hermione from her place beside him rather than giving her security; Leontes becomes an anti-God figure in his high-handedness and disregard for relationships.⁴³

Viewing Paulina's interactions with Leontes through this lens clarifies the valorization and condemnation at work in Shakespeare's depictions of his characters. The woman fulfills a function that the playwright's audience would associate with certain (male) stalwarts of the faith. Simultaneously, the man—holding a position viewed in early modern political theory as ordained by God, and indeed acting as the Lord/lord in the prophetic-intercession metaphor—fails radically in his role.⁴⁴ Paulina implicitly expands the possibilities open to her sex, while Leontes exemplifies the fallibility of his own.

"Ye shall trouble no wydowe nor fatherlesse chylde": The vulnerable

In 2.3, Paulina essentially begins and ends her exchange with the king on the subject of Perdita. Her final speech in the scene mentions the infant: "Look to your babe, my lord, 'tis yours—Jove send her / A better guiding spirit" (2.3.124–25). Cannily if perhaps unexpectedly, her first words to Leontes do not mention Hermione, the focus of his ire; she has come for "needful conference / About some gossips for your highness" (2.3.39–40)—"gossips," according to John Pitcher, in the sense of godparents, an implicit reference to Perdita's arrival (208 fn).⁴⁵ The queen, however, does not go unmentioned; when Leontes sneeringly says of Antigonus, "He dreads his wife," Paulina snaps in reply:

⁴² "*The Winter's Tale* is the only play in which one character, trying to establish another's innocence, engages in lawyer-like advocacy," Craig Bernthal states (201).

⁴³ Furthering the comparison, Northrop Frye writes of "Leontes' jealousy making something out of nothing, a demonic reversal of the divine creation" (167).

⁴⁴ Leontes's failure recalls another king's inability to live up to the role that he takes on: ". . . now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (*Macbeth* 5.2.20–22).

⁴⁵ Garber observes that Paulina "attempts to cure him by reconciling him not directly with the Queen, but instead with the newborn child" (*After All* 836).

“So I would you did. Then ’twere past all doubt / You’d call your children yours” (2.3.78–79). Not only has the king demonstrated lack of respect for his spouse, but his attitude effectively robs Perdita of her father. It is in this care for a vulnerable woman and child that Paulina participates in a Jewish prophetic concern that literally stretches from Exodus in the beginning of the Old Testament to Malachi at the end. A mere four chapters after the recording of the Ten Commandments, God warns: “Ye shall trouble no wydowe nor fatherlesse chylde. If ye shall euyll entreate them, and they crye out vnto me, I wyll surelye heare theyr crye. And then wyl my wrath waxe hotte . . .” (Ex. 22:22–24). If Israel does not want to see its own set of plagues, it must not wrong the vulnerable. The writer of Psalm 82 urges, “Iudge ryght vnto the poore and fatherlesse” (82:3); Jeremiah tells his people to neither “greeue nor oppresse . . . the fatherlesse” (22:3).⁴⁶ In the final book of the Old Testament, God warns: “And I wyl come neare to you in iudgement, and I wyll be a swyft witsnesse” against those who “vexe the widowe and the fatherlesse”—such people, he says, “feare not me” (Mal. 3:5). Those who afflict the vulnerable risk becoming defendants in a divine court, with God himself as a witness against them.

Perdita, of course, is not technically an orphan, nor is Hermione a widow. However, Leontes’s actions effectively create a husbandless woman and a girl who is bereft of her true parents; they also place the king in the dangerous position of oppressing people whom Scripture declares to be special objects of divine attention. Such actions hint at the possibility of divine judgment for the monarch. In addition, Leontes’s deeds and Paulina’s concern help to create a play about a king that is not primarily about kingship. Of course, Shakespearean works such as *Macbeth*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard III*, and the *Henry VI* dramas are not merely about the acquisition, use, and

⁴⁶ Calvin quotes the texts from Psalms and Jeremiah to explain “why there are magistrates, and to what end they have been appointed by God” (vol. 2 658).

abuse of royal power, nor is *The Winter's Tale* devoid of the issues that make crowned heads lie uneasy. The Delphos oracle's threat, for instance, is the lack of an heir to the throne—an issue that was all too real to playgoers who had witnessed decades of concern about who would succeed the childless Elizabeth, and who doubtless breathed a sigh of relief at the fact that James I brought three children with him upon his ascension. Hermione and Perdita's situation, of course, would hardly be as fraught were Leontes an ordinary shepherd. Yet at its core, the play is more about a husband and father than a monarch, and Paulina's advocacy for a wife and a child contributes to this.⁴⁷ Moreover, in an age anxious about cuckoldry and its potential disruption of the family line, the play radically critiques the heaven-condemned chaos that can be committed by men.

“Yea, scandalous to the world”: Pointing to a higher standard

One might assume that Paulina's plea in 2.3 would focus largely on those injured by the “dangerous, unsafe lunes i'th' king”—and so it does, as demonstrated in this chapter. However, much of the noblewoman's rhetoric focuses not on the virtues of the victims but on the sins of Leontes. Upon being accused by the king of being part of a “nest of traitors” (2.3.80), Paulina echoes her husband's denial of the allegation:

Nor I, nor any
But one that's here, and that's himself; for he
The sacred honour of himself, his queen's,
His hopeful son's, his babe's, betrays to slander,
Whose sting is sharper than the sword's; and will not—
For, as the case now stands, it is a curse
He cannot be compell'd to't—once remove
The root of his opinion, which is rotten
As ever oak or stone was sound. (2.3.81–89)

⁴⁷ Pitcher sees a valorization of the child in the play and its fairy-tale title: “The Elizabethans weren't supposed to prize childhood . . . so it was highly unusual to offer them a story or a play into which childlike and childish sentiments and thinking had been woven, and in which they too were invited to be like a child. This is what Shakespeare did in *The Winter's Tale*. The hard thing for Elizabethan audiences . . . is that they needed to have childlike trust and openness about what they were shown, but they had to be very sophisticated in interpreting it” (“Introduction” 25).

The true treachery, Paulina asserts, is that of Leontes, who has subjected his entire family to defamation. After yet another royal command to have her ejected from the chamber, she snaps, "A most unworthy and unnatural lord / Can do no more" (2.3.111–12), and when Leontes evokes the specter of the stake, she dismisses it and declares:

I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen,
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savours
Of tyranny and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world. (2.3.114–19)

Paulina's moral indictments in 2.3 act as the counterpart to the formal charge against Hermione in 3.2. Leontes's refusal to own Perdita proves that he has no respect for his wife (2.3.78–80); he exposes his entire family to slander (2.3.82–84).⁴⁸ His treatment of the queen, based on "weak-hinged fancy," smacks of despotism (2.3.115–18).⁴⁹ Like Hermione, Leontes stands accused in his performance as both spouse and monarch.⁵⁰

"Honour," "unworthy," "unnatural," "scandalous"—in using such terms, Paulina implies that the king is answerable to a source outside himself; she is weighing the monarch by such standards and finding him wanting. In so doing, she evokes one of the principal functions of the Old Testament prophets: the call to adhere or return to the covenant law. Prophets "served as the conscience of the kings," Victor Matthews writes. "It was their job to remind the monarch that he was not above the law and could be

⁴⁸ Ironically, as Stanley Wells points out, Leontes himself is afraid of being mocked (195) for playing "so disgraceful a part, whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour / Will be my knell" (1.2.187–89).

⁴⁹ Daryl W. Palmer argues that Hermione's mention of the Russian emperor (3.2.117) would have evoked that regime's despotic reputation. "Hermione can grasp the difference between rigor and law . . . because her own father epitomizes its abuse. I suggest that her search for pity from the Russian emperor marks the extremity of Leontes's tyranny . . ." (330–31).

⁵⁰ By reminding Leontes that she is "a great king's daughter" (3.2.38), Craig Bernthal writes, Hermione points "back to their wedding ceremony, in which she went from her father's [legal] cover to that of her husband. The implication is that Leontes has not only failed in his duties to Hermione, but to her father as well" (205).

punished like any other Israelite for an infraction of the covenant” (35).⁵¹ In Deuteronomy, Moses reviews the divine covenant established on Mount Sinai and instructs Israel about matters including the duties of future monarchs: “And when he is set vpon the seate of his kingdome, he shall write hym out a copie of this lawe in a booke before the priestes the Leuites: And it shalbe with hym, and he ought to reade therin all the dayes of his life, that he may learne to feare the Lorde his God, and to kepe all the wordes of this lawe and these ordinaunces, for to do them . . . (Deut. 17:18–19). The king is responsible to the law of God. This duty is so important that one of his first post-coronation tasks is to make a personal copy that he must keep with him and study during his entire reign. As if in imitation of Moses’ instructions, the 1560 Geneva Bible includes an epistle to Queen Elizabeth regarding the task that “God hath laid vpon you in making you a builder of his [spiritual Temple]” (*Geneva Facsimile* ii *recto*). Noting the presence of enemies such as “Papifts,” “worldlings,” and “ambicious prelates,” the translators “prefent vnto your Maieftie the holy Scriptures faithfully and playnely tranlated according to the langages wherein thei were firft written by the holy Gofit” (ii *verso*). The epistle further states: “Moreouer the maruelous diligence and zeale of Iehofaphat, Iofiah, and Hezekiah are by the finguler prouidence of God left as an example to all godly rulers to reforme their countreys and to eftablifh the worde of God with all [pede, left the wrath of the Lord fall vpon them for the neglecting thereof” (ii *verso*).⁵² The Geneva translators thus commend Scripture to the

⁵¹ Gerald Wooster and Janet Boakes, putting a psychoanalytic spin on the role of conscience, write that “Paulina becomes a projection of Leontes’ primitive super-ego, satisfying his need for punishment. Paulina in her turn . . . is willing to allow Leontes to carry her projected grief and guilt for the responsibility she carried for Antigonus’ death. A joint punishment—she punishes herself as she punishes him endlessly” (83).

⁵² The official homily “A Sermon of Good Works Annexed Unto Faith” compares Henry VIII to the same three kings (“most noble and famous princes”) in its praise of the Tudor monarch’s break with Rome (*Homilies* 53).

queen as a guide and point to the history of Israel and its kings as a template for the reform of England.

Old Testament historical narratives repeatedly raise the specter of royal failure to adhere to the covenant; the prophets warn about such neglect and malfeasance, and Paulina's challenge of Leontes is a version of this motif. The occupant of the throne is not immune to rebuke. Noting that the Christian doctrine of dual allegiance to God and king curbed absolutist thought in early modern England, Constance Jordan writes that thus "a secular office, whether answering to divine, natural, or positive law, had no decisive authority over subjects, however much its actual power might impose on them. Its full and often terrifying force, if dedicated to godless ends, could and should be resisted . . ." (4). In a similar vein, David Harris Sacks cites the case of Parliament member Peter Wentworth, for whom the House of Commons was "a place for truth-telling—even to the point of insisting that the queen herself 'hath committed great faultes . . . dangerous . . . to her selfe and to the state,' which it [was] his duty—a duty to her as well as to the realm—to help her remedy and avoid" (120; ellipses in original). Paulina therefore speaks in a politico-religious context in which monarchs and other authorities were seen by some as accountable to authorities or standards beyond themselves. Early modern playgoers might easily have constructed their own indictments of Leontes based on biblical law.⁵³

⁵³ Janet Adelman argues that Leontes subconsciously yearns for an "idealized male pastoral" (222) that the pregnant Hermione threatens. If one is inclined to such psychoanalytic readings, the Sicilian king has metaphorically set up a phallic image on whose altar he places his wife and daughter, violating the Jewish strictures against idolatry and human sacrifice. For critics not so inclined (this writer among them), Leontes's idolatry is that of making himself the center of his private universe; Garber writes that the king "creates a mental world of total egoism, total self-involvement" (*After All* 835). "As king," Charles Frey states, "he has perhaps some reason to become trapped in divine analogy, but as man, dependent upon woman in order to play his part in creation, he cannot be self-sufficient" (*Shakespeare's Vast Romance* 131). In contrast to the view that Leontes is threatened by his spouse, Pitcher argues that his idolatry is that of "uxoriousness—placing the love of one's wife above God," and more specifically the idea that the Hermione of his imagination "would replace the real woman" (47). Similarly, David N. Beauregard writes that Leontes "obviously" suffers from "the passion [that Thomas] Aquinas calls *zelus*, that intensity of

The king's allegations of infidelity and his plan to see Hermione and their child dead—"Hence with it [Perdita], and together with the dam / Commit them to the fire" (2.3.93–94)—violate the Torah's prohibitions of wrongful accusation and execution: "Thou shalt not haue to do with any false report Kepe thee farre from a false matter, and the innocent and righteous see thou slay not: for I wyll not iustifie the wicked" (Ex. 23:1, 7). His exposure of his family to vicious talk entangles him in a prohibition against slander: "Thou shalt not go vp and downe with tales among thy people" (Lev. 19:16). His attempt to have Camillo poison Polixenes violates prohibitions against mistreatment of foreigners and clandestine murders: "Cursed be he that hindreth the ryght of the straunger Cursed be he that smyteth his neighbour secretly" (Deut. 27:19, 24). The sixteenth-century French thinker Jean Bodin states: "Now the greatest difference betwixt a king and a tyrant is for that a king conformeth himself unto the laws of nature, which the tyrant at his pleasure treadeth under foot: the one of them respecteth religion, justice, and faith, whereas the other regardeth neither God, faith nor law" (quoted in Robin Wells 104). Although the play's pagan setting technically stands outside the Judeo-Christian context, Leontes remains subject to natural law—"common to all nations and independent of time, custom, or opinion" and "implanted by God in our hearts" (Robin Wells 163)—and thus proves himself to be a tyrant when he spurns it. His rejection of the oracle in 3.2 likewise displays his tyrannical disregard for such religion as he knows.

It is noteworthy that Paulina ends her denunciation by telling Leontes that his disreputable acts "will ignoble make you, / Yea, scandalous to the world" (2.3.118–19). Paulina's words imply that the king's deeds not only will deface his own image but also can lead others into wrongdoing by example. Erasmus writes: "The common people

love on the part of husbands that 'vigorously withstands opposition or resistance . . . to their exclusive individual rights' " (111; ellipsis in original).

imitate nothing with more pleasure than what they see their prince do. . . . [U]nder a cruel tyrant, everyone brings accusations and false witness. Go through your ancient history and you will find the life of the prince mirrored in the morals of his people” (quoted in Robin Wells 91). Commenting on the moral influence of those surrounding the throne, King James states in *Basilikon Doron* that “every one of the people will delight to follow the example of any of the courtiers . . . so what crime so horrible can there be committed and overseen in a courtier that will not be an exemplary excuse for any other boldly to commit the like?” (*True Law* 132). The danger is that Leontes, who believes he did not sire Hermione’s daughter, will reproduce himself morally in the populace at large. The prevention of such scandal, however, requires that at least one voice be raised against it. *The Winter’s Tale*, written during the reign of a monarch who declared in *The True Law of Free Monarchies* that “a good king will frame all his actions to be according to the law, yet he is not bound thereto but of his good will” (72), thus underscores the potential importance of the lone figure who may help to check the abuses of political power.⁵⁴

“And see what death is doing”: Witness of doom

For much of the trial scene of 3.2, Paulina remains (uncharacteristically) silent. When she finally speaks—upon Hermione’s collapse at the revelation that Mamillius “is gone” (3.2.142)—her words are notable: “This news is mortal to the queen. Look down / And see what death is doing” (3.2.145–46). The exclamation suggests the presence of an actual being wreaking havoc in the chamber. Paulina here adopts one of the most familiar personae of the traditional prophets: the harbinger or witness of doom. Leontes, by this point, has displayed a blackly comedic cognitive dissonance. Before the

⁵⁴ Such action, fortunately, may involve the reform rather than the mere defeat of the political sinner: “Normally a tyrant is past praying for,” E. M. W. Tillyard writes, but in this play, “Shakespeare may well have meant to express the power of his belief in the possibilities of forgiveness by showing the repentance even a tyrant is capable of” (88).

proceeding, he declares that Hermione will have a “just and open trial,” and yet he says “[w]hile she lives / My heart will be a burden to me” (2.3.203–204); as the scene opens, he declares that justice “shall have due course, / Even to the guilt or the purgation” (3.2.6–7), but he tells his wife that the “easiest passage” will be “no less than death” (3.2.88–89). When the supernatural verdict arrives from the oracle of Delphos—“Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found” (3.2.130–33)—the reaction constitutes a kind of binary. Hermione and the lords break out in praises to Apollo; Leontes, in contrast, first questions the accuracy of the reading and then flatly declares: “There is no truth at all i’t’h’oracle. / The sessions shall proceed—this is mere falsehood” (3.2.137–38).⁵⁵ For an instant, it appears that not even heaven can alter the king’s mad course.

Oddly enough, Leontes himself unwittingly predicts the reaction to the oracle. When he initially tells the lords that he has sent Dion and Cleomenes to Delphos, he says that although he is content with his assessment of the situation, “yet shall the oracle / Give rest to th’ minds of others; such as he / Whose ignorant credulity will not / Come up to th’ truth” (2.1.189–93). Indeed, this is precisely what happens: the reading sets at rest the minds of all others except Leontes, who ironically is the one whose “ignorant credulity” will not accept the truth. Walter S. H. Lim writes: “In a parodic version of faith,

⁵⁵ Snyder and Curren-Aquino, noting the historic conflation of Delphos/Delos with the better-known Delphi (122 fn), point out, “The human instrument (‘oracle’) was always a woman” (“Supplemental” 252). Leontes’s rejection of the message is thus of a piece with his overall misogyny. Adelman argues that “Apollo stands for the reassurances of male control . . .” (232). Yet the god vindicates the accused woman and seemingly strikes down the male child—instances of power and control in the service of the feminine rather than oppressing it. Craig Bernthal likewise writes, “In *The Winter’s Tale*, only the words of the women, Hermione and Paulina, are backed by Apollo” (205). Shelly Jansen makes the provocative point that “Hermione wishes to be judged by males other than Leontes, preferring Apollo or her own father to witness her and watch over her trial. She does not make any pleas to maternal figures, not even Paulina . . .” (93).

Leontes believes, even though he has not indirectly witnessed, Hermione's infidelity. Nothing that comes by way of council can convince him of the fallacy of that belief, and what Shakespeare's play does in portraying Leontes' obdurate blindness is foreground the gulf separating conviction from truth" (321–22).⁵⁶ Commenting on the play's self-conscious theatricality, David Daniell speaks of the "radioactive area between illusion and truth" (119), and one might use the same phrase to describe the state that Leontes inhabits—one of absolute conviction that turns out to be tragically and lethally wrong.⁵⁷

Then, as if the divine realm has been waiting to give the king every possible chance to abandon what he has called "mine own course [that I] have set down" (1.2.338), the hammer finally falls. A servant reports that Mamillius is dead, Hermione collapses and is carried out, and moments later Paulina returns, raging at Leontes like a she-bear bereft of her young:

Thy tyranny,
Together working with thy jealousies—
Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle
For girls of nine—O think what they have done,

⁵⁶ Viewing the play's epistemological issues through a Catholic lens, David N. Beauregard writes: "Truth is rooted, not in the autonomous individual, but in the community and a supernatural religious authority" (113). Similarly, Jeffrey Johnson says of the revelations of the three gentlemen in 5.2 that "the full truth can only emerge through the communal dialogue performed in this scene, in contrast to Leontes' jealous isolation in the first half of the play and his refusal to recognize the truth because of his refusal to hear any voice except his own" (79).

⁵⁷ In contrast to the theological faith that brings salvation, Leontes's unyielding and mistaken conviction brings damnation on himself, his marriage, and (in the disruption of the royal line of succession) his nation. The Sicilian king in fact exercises a sort of anti-faith; whereas biblical faith trusts in the merciful goodness of God, Leontes refuses to trust in the virtue of Hermione, even when it is confirmed by a divine message. According to John Gillies, however, Leontes's problem is not his possession of certainty but rather his misguided quest for it: "Instead . . . of believing in Hermione, in the absence of a reason *not* to believe in her, Leontes suspends belief . . . What Leontes demands is certain *knowledge* of another mind, exactly what Cartesian skepticism recognized to be impossible" (185; emphases in original). Cristina León Alfar writes that the dramatic use of the oracle "suggests that women's fidelity can only be known through divine intervention" (174). From a Leontesian viewpoint, this points to the inscrutability of women's virtue, but ultimately it is a comment on the king's unrealistic skepticism; only a word from heaven (and, in the event, not even that) will convince him. Perhaps W. H. Auden's concise formulation is the best: "He embraces doubt as a certainty" (287).

And then run mad indeed, stark mad, for all
Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it. (3.2.176–81)

Unconcerned that the shattered king already has begun regretting his deeds, Paulina wishes madness upon him, decries his sins against Polixenes, Camillo, and his children, and finally cries that Hermione lies dead.⁵⁸ Retribution for that terrible wrong has not fallen even yet, she says, nor will piety benefit Leontes:

A thousand knees,
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert. (3.2.207–11)

No prayer can benefit such a sinner, Paulina says.⁵⁹ But in a turnaround almost as abrupt as that of Leontes, her storm abates: “I am sorry for’t. / All faults I make, when I shall come to know them, / I do repent. Alas, I have showed too much / The rashness of a woman” (3.2.215–18). In saying this, Paulina acknowledges her own fallen humanity—and, implicitly, a subtle likeness to Leontes, who only now has come to know and begin to repent his own fault of rashness. Yet Paulina’s apology has a subtle sting in its tail; her acknowledgement of her shortcomings highlights the fact that it is Leontes’s late coming to self-knowledge and repentance that has sired the tragedy that he now faces.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lynn Enterline writes: “Before Paulina’s oath [that Hermione is dead,] no proof or belief attended woman’s word. . . . The truth of Hermione’s body—its innocence and its death—is always held from view; all that remains is the evidence of ‘word’ and ‘oath’ ” (32). The irony is that Paulina’s avowal of Hermione’s death, which Enterline views as consciously false rather than mistaken, actually supports Leontes’ assertion that women “will say anything” (1.2.131).

⁵⁹ Pitcher writes that this passage can suggest either Leontes’s own prayers or those of others after his death (233 fn). Given the play’s Catholic coloring in certain aspects, the latter reading can hardly be ruled out, but the former makes more sense in terms of the judgment that might be hurled in such a heated moment—i.e., “You can never pray your way out of this” rather than “When you finally die, you will never *be* prayed out of this.”

⁶⁰ Irene Dash, however, raises an eyebrow at the idea of being “satisfied to find parallels between this woman and the mentally unbalanced King whose rash actions had led to tragedy” (*Wooing* 135). Snyder and Curren-Aquino, while acknowledging that Paulina’s words are often played as regretful, point out the possibility of “an ironic reading that seeks not to diminish but in fact to exacerbate the king’s grief and guilt” (*WT NCS* 153 fn).

Paulina's status as a witness or harbinger of doom in this scene echoes some biblical episode in particular: the aftermath of King David's adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 11–12. Having impregnated the wife of Uriah the Hittite, the monarch has the soldier-husband carry his own death warrant to his military commander.⁶¹ David then marries the war-widowed Bathsheba, who delivers a son. "But this thing that David did, displeased the Lord" (2 Sam. 11:22), who dispatches the prophet Nathan to the palace. Confronting the king with a parable about a callous rich man who takes a pauper's only lamb,⁶² the prophet proclaims that David's adultery and murder-by-proxy will be punished by sexual chaos and bloodshed in his own house. The king reacts with horrified remorse: "And David saide vnto Nathan: I haue sinned against the Lord. And Nathan saide vnto David: The Lord also hath put away thy sinne, thou shalt not dye. Howbeit, because in doing this deede thou hast geuen ye enemies of the Lord a cause to blaspheme, the childe that is borne vnto thee shall surely dye" (2 Sam. 12:13–14)—a prediction that is later fulfilled.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's audiences can see a Sicilian version of David, who breaks marital faith by making false accusations of adultery instead of committing it, and a female version of Nathan, who both rebukes wrongdoing by the king and lays an emotional and moral foundation for the rebuilding of the court. Paulina subjects her liege to more (and more personal) verbal condemnation than Nathan does his—Leontes is "a fool, inconstant, / And damnable ingrateful," guilty of that which "a devil / Would have shed water out of fire ere done't" (3.2. 183–84, 189–90). The dramatic

⁶¹ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of course, become the objects of a similar scheme in *Hamlet*. Curiously, Shaheen makes no note of this parallel in the material on 5.2 of that play (561–63).

⁶² Nathan's comparison of David to a man who wrongs another by appropriating what is his is oddly similar to what Garber calls Leontes's "sour little fable" (*After All* 833): "And many a man there is even at this present, / Now, while I speak this, holds his wife by th'arm, / That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence / And his pond fish'd by his next neighbour . . ." (1.2.191–94).

effect of Paulina's ire is that of a prophet figure who is more noticeably human than the minimally described Nathan. Yet once the king expresses repentance, Paulina adopts a different tone: "He is touched / To the noble heart. What's gone and what's past help / Should be past grief. Do not receive affliction / At my petition . . ." (3.2.218–21). Stanley Wells points out that just as Gloucester in *King Lear* suddenly realizes his error upon being blinded, "so the shock of the boy's death at last brings Leontes to his senses" (196). Yet Paulina's statement contributes to what Peter Erickson sees as one of the differences between the two plays. "In *King Lear*," Erickson writes, "the tension between accountability and forgiveness breaks in favor of the former. . . . In *The Winter's Tale*, accountability is superseded and ultimately suspended through the mediation of women: an apparently 'free' bounty prevails" (163–64). For Erickson, this is a mixed blessing at best, stressing as he does the fact that the Sicilian patriarchy remains in place. In foregrounding forgiveness, however, the play follows the lead of, and points to, one implication of David's story: mercy has a place alongside judgment. Paulina's acts as a witness of doom, along with the parallel in 2 Samuel, reiterate the political point that kings are all too subject to the temptations of arrogance and tyrannical abuse of power, and that they reject reminders of righteousness (including those that come from "outsiders") at their peril. Like David, whose infant prince dies, Leontes faces a shadow of political and personal chaos that might have been avoided. Fortunately, as Erickson points out, the doom is (surprisingly) not final.

"I'll make the statue move indeed": Agent of resurrection

The opening of 5.1 is overshadowed by Leontes's continuing grief about Hermione and the past:

Whilst I remember
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
My blemishes in them, and so still think of
The wrong I did myself, which was so much

That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and
Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man
Bred his hopes out of. (5.1.6–12)

As if it were a medieval painting of a saint, the king's mental image of the queen provokes thoughts of her virtues and his vices.⁶³ Leontes's concern is echoed in Dion and Paulina's argument about whether the king should remarry, with the former citing "his highness' fail of issue" (5.1.27) and the latter stoutly replying, "The crown will find an heir" (5.1.47). The act thus opens with a certain bleakness still clinging to the country.⁶⁴ Even after Perdita returns, Leontes goes to Paulina's house in 5.3 as one who has lost wife and son. However, the play's last scene allows the Sicilian noblewoman to play her final prophetic role: agent of resurrection. After the royal party arrives at her abode, Paulina evokes awe with what she has described as Hermione's statue. The onlookers marvel at its lifelikeness—"Would you not deem it breathed, and that those veins / Did verily bear blood?" Leontes asks (5.3.64–65)—and their hostess cannily nurses their wonder: "No more shall you gaze on't, lest your fancy / May think anon it moves" (5.3.60–61). Finally, she performs a quasi-invocation:

Quit presently the chapel, or resolve you
For more amazement. If you can behold it,
I'll make the statue move indeed, descend
And take you by the hand. But then you'll think—
Which I protest against—I am assisted
By wicked powers.
.....
It is required

⁶³ Leontes's remarks are noticeably self-focused. Hermione's death is depicted in terms of the loss of his hopes, and his ill deed was one "I did myself," a phrase that can be understood as "did to myself" (Pitcher 311 fn)—a rather self-absorbed statement. Yet it would be a mistake to see the king as too narcissistic, given that he is depicting himself as one who rendered a nation heirless and "[d]estroyed the sweet'st companion" ever (5.1.10–11). As Snyder and Curren-Aquino write, "it is possible to read the line as indicating self-recognition," particularly given "the way the passage begins and ends with an acute remembrance of what has been lost" ("Introduction" 44).

⁶⁴ Snyder and Curren-Aquino write that "in contrast to traditional pastoral [which dominates the fourth act], the character most in need of healing, Leontes, never makes the journey to Bohemia; instead, Bohemia comes to him, in the revitalizing presence of Perdita and Florizel . . ." ("Introduction" 10).

You do awake your faith. Then all stand still.
Or those that think it is unlawful business
I am about, let them depart. (5.3.85–91, 94–97)

The lines strike several thematic chords. Paulina plays on her listeners' curiosity, raising the possibility of "more amazement" than they have seen. However, she also challenges them. The visitors must make a conscious decision to leave the room or remain; if they stay, they will witness a marvel *if* they "can behold it"—they must "stand still" in the "chapel" and "awake [their] faith."⁶⁵ The scene has a distinctly religious air.⁶⁶ Early modern parishioners at a Communion service would have heard the priest tell those guilty of serious, unrepented wrongdoing to "bewaile your Sinnes, and come not to this holy table"; in contrast, those who "do truly and earnestly repente you of youre sinnes, and be in love, and charite with your neighbors and entende to lede a newe lyfe" were urged to "[d]raw nere and take this holy Sacrament to your comferte" (*BCP* 133). Churchgoers thus were charged with deciding whether they should participate in what was about to happen. Paulina, echoing a sacerdotal role that (as a woman) she could not have performed in Shakespeare's day, wants her listeners to "draw nere" in belief and attentiveness ("awake your faith . . . all stand still") so that they can witness a wonder.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Jonathan Bate points out that parish churches were typical sites for early modern "bawdy courts," of which he sees echoes in Hermione's trial (171). This underscores the twinning role of Paulina's chapel, the site where the queen's virtue is definitively re-established, vis-à-vis the chamber in 3.2 where her honesty is formally impugned.

⁶⁶ "The entire atmosphere proclaims wonder," Snyder and Curren-Aquino write, citing "the chapel, the sounds of gentle music, the religiously sonorous 'Behold' . . . the reverential silence of the spectators," and Paulina's "chant-like invocation" ("Introduction" 48–49). Anthony J. Lewis strikes a humorous note in describing the onlookers as "dumb with amazement, as men always seem to be at the end of the comedies" (156). Jeffrey Johnson sees here a re-creation of the Anglican churching rite, in which "Paulina gathers a community of women (herself, Hermione, and Perdita) in a public ritual of thanksgiving that celebrates Hermione's surviving the dangers and perils not only of childbirth, but also the jealous, murderous rage of her husband, the king" (80). Greenblatt sees a rite that cleanses Leontes (*Shakespearean* 132), as does Schalkwyk (265).

⁶⁷ Paulina's words recall Moses's instructions to the Israelites to "[f]eare ye not, stande styll, and beholde the saluation of the Lorde" just before the parting of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13). Although "faith is a prominent theme in Christianity," Shaheen does not see Paulina's phrase as an actual biblical reference—"the words 'awake' and 'faith' [do not] occur together anywhere in Scripture" (719). Nor does he note the similarity of the language in Exodus.

As Maurice Hunt writes, “The language of the play encourages those who regard Paulina as a religious agent of Leontes’ spiritual reclamation to think of her as ‘priest-like’ ” (71). But even in her non-Christian milieu, Paulina guards against accusations of witchcraft; she dismisses the idea that she is aided by “wicked powers” and declares that if some “think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart.”⁶⁸ In the context of the Reformation, of course, the question of the spiritual nature of a seeming miracle was not an idle one. The “Homily Against Peril of Idolatry” warns that “wicked men . . . have reported and spread abroad, as well by lying tales as written fables, divers miracles of images. . . . For the Scriptures have for a warning hereof foreshewed, that the kingdom of antichrist shall be *mighty in miracles and wonders . . .*” (*Homilies* 214–15; italics in original). For many Protestants, such deceptive signs were a tool of Catholicism’s false prophets. The scene thus implicitly evokes but simultaneously rejects concerns about the uncanny statue and its mistress.

Paulina calls for music and then addresses the “image”:

’Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach.
Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,
I’ll fill your grave up. Stir—nay, come away;
Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
Dear life redeems you. (5.3.99–103)

There is a certain duality in the speech: is Paulina speaking to a statue or a dead body? Her command to “be stone no more” suggests the former, yet she follows this by speaking of a grave and redemption—death has purchase on the queen until life takes

⁶⁸ Paulina’s assertions here—in addition to her statement that “my spell is lawful” and Leontes’s “If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (5.3.105, 110–11)—contrast with the earlier label of “mankind witch” (2.3.66). “Leontes’ enraged projection of witchcraft upon Paulina . . . is in fact subtly sustained and brought to a head in the final scene,” Schalkwyk states (254). Kaplan and Eggert write that “the charges of witchcraft leveled at Paulina in act 2 are dismissed at the play’s end precisely when they are most credible” (108). For David Beauregard, the “extremely strange simile” about eating “brings to mind the legal prohibition against celebration of the Mass, an eating of the body of Christ which was considered magic by the Reformers” (121).

her back. The ambiguity in the invocation mirrors that of the larger play in terms of the queen's post-trial fate. In 3.2, Paulina not only avows, with believable emotion, that Hermione is dead but even invites inspection of the body: "If you can bring / Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye, / Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you / As I would do the gods" (3.2.201–04). Leontes declares that his queen and son will be buried together (3.2.233), and he later expresses no doubt that she is dead: "She I killed? I did so" (5.1.17). Antigonus, too, thinks her deceased (3.3.15–17).⁶⁹ Yet Paulina quietly visits a secluded house two or three times a day for sixteen years (5.2.102–05), at the end of which time Hermione reappears, properly aged.

Does Paulina call upon supernatural power in returning a dead woman to life?⁷⁰ Or has she employed all-too-natural cleverness—and more than a little presumption and deceit—in concealing an abused wife until the husband has (in the words of Cleomenes) "paid down / More penitence than done trespass"? (5.1.3–4).⁷¹ Maurice Hunt, addressing

⁶⁹ Commenting on the ambiguity of Antigonus's dream/vision, Greenblatt writes: "To the extent that *The Winter's Tale* is centrally about horrible consequences of taking fantasies as realities . . . then we are meant to distance ourselves from Antigonus's dream and to think of his ghost story as a psychological projection. . . . Yet though the audience is amply warned not to credit the ghost of Hermione, it is at the same time strongly induced to do so" (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 202).

⁷⁰ Laurence Publicover suggests that Leontes's continued entertainment of this possibility—"Thou has found mine [spouse], / But how is to be questioned . . ." (5.3.138–139)—is his way of dealing with the "deeply unattractive" idea that the queen has been hiding from him and may yet be unforgiving (23). In line with this, Greenblatt wryly posits that some readers may see Hermione as having been "sulking for sixteen years" (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 203).

⁷¹ Aaron Landau sees the noblewoman as a prevaricator from the beginning (35), as do Diane M. Dixon (40) and Richard McCoy, albeit one with a good motive—"Paulina's lie can be seen as a version of Plato's noble lie since its ends are deliberately beneficent," McCoy writes (137). (My own reading is that Paulina reports Hermione's death in good faith but then, offstage and quite shortly thereafter, discovers her error and capitalizes on it.) McCoy goes on to say that "her means are not only duplicitous but also frighteningly harsh and manipulative, oscillating from sadistic castigation to lenient indulgence" (138). For Paul D. Stegner, the depiction of Paulina as a difficult-to-satisfy counselor "transposes early modern concerns about female penitents' over-scrupulousness to her role as a female confessor" (194). Anthony Lewis suggests that "time and the women are more pitying than vengeful" (154), a characterization that may be questionable given the length of Leontes's penance. S. L. Bethell writes that "it is the ascetic discipline of Hermione, her obedience to the apparently unreasonable message of the oracle [that Leontes must remain heirless], that has been the instrument, under divine providence, of her daughter's safe return" (238). In this view, Hermione becomes a more active participant in the reformation of her husband and marriage than if she is seen merely as being in a self-protective holding pattern for years. Snyder and Curren-

the matter on the dramaturgical level, says that “Shakespeare uncharacteristically withholds from his audience the knowledge that Hermione lives, so that playgoers might more readily think her rebirth miraculous” (72); the play likewise suggests that Paulina, playing the dramatist with a stage of her own creation, withholds from her king the knowledge that Hermione lives until the time is right. Pointing to the theme of artifice that famously emerges in the debate between Perdita and Polixenes in 4.4., Jean E. Howard writes that “art gradually emerges as one of the resources people can use, either badly or well, to affect the world around them: to correct old mistakes and to forge new realities. . . . Paulina emerges as the chief representative of the ameliorative artist who uses her skills to make better the world around her” (“The Winter’s Tale” 2880). As demonstrated both early and late in the play, these skills extend to the literal manipulation of people, using the infant Perdita as a living prop and presenting Hermione as the artistic centerpiece of her chapel—theatricality at its finest.⁷² Returning to the original question, one could go even further, phrasing it thus: Does Paulina “play God” by bringing Hermione back supernaturally, or does she play God by guiding natural events to accomplish her good ends?⁷³ Polixenes’s request doubtless has been that of many playgoers: “Ay, and make it manifest where she has lived, / Or how stolen from the dead”

Aquino also see the queen as consciously acting in line with the oracle (“Introduction” 40). This viewpoint, however, assumes that her absence (implicitly from the marital bed) is necessary to the oracle’s fulfillment.

⁷² Commenting on 5.2, A. D. Nuttall describes Paulina as “the impresario of the episode” and compares her speech to that of a “fairground huckster” (356); Amy L. Tigner similarly styles her as “mistress of the revels” and compares the scene to a court masque by Inigo Jones (131–32). On the question of manipulation, Anthony Lewis writes of the statue scene, “Every action that he [Leontes] takes is first ordered by Paulina . . .” (156). As Tigner points out, Paulina acts similarly with the queen, “first commanding the ‘statue’ only to move, then finally instructing her to speak” (132). In assuming such authority over the royal couple, Paulina becomes even more god-like.

⁷³ Landau writes that Paulina’s falsehoods “advance the oracle’s prophecy instead of complicating it. Whether by physically separating Hermione from Leontes or by persistently dissuading Leontes from remarrying, Paulina is directly responsible for the fact that the king shall indeed live without an heir” (35). This creates the curious spectacle of a prophetic figure who “plays God” so as to help fulfill a prophecy by another god.

(5.3.113–14). Taking what seems to be a minority position, Sean Benson asks: are we meant to believe that “Hermione has been living . . . in some sort of cloistered condition unknown to any of the principals other than Paulina? The rational explanation defies credibility . . .” (11). Yet the text does not settle the issue; as with the question of why Leontes’s jealousy erupts in the first place, the matter remains an enigma.⁷⁴ “In my view,” Catherine Belsey opines, “no amount of critical discussion, no degree of textual analysis, will resolve the nature of Hermione’s preservation. Readers poring over a written text long for closure, but in the theatre, the play seems to sustain its own mystery . . .” (*Why* 83). Paulina figures God in the occasional inscrutability of the divine.

In contrast to the New Testament, which contains several accounts of resurrections and which establishes Jesus’s return from the dead as a cornerstone of Christian theology,⁷⁵ the Hebrew Scriptures contain less than a handful, one of which involves the prophet Elisha and “might have constituted a central scriptural source” for Shakespeare’s scene, according to Walter S. H. Lim (317).⁷⁶ Elisha is approached by a woman whose son has died.

He went in therefore, & shut the doore vpon them twayne, & prayed vnto the Lorde, And went vp, and laye vpon the lad, and put his mouth on his mouth, & his eyes vpon his eyes, & his handes vpon his handes, & . . . the fleshe of the childe waxed warme. And he went againe, and walked once vp and downe in the house, & then went vp, & layde him selfe vpon him againe: And then the childe gasped seue times, and opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:33–35)

⁷⁴ “*The Winter’s Tale* ends as the other comedies do, with a mystery surrounding a woman, and with that mystery’s being understood only by the women. . . . Shakespeare’s comedies end as *Alcestis* does, with men dumbfounded and women aligned with the supernatural,” Anthony Lewis states (196–97). In a more irreverent vein, Northrop Frye remarks that in some comedies, “the action gets so hard to believe that a central character summons the rest of the cast into . . . the green room afterward, where, it is promised, all the difficulties will be cleared away. . . . Here it looks as though the green room session will be quite prolonged . . .” (169).

⁷⁵ Piero Boitani connects the return of Hermione to New Testament narratives: “The tomb in effect is now empty, like Jesus of Nazareth’s after three days. . . . Yet it is not the resurrection of Jesus that Hermione’s coming back to life brings to mind. It echoes, rather, the story of Lazarus Paulina’s commands—‘descend,’ ‘approach’—have the force of ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ . . .” (84).

⁷⁶ Shaheen, however, does not mention this episode in his material on the play.

Paulina, like her Hebrew counterpart, brings a human being back from “death” in the seclusion of a room in a private house—words are spoken, and family life is restored. (The dead boy apparently is the only child, or at least the only son [2 Kings 4:14–17], implying that the death threatens the end of the family line.) In the biblical narrative, of course, the resurrective power comes from God; in Shakespeare’s play, Paulina is not dependent on her own “lord”—or is she? “It is required / You do awake your faith,” she tells her watchers, suggesting that they too are somehow necessary to the work at hand.⁷⁷ And it is only after Leontes has provided ample evidence of his repentance—and after Perdita returns unlooked-for—that Paulina can bring Hermione back from unlife. Mistress of strange art(s) that she is, she remains dependent on things outside herself.

The reunion of reassured queen, reformed king, and refound daughter signifies a rebirth of hope (although one overshadowed by the death of Mamillius). And in this, the episode echoes yet another Old Testament resurrection narrative. The prophet Ezekiel experiences a vision of an open space full of dry human bones. God tells him to preach to the remains and the winds; the bones reassemble themselves, and flesh and breath return to them. The Lord explains:

Thou sonne of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: Behold, they say, Our bones are dried vp, our hope is gone, and we are cleane cut of. Therefore prophecie thou, and speake vnto them, thus saith the Lorde God: Beholde, I wyll open your graues O my people, and cause you to come vp out your sepulchres, and bring you into the lande of Israel againe. (37:11–12)

Exiled Israel perceives no hope in its future—all possibility of life is gone—but the prophet sees an unexpected return to the homeland that will mean new life. Similarly, the last act of *The Winter’s Tale* begins with a king who cannot forget the “blemishes” that left him

⁷⁷ Paulina’s connection between the doing of marvels and active faith on the part of witnesses or recipients echoes a story about Jesus in his hometown: “And he coulde there shewe no mightie worke [except for a few healings] . . . And he marueyled, because of their vnbeliefe” (Mark 6:5–6). The implication is that Christ’s miracle-working was hindered by others’ lack of faith.

heirless and companionless (5.1.7–12). And as Snyder and Curren-Aquino write, “If not physically stone, she [Hermione] has . . . been stone emotionally, the rhythms of life she once knew and enjoyed frozen” (“Introduction” 49). In the final scene, by contrast, the monarch’s daughter, having come back unforeseen to her native country, is among those who listens as Paulina says: “Go together, / You precious winners all; your exultation / Partake to every one” (5.3.130–32). Celebration and renewed hope are proclaimed to Sicilia; as Norman Rabkin writes, “*The Winter’s Tale* communicates a joy new in Shakespeare by suggesting the possibility of grace and innocence in a world which presents every appearance of being able to overthrow them” (222). We see “the miracle of her [Hermione] becoming warm again” (Snyder and Curren-Aquino “Introduction” 49). Of course, the theatrical solution of difficulties via the seemingly miraculous is not without problems. Jean E. Howard notes the objection of Shakespeare’s contemporary Ben Jonson to plays that “make nature afraid” and commit “drolleries” (“Winter’s Tale” 155). Similarly, Paul A. Olson writes that “the outrageous claims of the plot—a statue coming to life, a woman hidden for a generation—may appear laughable” to modern readers; nevertheless, the “existence of a new life physically and a new kind of spirit in society, replacing the old malice and jealousy at the Sicilian court, may have appeared to Early Modern audiences to be the sort of outer and inner miracle that figurally anticipates final resurrection” (152–53). Howard says of Shakespeare’s romances, “Only by what is experienced as miracle does tragedy turn to mirth and suffering cease” (“Winter’s Tale” 155). In context, the critic is simply noting what occurs in these plays, yet with a slight change of emphasis, the remark can be seen as an expression of cosmic truth: Only by what is experienced as miracle *does* tragedy turn to mirth and suffering cease. For those so inclined, the play’s ending is indicative of a spring yet to come.

The Winter's Tale is an engraving in miniature of the situation of women in early modern society: not without resources and influence of their own but nevertheless subject to the power of male authority figures—power that can benefit but also devastate, without just or even faintly rational cause. “My life stands in the level of your dreams, / Which I’ll lay down,” Hermione tells Leontes (3.2.79–80)—her existence as queen, spouse, and even living being is subject to the whims of her husband/king. Yet as Phyllis Rackin points out, the scholarly “history of men’s anxiety in the face of female power, of women’s disempowerment, and of outright misogyny” requires rethinking, “not because it is necessarily incorrect but because it is incomplete” (*Shakespeare and Women* 9). There is more to the story. In *The Winter's Tale*, we see a powerful female performance of a role familiar in early modern England: the prophet. Like the Old Testament figures familiar to parishioners from sermons and Bible lessons, Paulina rubs shoulders with the denizens of a royal court, exercises the rhetorical persuasiveness of word and object, calls a king to account for his violations of moral law, intercedes for an oppressed woman and a “fatherless” child, witnesses the judgment that she warned against, and restores life in a wondrous fashion. In so doing, she demonstrates to the play’s readers and watchers that the abuse of power need not go unchallenged and that the mantle of “speaker of truth” can be worn by women as well as men, enabling them to validly imitate the confrontational boldness of Nathan or the earnest pleading of Moses.

Chapter 3

“A most poor woman, and a stranger”: Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*

In a cluster of plays in which women act as prophets, one might expect all the figures in question to represent the reigning orthodoxy of the era—but one would be wrong. Written when Protestantism was thoroughly entrenched in English life and Catholicism was the faith of an officially beleaguered minority, *Henry VIII* (also known as *All Is True*) valorizes a woman who is not only identifiably Catholic but also the mother of the notorious Queen Mary. In *The Winter's Tale*, a woman who is something of an outsider comes to the defense of a foreign-born queen whose marriage suddenly disintegrates; in *Henry VIII*, these two roles are united in Katherine of Aragon, the Spanish-born spouse of the second Tudor monarch. As Henry pushes to void his marriage as biblically illicit, the queen defends their union as valid and calls attention to her marginalized position as both woman and foreigner. In so doing, she taps into an Old Testament vein of concern for both groups (and particularly the latter) as worthy of societal attention and as people who must not be oppressed; because she is advocating her own cause, she is simultaneously the outsider prophet who challenges royal wrongdoing as well as the marginalized object of prophetic concern. However, her role touches on other areas of Hebrew prophetic attention as well. As the wife of a monarch with a wandering eye, Katherine not only recalls the Old Testament's concern for women similarly pushed aside but also re-inscribes the familiar scriptural metaphor of God as the rebuffed spouse of spiritually unfaithful Israel. The queen's pummeling of Cardinals Wolsey and Campeius parallels that of biblical speakers who vigorously critique the spiritual leadership of their people, yet her ultimate emotional submission to the powerful men around her also finds counterparts in all-too-human Old Testament characters. Finally, Katherine's last scene enlists her in the company of those graced with

supernatural visions, although the character of her dream places as an asterisk beside her name. Shakespeare's play thus foregrounds aspects of early modern womanhood: lonely defender of one's place, subject to male vicissitudes, critic of male spiritual leadership, yet potential subject of divine attention and reassurance. It also interrogates the anti-Catholicism of the early seventeenth century through its portrayal of Katherine as one of the drama's most sympathetic characters—and this during the reign of James, a king descended from Henry's sister Margaret and one who viewed "Roman priests . . . with deep suspicion and Jesuits with abhorrence and terror" (Willson 217).⁷⁸

"Thou shalt not oppresse a straunger": Katherine as outsider

Shakespeare's history plays are largely intra-national rather than international, dealing with the machinations of English nobles and the insular clashes of English soldiers rather than foreign escapades.⁷⁹ Even the military actions in France can be seen

⁷⁸ Gordon McMullan's Arden Third Series edition, the default text for this chapter, attributes the play to Shakespeare and John Fletcher, in line with questions about internal evidence that have been discussed since James Spedding and Samuel Hickson raised the issue in separate essays in 1850 (Margeson 5). Although the authorship/collaboration question has since generated considerable commentary, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For convenience's sake, I refer to the author(s) as "Shakespeare." For Gaywyn Moore ("You Turn Me Into Nothing," 2013), *Henry VIII* marks a destabilizing moment when the role of the English queen was changing. Hero Chalmers sees the play as interrogating absolutism, with Katherine acting as a key interrogator ("Break Up the Court," 2011); Matthew Woodcock argues that the work's tragic interludes shine a critical spotlight on its politicized pageantry ("Their eyes more attentive to the show," 2011). David Beauregard's *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays* (2008) argues that Cardinal Wolsey is treated more sympathetically than the drama's title character. The title of Amy Appleford's 2010 article neatly summarizes her argument: "Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon: Last Medieval Queen, First Recusant Martyr." Jennifer Richards's "Shakespeare and the Politics of Co-Authorship: *Henry VIII*" (2009) examines the question of "truth" vs. "honesty"; Anston Bosman explores the connection of truth to vision in "Seeing Tears" (1999). Jonathan Baldo views the play as an exercise in forgetting ("Necromancing the Past in *Henry VIII*," 2004). Jean-Christophe Mayer (*Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith*, 2006) detects a skeptical view of the English Reformation, and Susannah Brietz Monta examines the possible connection of martyrological discussions and the play's view of conscience ("Thou fall'st a blessed martyr," 2000). For Gerard Wegemer, the play indicates that one must choose between the king's favor and doing conscientious justice ("Henry VIII on Trial," 2000). Like many others, Maurice Charney (*All of Shakespeare*, 1993) sees *Henry VIII* as a combination of history play and romance—in his view, more the latter than the former, and with very little of Fletcher in the style (201). Kim H. Noling's "Grubbing Up the Stock" (1988) contrasts the staging of Katherine and Anne.

⁷⁹ However, even among Shakespeare's English history plays, *Henry VIII* stands apart from other works. "No one seeks to overthrow Henry VIII in this play or to organise a rebellion . . .," John

as (semi-)internal affairs; “in the authoritative words of the English men who define the terms of the conflict [in *1 Henry VI*], France is simply a rebellious English territory” (Howard and Rackin *Engendering* 55). Likewise, *Henry V* depicts its protagonist’s overseas quest as the forceful affirmation of control of land to which the English king has legitimate title. Similarly with biblical prophetic narratives: despite the often-antagonistic “outsider” relationship of the seer with his audience, the story is usually that of a prophet dealing with his own king or people. However, exceptions do appear—perhaps most interestingly Amos, who finds himself preaching in a royal court that both is and is not foreign to him. It is this liminal role of the outsider-insider that Katherine of Aragon finds herself inhabiting early in *Henry VIII*—a position in which she is both vocal rebuker of injustice and its victim, both occupant of an English throne and a potentially double Other: foreigner and woman. Nor was outsider-insider status limited to the stage world of the play; at the drama’s debut in 1613 (McMullan 9), England’s king was a Scot whose ascension had proved beneficial to a number of Scotsmen who found places in the royal household (S. J. Johnson 28–29), and the queen was a former Danish princess who had converted to Catholicism after her 1589 marriage to James. *Henry VIII* thus airs cultural bedding that was still in the English palace chambers.

Katherine’s liminality manifests itself fully in the divorce hearing in 2.4 but can be glimpsed in embryo in 1.2. In the latter scene, the king and Thomas Wolsey enter intent on interrogating Buckingham’s surveyor about the “full-charged confederacy” (1.2.3) that the duke allegedly represents. However, Henry has barely seated himself before Katherine enters, kneels, and importunes him on behalf of the populace against an

Margeson writes. “Hence there are no armed insurrections, no rival armies, no ultimate decisions by means of murder or battle. *Henry VIII* is remarkable in being a history play without corpses. We have moved in this play into a Renaissance court where . . . political rivalries, favourites and their factions have replaced competing armies” (33).

unpopular tax: "The subjects' grief / Comes through commissions which compels from each / The sixth part of his substance . . ." (1.2.56–58). The queen is outsider in this scene in terms of both her sex (as the only woman present) and her purpose—the king and his male entourage have gathered to discuss accusations about faithlessness, not finance. Barbara Kreps points out that the tax issue historically emerged in 1525, long after Buckingham's 1521 trial, and "has no plot significance after this scene." For Kreps, its inclusion elucidates "the difficulties of arriving at supposedly objective facts or discovering truth in public forums" (168). Yet the incident at least as clearly elucidates the queen's character. As Linda Micheli points out, Katherine's appearance "interrupts the expected course of events and imposes her own agenda on the Council meeting" (455). That agenda is multifaceted, involving the good of the crown and the nation as well as the detriment of the queen's foe, Wolsey.

Katherine's opening gambit, strikingly, focuses not on the populace but on Henry: "That you would love yourself, and in that love / Not unconsidered leave your honour nor / The dignity of your office, is the point / of my petition" (1.2.14–17). Katherine asks that the king listen to her out of self-interest—a tactic that can be viewed as practical (one is more likely to pay heed when a personal stake is clear), cynical (in its calculation of Henry's ego), or patriotic (the good of the throne is the good of the nation).⁸⁰ Indeed, Katherine continues to weave this thread into the rest of her discourse, pointing out that the king "escapes not / Language unmannerly" (1.2.26–27) and that dissatisfied subjects are disloyal ones: "Tongues spit their duties out, and cold hearts freeze / Allegiance in them" (1.2.61–62). Yet Katherine is also concerned about the subjects; the levies, she says, are "pestilent to th' hearing; and, to bear 'em, / The back is sacrifice to th' load" (1.2.49–50).

⁸⁰ One also can argue, of course, that the good of the king is the good of the queen—Katherine's own self-interest is involved as well.

In this worry she is supported by Norfolk, who cites the tax's effect on those who are "[u]nfit for other life" and marked by "hunger / And lack of other means" (1.2.34–35). However, the queen's agenda also includes the public pillorying of Wolsey; barely has she broached the subject of her plea before she remarks, "My good lord Cardinal, they vent reproaches / Most bitterly on you as putter-on / of these exactions . . ." (1.2.23–24). Katherine emerges from this discussion as a redoubtable rhetorician, simultaneously kneecapping an opponent while making obvious her concern for her royal husband and his beleaguered subjects. The effect is to establish a foreign queen as a voice for the English and a Catholic woman as a critic of sacerdotal malefaction.

In so doing, the queen condemns injustice in the manner of the biblical prophet Amos. In one of his initial oracles, Amos thunders against Israel's economic and religious sins: "they solde the righteous for siluer, and the poore for a paire of shoes. . . . And they lye vpon clothes layde to pledge by euery alutler: and in the house of their god, they drinke the wine of the condemned" (2:6, 8).⁸¹ The upright and the poor are economically exploited, the prophet complains; religious festivities feature ill-gotten drink, and laws on loan collateral ("clothes layde to pledge") are abused.⁸² Hero Chalmers asserts that Katherine's unexpected entrance "immediately challenges regal and episcopal dominance over the staging of power" (260). The appearance of this woman is a reminder that not all societal leverage and influence are covered by the (male) crown and the biretta. Chalmers's formulation also parallels Amos's condemnation of secular and religious wrongdoing that takes advantage of the poor. Like Amos, Katherine appeals for an end to oppressive practices. In addition, the episode gestures toward Paulina's

⁸¹ The Geneva Bible comments on 2:8, "They spoil others and offer thereof unto God, thinking that he will dispense with them, when he is made partaker of their iniquity" (903).

⁸² "If thou take thy neyghbours rayment to pledge, thou shalt deliuer it vnto him by that the sunne go downe. For that is his couering only, euen the rayment for his skinne, wherein he slepeth . . ." (Ex. 22:26–27).

declaration in *The Winter's Tale* that certain appeals are best left to women—or, in this case, royal spouses.⁸³ Mary P. Nichols points out that it is only after Katherine's discourse on the tax that Norfolk speaks up. "The nobility, as in the case of the accusations against Buckingham, seem powerless against Wolsey," Nichols writes, "and it takes the 'bolden'd' and 'venturous' queen to bring this situation to the king's attention" (545). The scene thus emphasizes Katherine's active advocacy for others' interests, including those of her husband, as well as the potential power for good of women's rhetoric.

In the divorce hearing scene in 2.4, however, this advocacy moves from the (at least partially) altruistic to the highly personal, bringing Katherine center stage. "No woman is the protagonist in a Shakespearean history play," Phyllis Rackin argues. "Antagonists and consorts, queens and queans, witches and saints . . . women can threaten or validate the men's historical projects, but they can never take the center of history's stage or become the subjects of its stories. . . . Except for the subversive Margaret . . . none of the queens plays a major role on Shakespeare's stage" (*Stages* 147, 162).⁸⁴ Yet *Henry VIII* calls into question the accuracy of these assertions, at least to a certain degree. "Henry is not the moral or emotional centre of the play," John Margeson posits (19); similarly, David Beauregard says the king "plays an important role in the action" but is "largely reduced to a secondary character" (139). In contrast, Garber states, "Although the play begins with an account of Wolsey's venality and thus in some sense aims, dramatically, at his discomfiture and disgrace, the plight of Katherine is at the

⁸³ Gaywyn Moore views intercession as one of the marks of a (fading) medieval concept of queenship (46).

⁸⁴ DusiBerre concurs to a certain extent: "Elizabethan drama has no Antigones. . . . The women of the political world—the Duchess of Malfi, Katherine in *Henry VIII*, even Margaret in the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*—are smaller, more domestic figures than Sophocles' heroine" (92). Yet she goes on to say, "Women dominate the last plays emotionally, dwarfing the men . . ." (219).

center of the action" (*After All* 884).⁸⁵ The hearing scene is where this becomes obvious.

After the hearing convenes, Katherine petitions Henry directly:

Sir, I desire you do me right and justice,
And to bestow your pity on me, for
I am a most poor woman and a stranger,
Born out of your dominions, having here
No judge indifferent nor no more assurance
Of equal friendship and proceeding. (2.4.11–16)

Setting forth her case, the queen initially stresses neither the legality of her marriage nor the regality of her position;⁸⁶ instead, she points to her vulnerability. As Matthew Woodcock points out, her sex is underscored by the chamber's demographics: "a stage full of bishops, cardinals, gentlemen and scribes stand off against a single, female character. . . . It is into this (literally) man-made space of the court that Katherine is commanded to appear" (8–9). Yet if she is subject to male dominion, the men in turn are morally responsible for her well-being, and they risk tarnishing their own reputations if they dishonor her.⁸⁷ The play's original audience might well have recalled a church-service exhortation to husbands from "An Homily of the State of Matrimony":

For even as the king appeareth so much the more noble, the more excellent and noble he maketh his officers and lieutenants, whom if he should dishonour, and despise the authority of their dignity, he should deprive himself of a great part of his own honour: even so, if thou dost despise her that is set in the next room beside thee, thou dost much

⁸⁵ Confirming Katherine's importance, Susan Frye writes that "*Henry VIII* returns queens to the history play" (427). Kim H. Noling notes that "at each major step of her movement from earthly to heavenly glory, he [Shakespeare] places her at center stage, both literally and figuratively. In a play that devotes a striking amount of stage time to narrations . . . Katherine's characterization is *not* appreciably enlarged by narration" (293; emphasis added). Guy Story Brown flatly declares, "The most princely monarch of Shakespearean England is a Spanish queen" (266).

⁸⁶ In contrast, Hermione quickly reminds those at her trial that she is a "fellow of the royal bed, which owe / A moiety of the throne," and "a great king's daughter" (*WT* 3.2.37–38). Hermione's foreign birth is part of her connection to royal status; Katherine presents hers as a liability. It is not until well into her speech that she mentions "My father, King of Spain" (2.4.46).

⁸⁷ To Hugh M. Richmond, the play's male characters come off badly compared to the queen: "The men in *Henry VIII* are as erratic as any of Shakespeare's earlier courtiers and princes. . . . [T]he hectic and sinister egotism of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Henry is measured against the matronly insight of Katherine . . ." (12–13).

derogate and decay the excellency and virtue of thine own authority.
(*Book of Homilies* 477–78)

The homilist not only argues that contemptuous treatment of one's wife is dishonorable but makes that point by appealing to royal practice: A king who treats his lieutenants ignobly makes himself ignoble.

Katherine also connects her double status as woman and "stranger." Leslie A. Fiedler argues that in Shakespeare's early plays, women "are likely to be portrayed as utter strangers: creatures so totally alien to men as threaten destruction rather than offer the hope of salvation" (43). In this very late play, Katherine's plight is rooted in the fact that she is an alien who has long offered, in the possibility of a male heir, the hope of dynastic salvation and who, in the absence of that heir, represents the threat of dynastic destruction to the English king. Paula S. Berggren argues that Shakespeare's female characters "become more or less crucial to the dramatic proceedings by virtue of the one act of which women alone are capable. The comic world requires childbearers to perpetuate the race Such women as exist in tragedy must make their mark by rejecting their womanliness, by sublime sacrifice, or as midwives to the passion of the hero" (18–19). As a character in a history play, Katherine does not technically fall under Berggren's paradigm for comedies and tragedies, yet "the one act of which women alone are capable" is the crux of her problem: she has not perpetuated the male Tudor "race"; Henry is rejecting her womanliness and thus forcing her to sacrifice her marital position. (In contrast, the childbearing Anne Bullen eventually provides the play with its principal comic aspect: the uplifting finale that introduces the infant Elizabeth.⁸⁸) Already portrayed in the play as a foreigner—Wolsey describes the Spanish nation as "tied by blood and

⁸⁸ To borrow more of Berggren's language about women in tragedies, Katherine ironically acts as a "midwife" to Henry's passion for Anne in that the younger woman has been a "creature of the queen's" (3.2.36).

favour to her” (2.2.88)—Katherine chooses in her opening plea to own that identity as one whose origins lie beyond the sway of the English scepter and who now has no access to judicial machinery that is not beholden to the king.⁸⁹ Already situated to play the outsider prophet, she now also paints herself as the “stranger” who exists at the good will—or the bad feeling—of the majority culture.⁹⁰

Katherine’s intercession for the overtaxed English populace wraps her in the mantle of Amos, but the likeness goes beyond the message to the prophet’s status as a liminal figure and his confrontation of royal power. Ministering during the post-Solomonic split between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern realm of Israel, Amos hails from the former but causes a stir by preaching in the latter, predicting disaster for its religious and political establishment. The priest Amaziah tells King Jereboam II: “Amos hath conspired against thee in the mids of the house of Israel: the lande is not able to beare all his wordes. For thus Amos sayth: Ieroboam shal die by the sworde, and Israel shalbe led away captiue out of their owne lande” (Amos 7:10–11). Although the Judahite prophet and his Israelite audience share a common Hebrew ethnicity, they are separated by politics. The prediction that the king is doomed to death and the nation to exile disturbs the priest of the national shrine of Bethel; in his eyes, Amos is a seditious, destabilizing influence. Amaziah tells the prophet, “O thou the sear, Go, flee thou away into the lande of Iuda, and there eate thy bread, and prophecie there. But prophecie no more at Bethel: for it is the kinges chappell, & it is the kinges court” (7:12–13). According to the priest, the outside agitator needs to go back where he came from. Amos, uncowed,

⁸⁹ Garber points out that Anne’s preferred spelling of “Boleyn” stresses “the French element—she was educated at the French court—while the play’s ‘Bullen’ is more flatly English” (*After All* 885). The current queen thus sees her Spanish origin as a liability, while her successor opts for a dollop of Gallic self-fashioning.

⁹⁰ Lisa Jardine describes the female prophet specifically as “the outsider, the person of no public status, traditionally likely to be unheeded” (115). Although Katherine clearly is not a person of no public status, she is certainly an outsider and, ultimately, unheeded.

turns his prophetic gaze on Amaziah: “Therefore thus sayth the Lorde, Thy wyfe shalbe an harlot in the citie, and thy sonnes and thy daughters shall fall by the sworde, and thy land shalbe deuided by line, and thou shalt die in a polluted land . . .” (7:17). A day of judgment will come, the religious leader will lose family and property, and he will die in a place profoundly unlike the one to which he is accustomed.

In *Henry VIII*, the divorce hearing and, in particular, the conflict between Katherine and Wolsey create a Tudor-era version of the face-off between Amos and Amaziah. The scene opens with the cardinal’s call for silence during the reading of a papal document commissioning him to deal with the validity of the king’s marriage, an issue that threatens the political stability of England. The set-up echoes that of the Old Testament episode, which begins with the priest sending a message to his monarch about potential upheaval in Israel. Wolsey already has noted the queen’s foreign origin, establishing a parallel between the liminal status of Katherine (who is of royal blood but not from England) and Amos (who is of Hebrew blood but not from of Israel). Thus, 2.4 opens with a king, an imperious priest, a semi-outsider immigrant, and concerns about the immigrant’s effect on king and nation—Amos 7 redux. The likeness goes beyond the personal similarities, however. Katherine’s plea begins, “Sir, I desire you do me right and justice . . .” As noted previously, Amos condemns the economic oppression of the vulnerable. Later in the book, the seer thunders about those who “forsake righteousnesse” and “turne iudgement to wormewood” (5:7); he rails against those who “abhorre him that speaketh vprightly” and who “hate him that rebuketh in the gate” (5:10).⁹¹ The picture is one of immorality, legal corruption, and rejection of those who speak forthrightly and publicly condemn wrongdoing. In contrast to this, Amos calls for

⁹¹ Wormwood is a synecdoche for bitterness. In ancient Israel, the town gate was a traditional place for legal judgment (Matthews 60); the criticism is thus aimed at those who dislike outspoken advocates for justice.

“iudgement [to] run downe as water, and righteousnesse as a mightie riuer” (5:24).

Katherine, too, calls for justice, but instead of acting only as the advocate, she simultaneously embodies the object of prophetic concern as well.

By pointing to her alien status, Katherine taps into one of the Old Testament’s deep theological veins, signifying and simultaneously redeeming the “foreign” status of early modern women in their own society. In Scripture, the theme and plight of the resident alien emerges very early; it is thus an integral part of the Jewish worldview. In Genesis, God tells the patriarch Abraham, “Knowe this of a suertie, that thy seede shalbe a straunger in a lande that is not theirs, and shall serue them, and they shall entreate them euyll foure hundreth yeres” (15:13)—a prediction of the Israelites’ lengthy sojourn and oppression in Egypt.⁹² During Moses’s time in Midian after his initial exile from Egypt, he describes himself as a “straunger in a straunge land” (Ex. 2:22). But the foundational texts on the treatment of foreigners are found in the Mount Sinai narrative, coming shortly after the Ten Commandments. “Uexe not a straunger, neither oppresse him: for ye were straungers in the land of Egypt,” the law says in a section that also forbids taking advantage of orphans, widows, and debtors (Ex. 22:21–27). The warning is repeated shortly thereafter in almost identical language—“Thou shalt not oppresse a straunger: for ye know the heart of a straunger, seyng ye were straungers in the lande of Egypt” (23:9)⁹³—in a chapter that also prohibits bribery and various other corruptions of justice (23:6–8). Foreigners are thus linked with other groups (those bereft of parents, husbands, or financial resources) that are particularly susceptible to exploitation, and abuse of them

⁹² The Geneva Bible’s gloss on this verse is that “God will suffer his [people] to be afflicted in this world” (17). Biblical writers, by contrast, tend to use the years of Egyptian bondage as a reminder not to afflict other people.

⁹³ “For in that he is a stranger, his heart is sorrowful enough” (Geneva Bible 84). Cf. Katherine’s later description of herself: “Shipwrecked upon a kingdom where no pity, / No friends, no hope, no kindred weep for me . . .” (3.1.149–50).

is classified with graft, false accusation, and wrongful execution as evil. In both of these texts, the prohibition is grounded in the Israelites' own history: Having themselves experienced oppression as foreigners ("ye know the heart of a stranger"), they are forbidden to treat others in such a way. The question of equity also emerges in other aspects of the law. In the Decalogue, "thy man seruaunt, and thy mayde seruaunt . . . and the stranger that is within thy gates" are among those who are barred from working on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10). A modern reader is likely to see this requirement as an imposition of religious law on a nonbeliever, but the commandment also prevents the abuse of outsiders by providing that they receive the same release from labor as the majority population.⁹⁴ Likewise, foreigners have access to the designated towns that provide sanctuary for Israelites who accidentally kill someone (Num. 35:15)—an example of the justice system specifically making allowances for outsiders. In the opening pages of Scripture, then, the foreigner is established as a figure of special concern.

This concern does not end in the Pentateuch, however; rather, it continues in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah is ordered to tell the king: "do not greeue nor oppresse the stranger, the fatherlesse, nor the widowe, and shed no innocent blood in this place. . . . But if ye wyll not be obedient vnto these commaundementes, I sweare by mine owne selfe, saith the Lord, this house shalbe waste" (Jer. 22:3, 5). In a warning addressed specifically to the monarch, God says foreigners must not be oppressed—an evil that is cited along with murder as one that invites divine disaster. In the Book of Ezekiel, the Lord says to Jerusalem: "Beholde the rulers of Israel, euery one in thee [was redy] to his power to shed blood. In thee haue they dispised father and mother, in thee haue they oppressed the stranger . . ." (22:6–7; interpolation in original). The prophet accuses the

⁹⁴ Calvin comments that "servants, and those who lived under the authority of others, should be indulged with a day of rest, and thus have some intermission from labour" (vol. 1 339).

nation's leaders of bloodshed, disrespect for parents, and mistreatment of aliens, thereby associating abuse of foreigners with sins that violate two of the Ten Commandments—the bedrock laws of Judaism. The writings of the prophets thus demonstrate a continuing concern with the Torah's standard of justice for the foreigner, implicitly providing Katherine—who mourns her lack of “assurance / Of equal friendship and proceeding”—with a host of invisible witnesses.

In 2.4, the queen finds herself the lone woman in a legal proceeding far from her native land—a hearing that threatens to strip her of the very position that she has recently used to advocate for her disadvantaged subjects. The former Spanish princess might have opened her speech in any number of ways—for instance, by citing (as she does in 2.4.43–51) the due diligence done by Henry VII, her father Ferdinand, and their advisers as to the lawfulness of the marriage, or by pointing out the political hazards of angering the leadership of Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Vatican. Why, then, begin as she does? The nation's official faith—most prominently embodied by Katherine's perceived opponent, Cardinal Wolsey—is marked, in its Jewish infrastructure, by a reiterated concern for women and foreigners and by a vocal prophetic condemnation of those who abuse them. The queen's opening words thus implicitly summon to her aid this entire moral tradition; any wronging of her at the hearing places Henry in the unenviable company of the Old Testament kings and others who were condemned for “oppress[ing] the stranger.” In standing up for herself on such grounds, Katherine embodies the possibility of self-defensive agency and awareness of divine concern in a world in which many women would have seen themselves as strangers.⁹⁵ The “alien” motif also raises

⁹⁵ Sixteenth-century martyr Anne Askew likewise plays the sex card while being interrogated about Eucharistic theology. Upon being told by her inquisitor that “it was against the order of schools, that he who asked the question should answer it,” she recalls, “I told him I was but a woman, and knew not the course of schools” (Foxe vol. 5 539).

the question of England's attitude toward the Roman church and its adherents. To the degree that Catholicism was seen as something foreign to Albion, the rubrics of "Uexe not a stranger" and "I desire you do me right and justice" hint at the value of forbearance—something of which the foreign-born James, with his Danish Catholic queen, might have understood the value.

"That thus you should proceed to put me off": The wronged spouse

Having stressed her vulnerability as "a most poor woman and a stranger" to the king and the rest of her audience at the divorce hearing, the queen turns to her wifely behavior. In depicting herself as one who has served her kingly husband with self-forgetful zeal, Katherine's words recall the Old Testament prophets' condemnation of the desertion of devoted spouses, both literal and spiritual—an abuse not unfamiliar to women of Shakespeare's day. Directly querying Henry, the queen says:

Alas, sir,
In what have I offended you? What cause
Hath my behavior given to your displeasure
That thus you should proceed to put me off
And take your good grace from me? (2.4.16–20)

Continuing in the plaintive tone of her opening lines, Katherine seeks the cause of Henry's change of heart. As if recalling the Mosaic decree that a man who "hath spied some vncleannes" in his wife can "wryte her a byll of deuorcement . . . and sende her out of his house" (Deut. 24:1), Katherine asks her spouse to cite the "vncleannes" behind his burgeoning rejection of her. In her view, she was been "true and humble," compliant to his will and skittish of evoking his displeasure, making his desires her own, loving even those friends of his who were her foes, and setting aside her friends if they angered him (2.4.21–32). She has exemplified qualities that early modern churchgoers would have heard praised from the pulpit: "For this surely doth nourish concord very much, when the wife is ready at hand at her husband's commandment, when she will apply herself to his

will, when she endeavoureth herself to seek his contentation, and to do him pleasure, when she will eschew all things that might offend him . . .” (*Homilies* 472). She pointedly has not acted (in the words of another Shakespearean Kate) “froward, peevish, sullen, sour, / And not obedient to his honest will” (*Shrew* 5.2.163–64). In a sense, Katherine has lived as Henry’s disciple, but the master now seeks to disavow his follower.

On a religio-political level, Katherine might here embody the Catholicism of her day asking Henry about the schism that he is about to create: “What cause / Hath my behavior given to your displeasure / That thus you should proceed to put me off . . . ?” The king was no firebrand Reformer; in 1538, several years *after* the break with Rome, he would co-write a proclamation that exiled Anabaptists, labeled clerical marriage as unbiblical, demanded acquiescence to the doctrine of the Real Presence, and banned the importation or printing of English Bibles without a license (Haigh 136). Henry did not “stride purposefully” toward royal supremacy over the church, Christopher Haigh writes; rather, he “asserted the claims his divorce had made necessary” (121). The divorce between Henry and Rome was (marital) business, not personal (belief). Katherine becomes an icon of the old faith, perplexedly questioning the king’s burgeoning estrangement from her. For the seventeenth-century audiences of the play, Katherine might stand in for the more cool-blooded of England’s Catholics, those who had no interest in theology-by-gunpowder and would be content to live with Jacobean Protestantism if only its Supreme Governor would live tolerantly with them.

In her emotional probing of Henry’s marital estrangement, Katherine echoes one of the more notable prophetic themes in the Old Testament: the relationship between God and Israel as a troubled marriage. It should be noted that the prophets do not neglect the topic of literal, earthly marriage. Malachi tells men who have sent away their spouses that such acts incur divine displeasure—“the Lord hath ben witness betweene

thee and thy wyfe of thy youth, against whom thou hast transgressed, yet is she thyne owne companion, and the wyfe of thy couenaunt” (2:14). The metaphorical setting is that of a legal hearing; the husband is the accused, the wife is the accuser, and God is the prosecutorial witness. The prophet sympathetically describes the plaintiff as the “wyfe of thy youth” (i.e., a long-term spouse) who is party to a “couenaunt,” and a decree is issued: “let none transgresse against the wyfe of his youth” (2:15). Faithfulness in covenant relationships, a core attribute of God, should be an attribute of God’s people.⁹⁶ Katherine thus acts as Malachi *redivivus*, calling the king to account, as well as earning a place among the prophet’s plaintiffs—the wife of Henry’s teenage years, “against whom [he has] transgressed.”⁹⁷

The prophetic literature, then, touches on marital conflict on a literal level, but more frequently the problem serves as a metaphor for the strained or broken relationship between God and the Israelites. God typically is portrayed as a husband confronted with (and affronted by) the spiritual unfaithfulness of his wife, the Hebrews; the seer condemns his people’s cuckoldry-by-idolatry and/or calls them back to religious “honesty.” Once again, Katherine’s plight echoes that of the wronged spouse—with the difference that in this case she stands in the place of the Lord. In the Book of Jeremiah,

⁹⁶ In the Bishops’ Bible, Malachi goes on to say: “If thou hatest her, put her away, saith the lorde God of Israel”—a seeming concession on the issue, although the verse ends with a repetition of the warning to “transgresse not” (2:16). However, the King James Version, which appeared two years before the first recorded performance of *Henry VIII* in 1613, renders the phrase as “For the Lord the God of Israel saith, that he hateth putting away” (*The Bible*)—wording that is far more anti-divorce than that of the Bishops’ Bible. “English Versions agree that this [the latter rendering] is the prophet’s meaning,” writes Joyce G. Baldwin, “even though the Hebrew in fact reads ‘if he hates send (her) away, a sense found also in the ancient Versions” (*Haggai* 241). In either case, Malachi’s oracle criticizes the wronging of wives and depicts it as covenant-breaking. The gloss in the Geneva Bible (whose translation agrees with the Bishops’ Bible) reads in part, “Not that he doth allow divorcement, but of two faults he showeth, which is the less” (944).

⁹⁷ Dusinger remarks that women “stand in Shakespeare’s history plays for permanence and fidelity against shifting political sands” (294). In Katherine’s case, these sands are not only political (Henry’s need for a male heir to ensure national stability) but also theological/spiritual (the king’s belated qualms about marrying his brother’s widow) and sexual (his desire for Anne).

God observes that Israel “hath runne vp vpon all the hylles, and among all thicke trees, and there played the harlot . . . I put her away, and gaue her a byll of deuorcement: For all this, her vnfaithfull sister Iuda was not ashamed, but went backe and played the whore” (3:6, 8). The Lord is doubly cuckolded—the northern kingdom of Israel worships at pagan shrines on hilltops and under trees, and the southern realm of Judah follows suit. Yet the prophet is told to proclaim: “Thou disobedient Israel, turne agayne saith the Lorde, and I wyll not bring my wrath vpon you: for I am mercifull saith the Lorde . . . O ye disobedient childe, turne agayne saith the Lorde, and I wyll be maryed with you . . .” (3:12, 14). God is unwilling to abandon his relationship with Israel; if the nation will return to him, the “marriage” will be renewed.⁹⁸ By the time of the hearing scene in *Henry VIII*, the audience knows that the king not only has flirted with Anne Bullen at Wolsey’s party but has named her the Marchioness of Pembroke, a title with one thousand pounds a year attached (2.3.63–65), and suspicion about the king’s “conscience” has crept at least as far as the Duke of Suffolk (2.2.16–17). Exactly what Katherine knows about this is unclear; nevertheless, her wish for Henry remains “I wyll be maryed with you.”

Jeremiah portrays God as disturbed by the fractured relationship but unwilling to wash his hands of it—the same posture that Katherine adopts. It is the Book of Ezekiel, however, that most strongly parallels her situation. In an allegory about Jerusalem, God depicts himself as a generous benefactor who falls in love with his ward:

I clothed thee with broidred worke, . . . and I gyrded thee about with fine linnen, and covered thee with silke. I decked thee with costly apparell, I put braselets vpon thy hands, a chayne about thy necke. And I put a frontlet vpon thy face, and earringes vpon thyne eares, and a beautifull crowne vpon thyne head. (16:10–12)

⁹⁸ Jeremiah seems curiously unperturbed by an allegory in which God has two sibling-spouses, a metaphor that may look back to Jacob’s marriage to the sisters Leah and Rachel in Genesis.

The holy city—a synecdoche for the people of Judah—was treated like a queen, God says as he enumerates the actions of a royal husband: He clothed her, bedecked her with jewelry, gave her a crown. But now, the Lord tells the city, “thou remembrest not the dayes of thy youth” (16:43)—she has set him aside. In similar fashion, Katherine’s description of her side of the royal marriage notes how she strove to benefit her spouse:

When was the hour
I ever contradicted your desire,
Or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends
Have I not strove to love, although I knew
He were mine enemy? what friend of mine
That had to him derived your anger did I
Continue in my liking? Nay, gave notice
He was from thence discharged? (2.4.25–32)

Katherine’s wedding gift was essentially herself, remade in Henry’s image. (Indeed, the lengths to which she has gone would strike modern readers as psychologically unhealthy.) Yet the bond between them, inexplicably, has frayed; Henry “remembrest not the dayes of [his] youth.” Katherine and God essentially ask the same question of their respective spouses: “In what have I offended you?” (2.4.17). Unfortunately, as historically knowledgeable members of the audience are aware, exile is the fate in both Scripture and play: the Hebrews are uprooted and scattered by pagan empires, and Katherine is bereft of her throne and dies far from the land of her birth. The twist is that, in contrast to the biblical narrative, Shakespeare’s story ends badly for the non-straying spouse.

Katherine’s challenge to Henry reverses the typical gender roles of the biblical metaphor, with the wronged wife confronting the wandering affections of the husband. The queen’s plea reminds the audience—including the original one, operating in a society in which sexual insatiability was a stereotypically feminine attribute (Laurence 66–67)—that the Bible’s rhetorical pictures of an adulterous, feminized Israel need not be read as a declaration about the nature of women per se. The play’s Tudor gender is all too susceptible to a condemnatory saucing. This alteration of the metaphor roles gains

additional ironic power from the fact that as king and husband, Henry would be seen as an earthly, human counterpart to God the Father and/or Christ vis-à-vis his subject/wife. “An Homily of the State of Matrimony” notes that “St. Paul expresseth it in this form of words, *Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: for the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church* (Ephes. v. 22, 23). . . . God hath commanded that ye should acknowledge the authority of the husband, and refer to him the honour of obedience” (*Homilies 472–73*; italics in original). The homilist quotes a New Testament passage likening the authority of husbands over wives to that of Jesus over the church. Early modern playgoers and parishioners would have seen Katherine as owing “the honour of obedience” to Henry because of his theologically ordained domestic lordship. But of course, Henry holds an even more exalted position than the run-of-the-mill husband, as described in “An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion”: “our Saviour Christ in sundry parables saith, that the kingdom of heaven is resembled unto a man, a king . . . and as the name of the king is very often attributed and given unto God in the Holy Scriptures . . . so doeth God himself in the same Scriptures sometime vouchsafe to communicate his name with earthly princes, terming them gods . . .” (519). According to the homilist, the deity/monarch metaphor is reversible: just as God is frequently described as the king of all, so earthly rulers are occasionally and legitimately described as “gods” and should receive the respect due to a person in such an exalted position. In Henry’s case, however, his male status as divine counterpart/viceroy only increases the tension inherent in a woman’s implicit rebuke of him for lacking the kind of faithfulness for which God is praised. Not only is Henry failing to live up to the integrity demanded of ordinary husbands by Malachi, but he also is tarnishing his specifically royal version of the *imago Dei*. Yet the irony does not stop even here. As the play’s original audiences know, Henry will soon declare himself Supreme Head of the national church,

thus underscoring even further his implicit status as “Lord.” But this future position makes his desire to leave Katherine—who as wife plays church to Henry’s Lord—even more problematic, as he now fails as husband, king, and ecclesiastical Christ figure.

Henry’s implosion on the personal and monarchical level in his rejection of a upstanding spouse has evoked frequent comparisons with *The Winter’s Tale*;⁹⁹ indeed, *Henry VIII* might be seen as a reversal of the other late play. Janet Adelman argues in her book *Suffocating Mothers* that the “very presence” of the pregnant Hermione is “disruptive of male bonds and male identity” in *The Winter’s Tale*; in the male-oriented boyhood world that Polixenes describes in 1.2 and that Adelman sees Leontes as fixating upon, the “sexualized female body is the sign of male separation and loss” (220–21). Hermione’s fecundity sparks Leontes’s marital rejection. In contrast, in *Henry VIII* (which Adelman’s book does not examine), the disruptive presence is that of the conspicuously unpregnant Katherine—the female body that has failed to produce a surviving prince, the sign of potentially devastating loss for the Tudor line. Henry does not seem put off by Katherine’s sexuality: “Would it not grieve an able man to leave / So sweet a bedfellow?” he asks Wolsey (2.2.140–41). In Adelman’s view, Leontes seeks to shore up his masculinity by ridding himself of the women around him: Hermione and Perdita. Henry follows Leontes’s lead by pushing away his longtime wife (and, implicitly, her daughter).¹⁰⁰ Yet unlike the Sicilian monarch, he simultaneously prepares the way for

⁹⁹ Garber also sees similarities to *Hamlet*, as both that play and *Henry VIII* raise the issue of “incest” in the sense of illicit marriage (*After All* 884).

¹⁰⁰ It is indicative of the two dramas’ similarities that Irene Dash’s description of Hermione’s trial almost could have been written about that of Katherine: “Standing before a court of men and a hostile husband . . . she recognizes the impossibility of winning a just verdict. Nevertheless, the Queen persists . . .” (“Penchant” 278). In the matter of daughters, *Henry VIII* goes *The Winter’s Tale* one further in that Mary, unlike Perdita, remains unseen. Even in Katherine’s commendation of her to Henry’s care in 4.2.131–38, her name is not mentioned. McMullan points out that Henry tells Cranmer after the latter prophesies about Elizabeth, “Never before / This happy child did I get anything” (5.4.63–64)—“a curious claim, since . . . Mary was very much alive” (81). The effect is almost that of the “unperson,” one who in George Orwell’s novel *1984* incurs governmental displeasure and ceases to exist both actually and in the official record.

another, younger and presumably more fertile consort.¹⁰¹ Gerard Wegemer writes, “The many instances of willful action, . . . and the repeated suggestion of malicious action, suggest that Henry is like Leonatus [*sic*] in his tyranny, but unlike him in his reformation” (126)—another way in which the English king can be seen as a reverse image of his Sicilian counterpart.

Katherine’s critical questioning of Henry’s actions provides Shakespeare’s audiences with a powerful picture of a wife’s prophetic challenge to unwarranted marital rejection. The domestic hierarchy of early modern society was based on a biblically derived system of husbandly authority: “Now as concerning the wife’s duty. What shall become her?” asks the writer of “An Homily of the State of Matrimony. “. . . . [T]hus doth St. Peter preach to them, *Ye wives, be ye in subjection to obey your own husbands* (1 Pet. iii.1). To obey is another thing than to controul or command, which yet they may do to their children, and to their family: but as for their husbands, them must they obey . . .” (*Homilies* 472; italics in original). The homilist appeals to the Petrine epistle’s apostolic authority in calling for wifely subjection. However, this system of male authority was subject to correction from its own textual source; Malachi, for instance, condemns Jewish husbands for treating their wives as disposable. Marital desertion was not unusual in early modern England, and the perpetrators tended to be male: “In the 1570 Norwich census of the poor, apart from married couples, only two men had children, compared with 112 women” (Mendelson and Crawford 142). Those familiar with Old Testament texts in which a masculine God laments the distraction of his spiritual spouse could see in Shakespeare’s queen a female use of the same critique, boldly aimed at the most powerful husband in their society.

¹⁰¹ Cristina León Alfar, interestingly, argues that in the wake of the trial in *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione essentially divorces Leontes (182). In this light, the Sicilian queen is a reverse image of the rejected Katherine.

“You tender more your person’s honour”: Critiquing religious leadership

However, Henry is not the only (male) target of Katherine’s prophetic upbraiding. Wolsey’s dismissal of her request for a delay to allow counsel from Spain turns her attention to the cardinal; the queen thus enlists in the ranks of biblical figures who decry the malfeasance of official religious leadership, providing an example of female outspokenness in what was often a men’s debate in Reformation Europe. Labeling the cleric “mine enemy” (2.4.75), “my most malicious foe” (2.4.81), and “not / At all a friend to truth” (2.4.81–82), the queen accuses him of having “blown this coal betwixt my lord and me” (2.4.77) and repudiates him as a judge of their case (2.4.75–76). When Wolsey flatly denies her allegations, she denounces him:

You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,
With meekness and humility; but your heart
Is crammed with arrogancy, spleen, and pride.
You have, by fortune and his highness’ favours,
Gone slightly o’er low steps, and now are mounted
Where powers are your retainers, and your words,
Domestics to you, serve your will as’t please
Yourself pronounce their office. I must tell you,
You tender more your person’s honour than
Your high profession spiritual . . . (2.4.106–15)

Katherine’s accusation is the classic one of hypocrisy, expressed partly in a somatic metaphor: The cardinal’s mouth is full of humility, but it is detached from a heart stuffed with pride—“which of all vices is most universally grafted in all mankind,” according to the *Book of Homilies* (10).¹⁰² The contrast between surface appearance and inner content calls to mind Jesus’s condemnation of the Pharisees as “paynted sepulchers” that “appeare beautifull outwarde, but are within full of dead [mens] bones, and of all

¹⁰² In his examination of this passage in the play, Shaheen points to Eph. 4:2 and Col. 3:12, which commend virtues such as “humbleness of mind” and “meekness” (481).

fylthynes" (Matt. 23:27; interpolation in original).¹⁰³ With power at Wolsey's beck and call, the queen says, and in a situation where his wish is others' command, the cleric is more interested in his own prestige than his vocation as a shepherd of souls. Nor is the queen's rebuke of the cardinal merely verbal; losing patience with the proceedings, she leaves: "I will not tarry; no, nor ever more / Upon this business my appearance make / In any of their courts" (2.4.128–30). Absence of body become a rhetorical statement. Christina Luckyj observes, "Feminine silence can be constructed as a space of subjective agency which threatens masculine authority" (60). In 1.2, Katherine exercises agency by unexpectedly appearing before the king and intervening in a matter not her own; in this scene, she exercises agency by unexpectedly disappearing and refusing to participate henceforth in formalities bearing on a matter that is distinctly her own. "Her silence outwits her accusers," Dusinberre writes, "because her presence is necessary to the exercise of the law against her" (223). The queen's closing statement at the hearing is to have no further statement.

In her rebuke of the cardinal, Katherine participates in another occupation of the biblical prophets: the censure of religious leaders. Given the early modern privileging of official male spiritual authority, the calling of such figures to account in Scripture affords Katherine with valuable cover, particularly as a female critic. Ezekiel criticizes priests who neglect their responsibility to uphold religious standards: "they put no difference betweene the holy & vnholly, neither discerneth they betweene the cleane & vncleane . . ." (22:26). Like Ezekiel, Malachi sees the priest as someone called to know and proclaim the divine will—such a person is "the messenger of the Lorde of hoastes," a man whose

¹⁰³ The Geneva Bible's comment on Matt. 23:13 reads in part, "Christ when he reproveth any man sharply, uses this word ["hypocrite"], to give us to understand that there is nothing more detestable than hypocrisy and falsehood in religion" (981).

“lippes shall kepe knowledge” (2:7).¹⁰⁴ However, Malachi says, the priests of his day “haue ben parcial in the lawe” (2:9), showing favoritism where they should not. Picking up the corruption motif, Micah points to priests who “teache for hyre” (3:11); Jeremiah accuses them of “couetousnesse” as well as “falshood and lyes” (6:13). Zephaniah speaks of religious leaders who have “polluted the sanctuarie” and “wrested the law” (3:4). The general picture is one of greed, neglect of duty, and misuse of religion—precisely the substance of Katherine’s indictment of Wolsey.¹⁰⁵ It is worthwhile to note the general tenor of the queen’s criticism. The Reformation’s disputes were notoriously concerned with doctrine: the presence of Christ in Communion, the ecclesiastical structure of the church, the use of a vernacular Bible, the authority of individual interpretation, etc. However, the scriptural passages quoted in this discussion exhibit a concern for pastoral matters; Israel’s priests are condemned because of their misuse of their office. Katherine’s speech follows this line of biblical thought; her dispute with Wolsey is more about his acts than his orthodoxy. In one sense, this is to be expected; Katherine presumably has no interest in repudiating theology that is, after all, her own. However, her criticism of the cardinal thus echoes that of certain biblical prophets not merely in their attack on religious leaders but in their specific line of fire.

One of the first statements in the official “Sermon Against Contention and Brawling” is that “among all kinds of contention, none is more hurtful than is contention in matters of religion” (*Homilies* 128). Order, hierarchy, deference, religious unity—all of

¹⁰⁴ Calvin cites this verse to support his assertion that “[e]cclesiastical power . . . is not to be mischievously adorned, but it is to be confined within certain limits . . .” (vol. 2 390).

¹⁰⁵ According to Linda Micheli, Katherine’s performance at the hearing demonstrates “her spirited rejection of corrupt or hollow ceremony” (459), a phrase that recalls the biblical prophets’ condemnation of insincere religious ritual: “Offer me no mo oblations, for it is but lost labour: incense is an abominable thyng vnto me Learne to do well, applie your selues to equitie, deliuer the oppressed . . .” (Isa. 1:13, 17). God declares that he detests such worship—the hearers should devote themselves to justice.

these were prominent values in Renaissance England, and linked in the thought of the period.¹⁰⁶ Citing a passage in the “Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion” that calls rebellion “both the first and greatest, and the very root of all other sins,” Russ McDonald writes: “The identification established here between political and religious disobedience, sedition and sin, is one of the defining characteristics of ideology in early modern England” (313). For Henry’s royal successor James, episcopal ecclesiology and monarchical government were properly and inextricably connected: “No bishop, no king” (McDonald 312). Such an environment does not encourage the challenging of religious authority—and all the more so when the Church of England excludes women “from all positions of power, both clerical and lay” (Laurence 199). However, the “Sermon Against Contention” goes on to say:

For we read, that many holy men of good zeal have sharply and fiercely both spoken and answered tyrants and evil men And this zeal is godly, and to be allowed, as it is plainly proved by the example of Christ, who . . . called the obstinate scribes and Pharisees, *blind guides, fools, painted graves, hypocrites, serpents, adders’ brood, a corrupt and wicked generation* . . . (*Homilies* 138; italics in original)

“Holy men” and Jesus himself did not remain silent in the face of tyrants and hypocritical religious leaders. Katherine’s lambasting of Wolsey thus follows the ultimate example for early modern Christians and provides a lens through which Shakespeare’s female playgoers could analyze their duties toward spiritual authority.

“I’ll hang my head and perish”: The angst of a prophet

The rebukes of 1.2 pave the way for Katherine’s later fulminations at the divorce hearing in 2.4 and in her conversation with Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius in 3.1, a scene in which she demonstrates that a blazing prophetic boldness may be followed by a

¹⁰⁶ Commenting on Ex. 12:49—“One law shall be to him that is born in the land, and to the stranger that dwelleth among you”—the Geneva Bible’s gloss says, “They that are of the household of God, must be all joined in one faith and religion” (73).

dark night of the soul. In some ways, this final interaction between the two clerics and the queen repeats the lines of thought in 2.4. The cardinals assert their good faith—"Pray think us / Those we profess: peacemakers, friends, and servants" (3.1.166–67)—as well as that of Henry: "Put your main cause into the King's protection. / He's loving and most gracious. 'Twill be much / Both for your honour better and your cause . . ." (3.1.93–95). Katherine, in turn, points out her problematic status as female—"You know I am a woman, lacking wit / To make a seemly answer to such persons" (3.1.177–78)—and as someone far from her homeland and countrymen: "They that must weigh out my afflictions, / They that my trust must grow to, live not here" (3.1.88–89). But on the queen's part, the chamber scene is marked by a level of emotion markedly higher than that of 2.4. This is not to say that the Katherine of the divorce hearing is one "whose blood / Is very snow-broth" (*Measure for Measure* 1.4.57–58). On the contrary, she warns Wolsey on that occasion that "my drops of tears / I'll turn to sparks of fire" (2.4.70–71), and when the cardinal admonishes her to be patient, she snaps, "I will, when you are humble—nay, before, / Or God will punish me" (2.4.72–73). But in 3.1, the queen is in her private chamber rather than the hall of Blackfriars, and in the presence of her own attendants rather than the king. Moreover, the divorce hearing begins with Katherine formally requesting a continuance, so that at least initially she has reason to show restraint lest she be refused. In the chamber scene, her petition already has been rejected, so she has less to lose by being candid. For these reasons, perhaps, the queen feels more free to vent her anger and frustration on Wolsey and Campeius. In true prophetic fashion, she suggests that God will not lightly dismiss their treatment of her:

Ye tell me what ye wish for both—my ruin.
Is this your Christian counsel? Out upon ye!

Heaven is above all yet: there sits a judge
That no king can corrupt. (3.1.98–101)¹⁰⁷

Her implication not only that the Lord will have the final word on the current affair but that Henry is abusing justice indicates the degree to which Katherine has abandoned rhetorical prudence—this is hardly the same woman who knelt before Henry in the hearing scene.¹⁰⁸ After she bitterly labels the two men as “cardinal sins and hollow hearts” (3.1.104), Wolsey protests, “You turn the good we offer into envy,” to which the queen retorts: “Ye turn me into nothing.¹⁰⁹ Woe upon ye, / And all such false professors!” (3.1.114–15). Her fiery condemnation of her allegedly hypocritical listeners places Katherine in the tradition not only of the Old Testament prophets (the word “woe” is used six times in Isa. 5:8–22, for instance) but also, and more famously, in that of Jesus’s condemnation of the religious leaders of his day: “Wo vnto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites . . .” (Matt. 23:13).¹¹⁰ In a societal context in which King James told his Privy

¹⁰⁷ Shaheen cites 2 Chron. 19:7 and Rom. 2:11, which say God has no “respect of persons” (481). Guy Story Brown sees another reference to heaven earlier in the act when, after declaring that there is little hope of good counsel in England, Katherine declares that those whom she must trust “are, as all my other comforts, far hence / In mine own country, lords” (3.1.90–91). Brown asserts, “The queen refers primarily not to Spain but to . . . her heavenly home . . .” (196). This reading gains credibility from Katherine’s reference to divine justice a few lines later, but the down-to-earth interpretation of a primary reference to Spain still seems more likely.

¹⁰⁸ In an analysis of Shakespeare’s view of divine justice, Roland Mushat Frye quotes Henry V’s assertion that even if fugitives “can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God” (193). Walter Cohen notes that Henry VIII’s angry reaction to the nobles’ treatment of Cranmer—“ ’Tis well there’s one above ’em yet” (5.2.26)—can refer to Henry himself or the Lord (3115). If it is the latter, the king unwittingly confirms Katherine’s assertion that “Heaven is above all yet.” However, an element of divine mystery is also at work; Rackin notes that “like Shakespeare’s emphasis on Katherine’s virtue even as he depicts her fall, the entire plot seems calculated to demonstrate that the ways of providence are inscrutable” (*Stages* 62).

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Baldo writes that the play presents “a grand pageant of oblivion, a procession of the officially erased, beginning with Buckingham and continuing with Katherine and Wolsey” (376–77). Although the play and much of its criticism speak in terms of divorce, the king is of course actually seeking an annulment—a declaration that the marriage is invalid (rather than merely ended), and thus that Henry has never truly had a wife. Katherine’s and Baldo’s words thus recall the previously mentioned idea of Orwell’s “unperson.” Given the context, there is no obvious reason to read the queen’s term “nothing” as a double entendre using the early modern slang for female genitalia. In a sense, however, Katherine is indeed being reduced to her reproductive organs, as her inability to produce a surviving son has undermined her marriage.

¹¹⁰ Both McMullan (324 fn) and Shaheen (482) note the similarity to Matthew’s text, although they do not mention Isaiah.

Council in 1605 that “he was so far from favouring their [Catholics’] superstitious religion that if he thought his son would tolerate it after his death, he would wish him buried before his eyes” (Willson 223), and in which an official homily inveighed against the “pharisaical and papistical leaven of man’s feigned religion” that is “before God most abominable” (*Homilies* 53–54), Katherine’s pillorying of the cardinals probably struck a melodious chord among some of Shakespeare’s playgoers.

The queen’s combativeness threatens to place her in the infamous role of scold or shrew, although in such a way that she alters a Shakespearean pattern. In a study of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Othello*, Marguerite Hailey Rippy posits that a number of the playwright’s women function in shrew/saint pairs: Kate and Bianca, Paulina and Hermione, Beatrice and Hero, and Emilia and Desdemona. According to Rippy, the shrew comes to the aid of the beleaguered “good wife” but is silenced once the crisis is over; the shrew is “an essential component of the patriarchal system, employing her language as a defense against individual members of the patriarchy who transgress their own system and thereby threaten the good wife ideal and the propagation of the patriarchy that created her” (106).¹¹¹ Rippy does not examine *Henry VIII*, but Katherine is essentially a variation on the theme, uniting the good wife and the shrew in a single character. Even as Henry strives to void his marriage in the hearing scene, he acknowledges the queen’s qualities:

That man i’th’ world who shall report he has
A better wife, let him in naught be trusted
For speaking false in that. Thou art alone—
If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,
Thy meekness saint-like, wife-like government,
Obeying in commanding, and thy parts

¹¹¹ In *Henry VIII*, however, it is precisely the king’s pursuit of “the propagation of the patriarchy” that leads him to act against his good wife. In contrast to Leontes, whose actions temporarily rob him of any heir whatsoever, Henry retains his daughter. However, the English king is determined not merely that a Tudor will occupy the throne but that the occupant will be male.

Sovereign and pious else, could speak thee out—
The queen of earthly queens. (2.4.131–38)¹¹²

The gentle, meek, and devout Katherine, however, has no Paulina or Beatrice to come to her aid; instead, she performs that function herself, calling her husband to account and fulminating against Wolsey and Campeius. In the end, of course, she cannot overcome the patriarchal power that Rippey sees in the fates of Shakespeare's other saints.

Dusinberre, who essentially views Katherine as run down by a masculine royal carriage, writes: "Shakespeare uses the women who seem the most at the mercy of the male world to assert values which measure its worth and find it wanting" (293). One can argue that Katherine has something of the last word. Wolsey tumbles from power and dies repentant; Henry will sire no male heir with his nubile Anne, who will go to the headsman's block all too soon.¹¹³ In contrast, the former queen—"the one picture of stability, integrity and religiosity in the play" (Mayer 137), the "only morally unambiguous

¹¹² In McMullan's phrase, is the king being "wistful or hypocritical"? (308 fn). Garber argues for sincerity: Henry's speech, "however reluctantly delivered, rings true" (*After All* 885). However, David Beauregard, pointing to the king's remarks in 2.2 and 2.4, accuses him of "hypocritically praising Katherine and unscrupulously pretending to scrupulosity" (139); by the end of the latter scene, "the moral probity of his claim has collapsed" (140). Guy Story Brown calls Henry's encomium an "all but . . . explicit if parodic allusion to *The Taming of the Shrew*" (186). The evocation of feeling for Katherine in Henry's awkward praise recalls an observation made by Dusinberre in a somewhat different context: "The [early modern] dramatists sympathise with women made pregnant by men who desert them" (59).

¹¹³ Suzanne Gossett remarks, "The drama seems oddly current, the tale of an older, devoted spouse replaced by a fertile trophy wife many years younger" (197). Dusinberre cites Anne's displacement of Katherine as an example of the fact that in early modern drama, "the chaste wife—and the chaster she is, the more true this is—tends to be associated with loss" (120). McMullan evokes the biblical story of David's adultery to compare the two women, writing that "where Anne is portrayed as a Bathsheba figure (though one for whom a wife rather than a husband must be destroyed), Katherine is depicted as a woman of strength and faith" (132). Maurice Charney, interestingly, asserts that Anne is "probably the most vivid character in the play" (*All* 207)—a curious assessment of a part that is markedly less substantial than those of Katherine or Wolsey. McMullan, in contrast, argues that "Anne is so overtly instrumental within the patriarchal frame that it becomes difficult to treat her as a 'character' in the traditional sense. She is a 'creature,' rather, a vehicle for the birth of Elizabeth, barely adequately characterized as a foil for Katherine's virtues and strength of personality . . ." (130). A. Robin Bowers notes that, ironically, "Anne's only substantive dialogue in the play . . . concerns the virtues of Katherine . . ." (37), and Lynne Magnusson, referring to the drama's "merciful construction of good women" (Epilogue 10), remarks (perhaps sardonically): "In Anne's case it would seem the main linguistic means to construct her goodness is to keep her silent" ("Rhetoric" 404).

figure" (Appleford 150)—will exit with a heavenly vision. If the patriarchy succeeds in circumscribing the shrew/good wife of *Henry VIII*, it is not a complete victory. A seventeenth-century audience—living in an England shaped by Henry's watershed break with Rome as well the four-decade reign of his daughter, and scarred by the ruthless ecclesiastical tactics of Mary I—might well have wondered at the fact that the "loser" in this marital face-off is memorialized so positively.¹¹⁴

In addition to Katherine's heightened indignation in the chamber scene, there is a note of pathos, exhaustion, and betrayal that distinguishes it from the divorce hearing. At Blackfriars, the queen asks Henry how she has failed him; in her chamber, Katherine returns to this theme of the broken relationship, but in a more emotionally fraught atmosphere. "Would you have me . . . [p]ut my sick cause into his hands that hates me?" she demands of Campeius and Wolsey (3.1.115, 118), and then confesses:

Alas, 'has banished me his bed already;
His love, too, long ago. I am old, my lords,
And all the fellowship I hold now with him
Is only my obedience. What can happen
To me above this wretchedness? (3.1.119–23)

There is an odd emotional nakedness about her admission of sexual and emotional exile, of age and the erosion of a twenty-year marital bond—an admission made to men whom only moments before she blasted as "false professors." Pondering a psychic wilderness,

¹¹⁴ Seeing the play as serving power, Leonard Tennenhouse argues that "Shakespeare makes genealogy one and the same thing as Providence in *Henry VIII*. . . . Operating under this imperative, the playwright has no cause to engender sympathy for Katherine or endow his monarch with it. He may in fact equate the unproductive mate with Wolsey and Buckingham—as being opposed to legitimate political authority—because they obstruct genealogy" (123). Yet this reading surely underestimates the amount of sympathy that Katherine actually engenders. David Beauregard, for one, does not see the play as supportive of the monarchy; rather, the story views the crown in "unfavorable and critical terms" (124), while "Henry is subtly portrayed as neglectful, hypocritical, and manipulative" (139).

she asks mournfully, “What can happen / To me above this wretchedness?”¹¹⁵ As in the divorce hearing, the queen reviews her devotion to her royal wifely duties:

Have I with all my full affections
Still met the King, loved him next heaven, obeyed him,
Been, out of fondness, superstitious to him,
Almost forgot my prayers to content him,
And am I thus rewarded? (3.1.129–33)

Katherine’s words foreshadow the play’s most famous lines, spoken by Wolsey after his fall from political grace: “Had I but served my God with half the zeal / I served my King, he would not in mine age / Have left me naked to mine enemies” (3.2.455–57). Both queen and cardinal have given Henry years of near-idolatrous devotion, only to be cast aside. Each deals with feelings of betrayal. Wolsey sees that he has wrongly worshiped at the altar of power; the (spiritual) faithlessness is his. In contrast, Katherine ultimately perceives herself as a victim of disloyalty rather than a perpetrator of it; her dedication to Henry may have been inordinate, but her recompense for it was inordinately tawdry.¹¹⁶ Indeed, her sense of ill use extends beyond her spouse to her adopted nation: “Would I had never trod this English earth / Or felt the flatteries that grow upon it,” she wishes (3.1.143–44); she feels “[s]hipwrecked upon a kingdom where no pity, / No friend, no hope, no kindred weep for [her]” (3.1.149–50). To the former Spanish princess, Albion is indeed perfidious.¹¹⁷ Jeanne Addison Roberts writes, “Although she is wonderfully

¹¹⁵ Noting the affective factor in the play, Susan Frye states that Katherine is “the only character whose downfall occasions strong emotion” (440). Maurice Charney, however, opines that Wolsey is the only one “whose downfall approaches tragedy” (*Wrinkled* 118). The meaning, presumably, is that the cardinal’s fate springs from his flaws while Katherine’s does not. John Margeson sees Katherine’s fall as having “its resonance in pathos rather than tragic irony” (17).

¹¹⁶ Mary P. Nichols, summarizing what she sees as Katherine’s concern that her daughter Mary will not receive her due from Henry, writes: “Her desert is not guaranteed by her nature” (550). The same phrase could apply to Katherine’s treatment at her spouse’s hands.

¹¹⁷ However, Craig Bernthal writes that the historical Katherine’s affection for her adopted country prevented her, despite the efforts of an ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire, from leading a Catholic rebellion against Henry and Anne when disaffection with them was serious (224). In a similar vein, Amy Appleford (159) and Jean-Christophe Mayer (138) see Katherine’s insistence on using English rather than Latin in 3.1 as a sign of commitment to England.

eloquent in her own defense, she has after she has been divorced no recourse except death" (124)—something that Katherine seems to sense, with her statement that "like the lily / That once was mistress of the field and flourished, / I'll hang my head and perish" (3.1.151–53).¹¹⁸

Even so, her about-face seems abrupt. "Do what ye will, my lords, and pray forgive me / If I have used myself unmannerly," she tells the cardinals, not only acquiescing to them but even apologizing for any untoward behavior (3.1.175–76). Lynne Magnusson sees in these lines a rhetorical strategy of "negative politeness" combining "bold speech and apology" ("Rhetoric" 404), although she also allows for a sarcastic reading indicating the former queen's "continuing strength of character, defiance, and rhetorical self-possession" (403). In a similar but more spiritual vein, Hugh Richmond asserts that any seeming humility on Katherine's part springs "from a deliberate choice made from a position of psychological power, not feebleness" (15)—it is out of a "spirit of acceptance of a Providence beyond human understanding that Queen Katherine acquiesces in her ruin, having made every fair and practical effort to avert it" (17). Yet Katherine seems less an outmaneuvered chess player than an exhausted pugilist—still standing but unwilling to take additional blows. Her words seem to echo of a "little death," and not the kind associated with sexual ecstasy.¹¹⁹

In her feeling of rejection, Katherine traces yet another path of the biblical seers: that of a sense of betrayal or despair. Unlike confrontation with power or advocacy for the

¹¹⁸ Shaheen cites Matt. 6:28–29, in which Jesus compares Solomon to the "lilies of the field," and Ps. 103:15–16, which says man "flourisheth as a flower of the field" but then is no more (482).

¹¹⁹ Linda Micheli sees in this episode an echo of Katherine's rival: "Like Anne in the parallel scene [2.3], though with infinitely greater reluctance, she accepts the inevitability of what Henry and his law have decreed" (462). In Micheli's view, both women suffer from restricted agency. Kim Noling, however, argues that Katherine's acquiescence "merely confirms the resignation she had achieved before they [the cardinals] began their persuasions"; in the scene, she "speaks herself through to her new position in life" (295).

oppressed, this is not one of the obvious aspects of the prophetic experience, but it occasionally emerges nonetheless. Once again, the foundational figure is Moses. When the Israelites complain about their unchanging wilderness diet—no cucumbers, no melons, nothing but the miraculous manna from heaven (Num. 11:5–6)—their leader confronts God with his own dissatisfaction. “Wherefore hast thou dealt cruelly with thy seruaunt?” he asks. “And wherefore haue I not founde fauour in thy sight, seyng that thou putttest the wayght of all this people vpon me? Haue I conceaued all this people? Or haue I begotten them, that thou shouldest say vnto me, Cary them in thy bosome as a nurse beareth the suckyng chylde . . .?” (Num. 11:11–12). Like Katherine, Moses questions his lot: He has been dealt with “cruelly”; like an overworked wet nurse, he must tend hordes of people whom he did not bring into the world. “If thou deale thus with me, kyll me I pray thee, if I haue founde fauour in thy sight, yt I see not my wretchednesse,” he declares (11:15). Both the English queen and the Hebrew deliverer see the world as a grim place, although they employ different rhetorical strategies as they nail their complaints to the door. Katherine claims injustice on the basis of what she has done: she has “met the King, loved him next heaven, obeyed him” and now is being asked to “give up willingly that noble title” of queen (3.1.130, 140). In contrast, Moses points not to his performance but to the Lord’s, questioning the justice of what God has called him to do. Since divine disfavor means dealing with “the wayght of all this people,” the disenchanting deliverer says with a certain bleak comedy, divine favor might best be demonstrated by simply killing him now.

Nor is Moses the only biblical prophet to express a death wish and thus paint a biblical background for Katherine’s depression. After Elijah receives a death threat from Queen Jezebel of Israel, he flees to the wilderness and prays, “It is nowe enough O Lorde, take my soule, for I am not better then my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4). When the

prophet reaches Mount Horeb, God asks why he is there. "And he answered, I have been jealous for the Lord God of hosts sake: For the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, broken downe thine altars, and slayne thy prophetes with the sword: and I onely am left, and they seke my lyfe to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah sees his countrymen as having turned violently against everything he stands for; like Katherine, he perceives "no pity, / No friend, no hope" (3.1.149–50). Why not have the Lord "take [his] soule"? In similar fashion, Jonah becomes angry when the people of Nineveh, to whom he has preached impending divine disaster, have the audacity to repent and thus avoid judgment. Upbraiding God for his mercy, the seer prays: "And nowe O Lorde, take I beseeche thee my lyfe from me: for it is better for me to dye, then to lyue" (Jon. 4:3). Jonah is plunged into a dark mood despite recent prophetic success. Shakespeare's queen, of course, has no spiritual victory to look back upon; in her personal confrontation with the forces of unrighteousness, she has been bested.

As will be seen in Chapter 6's examination of Joan Puzel in *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare was quite capable of placing historic characters who were on the "losing side" in a less-than-flattering light. As a Catholic foreigner whose royal daughter became an icon of anti-Protestant persecution, Katherine might be expected to come in for such treatment. Yet the playwright's depiction of Katherine's dark night of the soul makes her an unusually sympathetic figure in a drama in which she might have been portrayed as a papist obstacle overcome by (in the homilist's words) God's "faithful and true minister, of most famous memory, king Henry VIII.," in his quest to "put away all such superstitious and pharisaical sects, by antichrist invented, and set up against the true word of God" (*Homilies* 53). Such a depiction holds out the promise of humanizing the religious Other in a Jacobean society accustomed to scorched-earth theological rhetoric.

“Saw you not even now a blessed troop”: Katherine the visionary

The encounter with the cardinals, however, is not the play’s last word on Katherine; in the penultimate act, the princess dowager’s vision of angelic figures aligns her with Old Testament personalities privileged to receive a glimpse of the divine plane, although in an almost counter-biblically self-focused fashion. In what might be called a death-chair scene (although her actual passing presumably occurs shortly afterward), Katherine discusses Wolsey’s death and character with the gentleman usher Griffith and then falls asleep. According to the rather elaborate stage direction: “Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six Personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces; branches of bays or palm in their hands” (4.2.82.2–82.5). The figures bow to Katherine, dance, and take turns holding another garland over her head. Upon their disappearance, Katherine awakes; after Griffith says he has seen no one, she replies:

No? Saw you not even now a blessed troop
Invite me to a banquet, whose bright faces
Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun?
They promised me eternal happiness
And brought me garlands, Griffith, which I feel
I am not worthy yet to wear: I shall, assuredly. (4.2.87–92)

As Naseeb Shaheen indicates, the stage direction recalls Rev. 7:9’s description of the blessed as “[c]lothed with long white robes, and palmes in their hands,” and Katherine’s description of her vision evokes the idea of the divine banquet mentioned in Rev. 19:9: “Blessed are they which are called vnto the Lambes supper” (Shaheen 488). The princess dowager has experienced rejection at the hands of her earthly lord, but now she has received a vision of acceptance from the Lord of heaven and earth. The episode echoes the Apparitions scene in *Macbeth* 4.1, in which another non-English wearer of a crown has a supernatural vision that plays out in masque-like fashion and focuses on the recipient’s fate. Macbeth, however, is a political usurper who deliberately goes looking for

insight from a hellish source in hopes of retaining power, and his immediate reaction to the vision is to plan yet more bloodshed. Katherine, by contrast, is a victim of marital usurpation, bereft of significant power, who seeks nothing yet is graciously enlightened by heaven; when she awakes, she acts to ensure a comfortable future for her attendants and her daughter.¹²⁰

The former queen's experience unites her with the ranks of the Hebrew prophets who write of heavenly visions or dreams. Although the Old Testament writers frequently depict a revelation from or an encounter with the divine as verbal ("Thus saith the Lorde" or "The word of the Lord came to me, saying"), they also sometimes describe it in visual terms. Daniel and Ezekiel are particularly noted for this trait (Thomson "Vision" 1313). The former is known for a dream of a great statue of various elements, including a head of gold and feet of mixed iron and clay; the latter is remembered for a vision of wheels and strange creatures. The Book of Zechariah contains a series of fantastic visions that feature (among other things) horses of various colors, a man with a measuring line, olive trees, a flying scroll, and a woman in a basket. One of the most famous Old Testament visions is part of the call narrative of Isaiah. The prophet sees God enthroned in the temple, attended by angelic beings, and he is overwhelmed by his sinfulness and that of

¹²⁰ "Praise of women beyond or even in opposition to the supposed virtues of marriage and childbearing seems to be Shakespeare's purpose . . . in his treatment of Katherine in *Henry VIII*," writes Charles Frey, who sees Katherine as "converting her secular fall into spiritual ascent." The play "suggests the vanity of earthly pageantries, the paltriness of bodily appetites, and the insufficiency of love's whole enterprise" ("O sacred" 305). The key word in Frey's comment may be "suggests." Katherine receives a sign from heaven and comes off positively despite her broken marriage and lack of a son—yet the play's final scene focuses precisely on "earthly pageantries" and the celebration of a royal family from which Katherine is pointedly excluded. The former queen's "vision of eternal bliss is set directly beside the more humanly joyous coronation of Anne Bullen" in 4.1 (Knight 80). But does the vision balance the coronation and the infant Elizabeth's christening, or does it subtly undermine them? Noting the dissonance, David Beauregard writes: "The previous representation of the hazards of worldly glory suddenly and inconsistently shifts to a vision of [Elizabeth's] queenly virtue and glorious prosperity" (142). The total effect is ambivalent. Commenting on the play as a whole, Margeson writes: "Many nineteenth-century critics found that it was altogether incoherent in its moral design. As [James] Spedding himself put it, the play offers 'little else than the ultimate triumph of wrong'" (23).

his people. “Then flew one of the Seraphims vnto me, hauing a hote cole in his hand, whiche he had taken from the aulter with the tongues, And layde it vpon my mouth, and sayde: Lo, [this] hath touched thy lippes, and thine vnrighteousnesse shalbe taken away, and thy sinne forgeuen” (Isa. 6:6–7; interpolation in original). As with Katherine’s dream of the garlanded spirits who invite her to a heavenly banquet, Isaiah’s vision of the divine presence and of the purging of his sin via a fiery coal provides the recipient with reassurance. Commenting on the play scene’s similarity to a vision of heaven in Rev. 7:9, Hannibal Hamlin writes, “The visual allusion . . . confirms the genuineness of Katherine’s experience, which imbues her with as much saintliness as a Protestant theater might allow” (117). Although in the next act the (Protestant) infant Elizabeth steals the scene by proxy via Thomas Cranmer’s laudatory prophecy, this act startlingly puts a heavenly blessing on a Catholic woman. For the original Jacobean audience, the effect might have been similar to that of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan on its Jewish hearers, many of whom presumably were taken aback by the story’s valorization of a detested ethnic minority.

The former queen’s vision aligns her partially but not entirely with her biblical forebears. “The character of the revelation through vision has a double aspect in the [scriptural] narrative,” writes biblical scholar Charles M. Stuart. “In one aspect, it proposes a revelation for immediate direction, as in the case of Abram In another aspect it deals with the development of the Kingdom of God as conditioned by the moral ideals of the people . . .” (3057). In Scripture, visions look beyond the recipient to some divinely ordained task or some state of societal affairs, whether desired or undesired; they do not tend to be intensely personal or deal with one’s spiritual state. Daniel’s statue vision involves future geopolitical events; Zechariah’s scroll predicts divine judgment. Isaiah receives reassurances of atonement, but these come along with a call to ambassadorial

service: “Also I hearde the voyce of the Lorde on this maner: whom shall I sende, and who wyll be our messenger?” (Isa. 6:8). Katherine’s “blessed troop,” in contrast, gives her no commission and addresses only her own circumstances, providing her with a confidence in her soul’s status (“They promised me eternal happiness”) even if she believes that she is “not worthy yet to wear” the garlands of spiritual victory.¹²¹

On a theatrical level, what is perhaps remarkable about Katherine’s self-focused vision is its lack of reference to Henry’s remarriage or, on a broader level, any other political topic. In contrast to Cranmer’s prediction of Elizabeth’s future, Shakespeare (probably quite wisely) resists any temptation to have angels address the fate of the king or Anne Bullen; Katherine’s vision is safely limited and self-focused. Compare this with some of the prophecies of Elizabeth Barton, the previously mentioned Benedictine nun who spoke out against Henry’s marital plans. Barton “received a revelation that Henry VIII would be damned and claimed that she had seen ‘the particular place and spot destined to him in hell,’ ” Diane Watt writes (69); according to an attainting act of Parliament, the prophetess claimed that if the king “proceeded to thaccomplishment of the seid divorce and married another, that then hys Majestie shulde not be kynge of this Realme by the space of one moneth after, And in the reputacion of God shuld not be kynge one day nor one houre” (51). In one “openly seditious eucharistic vision,” Watt writes, Barton was miraculously present during a Mass in Calais, and when “the King prepared to receive the bread of the sacrament an angel took it out of the hands of the priest and offered it to Barton instead” (69) For the monarch “to be deprived of the host in this way was a sign that he was no longer a member of the community of the Church and may have been intended as a prediction of his excommunication . . .” (70). Unlike Katherine’s vision, such

¹²¹ F. Schreiber-McGee draws attention to the fact that Katherine’s statement is foreshadowed by Anne’s “hasty assumption of a temporal crown” in an earlier scene (196). Heavenly honors, of course, are eternal, whereas Anne’s diadem is not only temporal but notoriously temporary.

proclamations clearly look beyond the proclaimer to the broader religious and political society, making judgments and calling for change.¹²² Barton's mystical mode is active rather than contemplative; like her contemporary Martin Luther, she nails demands to a (metaphorical) door—in this case, that of the royal bedroom. Unfortunately for the Maid of Kent, Henry had little toleration for such demands.

Emphasizing the personal aspect of Katherine's vision, Kim H. Noling argues that "Shakespeare takes several steps to make the dream seem as much as possible an emanation from Katherine's brain rather than an apparition from heaven"—for instance, the fact that the spirits appear only to the former queen and leave behind no physical token or evidence (297–98). Such a reading, however, decreases the contrast between human rejection and divine approval that the scene otherwise supports. Further, the qualities that Noling mentions actually are found regularly in biblical accounts of heaven-sent apparitions. Isaiah's commissioning narrative, for instance, contains no indication of witnesses or physical evidence, nor does the New Testament account of Joseph's dream in which an angel tells him to marry the pregnant virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18–21).¹²³ Lynne Magnusson, meanwhile, asserts that the scene's portrait of Katherine's spiritual side "performs the ideological work of patriarchy by idealizing nonassertive speech" ("Rhetoric" 405), producing words that are "insipid" (406).¹²⁴ Yet this argument implies

¹²² Writing about the mid-seventeenth-century visionary Eleanor Davies, who more than once provoked official ire, Elaine Hobby remarks: "As the punishments she received escalated . . . her writings seem to have less to say about national events, and to become ever more focused on her own identity as a prophet" (266).

¹²³ Some biblical accounts of divine messages do include witnesses or physical effects. In the New Testament, the angel Gabriel appears to the future father of John the Baptist and strikes him mute for questioning the message (Luke 1:5–22). In the Old Testament, an angel tells a woman that she will become the mother of the deliverer Samson; the angel later reappears in the presence of her husband, confirms his news, and ascends to heaven in an altar fire (Judg. 13:2–20).

¹²⁴ Magnusson also writes that the queen's "heavenly coronation . . . comes to her not through her own exertions but after she has wished Patience to 'set [her] lower' . . ." ("Rhetoric" 405; interpolation in original). However, the implication that such a coronation *ought* to reward one's own exertions (rather than clearly being an unmerited grace from God) might have been theologically questionable for Shakespeare's audiences, at least those of a Protestant persuasion.

that the admittedly lower-key Katherine of 4.2 somehow blots out the bold queen of the rest of the play and that the audience will see her as having been put in her proper place. To the contrary, a playgoer's image is far more likely to be that of a notably assertive queen who has been improperly shoved into a corner and left to wilt. For early modern women, the dream scene offers a reminder of Christianity's fundamentally revelatory nature: God condescends to speak to human beings, and frequently ones of troubled life, marginalized status, or both. However, in terms of its resemblance to biblical narrative, the scene is less than it might initially appear to be; Katherine's vision simultaneously provides her with unexpected valorization in a theologically conflicted society and undercuts that valorization slightly with its highly personal nature.

Katherine's prophetic mantle thus is woven of material that is both other-directed and self-focused.¹²⁵ In her confrontations of Henry and Wolsey, the Spanish-born royal calls upon the male powers-that-be to do justice to the people of England, and in her final scene, she seeks the good of her daughter and her attendants. Yet her primary focus, not unreasonably, is herself—and in her self-identification as a woman and a foreigner, she touches on chords that in the Bible are linked to divine demands for fair treatment of the marginalized. Moreover, she displays the possibility of human virtue and spiritual (even supernatural) exaltation as well as a propensity for dejection and pride. Katherine is “unquestionably a saint,” Joseph Candido remarks, but even at death's door (as demonstrated by her rebuke of a messenger in 4.2.100–08) she loves “the earthly dignities that she perceives as central to her person” (497). Perhaps more than any other woman examined in this dissertation, Katherine embodies a radical challenge for

¹²⁵ As will be seen, in this dichotomy Katherine resembles another of Shakespeare's former queens, Margaret of Anjou. Mary Nichols also contrasts the two foreign-born monarchs, pointing out that whereas Margaret instructs Richard III's female victims in cursing, Katherine implicitly teaches “how to bestow blessings rather than curses” (550 fn).

Shakespeare's audience. Paulina is fictional, and the Weird Sisters essentially so; Lady Macbeth lies centuries deep in the murky past; Margaret of Anjou and her contemporary Joan Puzel are more recent figures but can be written off as French. For the original Jacobean patrons of *Henry VIII*, however, Katherine of Aragon was only two generations past—the first wife of the king who freed their national church from the sway of Rome, the mother of the queen who hurled Canterbury back into that orbit (however briefly), the great-aunt of the Spanish king who dispatched the Armada against Elizabeth's England. Yet despite this pedigree, the play's officially Protestant watchers saw a woman pressing for the good of the common people and the preservation of her own marriage and against the abuses of a powerful religious leader—all activities characteristic of male heroes of faith whom they knew from Holy Writ. Katherine embodies the possibility that one in a position of Otherness is neither forgotten by heaven nor incapable of vocally standing up for righteousness.

Chapter 4

“Say poor Margaret was a prophetess”: Margaret of Anjou in *Richard III*

Like Katherine of Aragon, Margaret of Anjou can claim the status of a liminally positioned prophet, one who speaks to the powerful in a land not originally her own, yet her French background matters little or nothing in *Richard III*.¹²⁶ Margaret is one of the few Shakespearean characters who both refers to herself and is seen by others as a prophetic figure.¹²⁷ Rebuking Buckingham for brushing off her warnings about Richard, Margaret declares: “O, but remember this another day, / When he shall split thy very heart with sorrow, / And say poor Margaret was a prophetess” (*R3* 1.3.298–300). While later being led to execution, the duke ruefully confirms her avocation: “Now Margaret’s curse is fallen upon my head” (5.1.25)—a thought echoed by the similarly doomed Grey (3.3.14) and Hastings (3.4.91–92) as well as by Queen Elizabeth (4.4.79–81). Nor is the former queen’s predictive (or perhaps maledictive) ability her only somewhat eldritch aspect; she also exhibits an odd, half-substantial quality even as she pronounces her dooms, like the ghosts in *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*. (The fact that the historical Margaret was dead in France by the time Richard took the throne underlines the character’s semi-spectral nature.) Further, she has a knack for self-conscious rhetorical display that is reminiscent of the more poetic Hebrew prophets. Yet Margaret’s distinctively confirmed

¹²⁶ Marguerite A. Tassi compares Margaret to the Trojan queen Hecuba, who revenges herself on the Thracian king Polymestor after her son is murdered in violation of “*xenia*, the sacred law of hospitality”—a sin traditionally avenged by the Furies, whom both Margaret and Hecuba resemble (95). What goes unexplicated in Tassi’s essay is that *xenia* derives from the Greek *xenos*: “foreign, stranger” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary* 1544). A violation of *xenia* is thus wrongful treatment of the outsider, so that the word is all the more appropriate to Margaret’s case.

¹²⁷ The distinction is not necessarily a happy one. In *3 Henry VI*, Henry is fatally stabbed by Richard after predicting that many will rue the day of Richard’s birth. Joan Puzel goes to the stake in *1 Henry VI*; Peter of Pomfret is sentenced to hang in *King John*; Cassandra of Troy is famously unheeded in *Troilus and Cressida*. Margaret suffers a form of this dismissal, according to Madonne M. Miner: despite Margaret’s demonstration to Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York that “years of sterile widowhood” lie in their future, they “do not perceive Margaret’s function; with Richard, they mock her and force her from the stage” (41–42).

prophetic status is counterbalanced by her occupation of an ambiguous moral space. On the one hand, she acts as a traditional announcer of doom, an early modern counterpart of biblical figures like Ezekiel who proclaim divine judgment on the ruthless, including those in high places: “therefore will I make thee a reproche among the heathen, and to be a mockyng in all landes. . . . Beholde the rulers of Israel, euery one in thee [was redy] to his power to shed blood” (Ezek. 22:4, 6; interpolation in original). On the other hand, her position as agent of righteous justice is tainted by her blatantly self-conscious role as a Lancastrian Fury and by her grim delight in the Yorkists’ dark prospects, and her rhetorical performance bespeaks a level of artfulness that, ironically, evokes her nemesis Richard’s calculating personality. Given the moral ambiguity, Margaret is a more complicated prophetic figure than Paulina, whose blunt rhetoric is employed in the service of another, or Katherine, who acts in her own interest but without Margaret’s ruthlessness. In his Margaret, Shakespeare summons the past to stand in judgment of the present, even though the past has no immaculate moral standing of its own.

“Why hast thou vnquieted me . . . ?”: The choric specter

When Margaret makes her entrance in *Richard III*, she is initially unnoticed by the other characters; as Richard trades barbs with Queen Elizabeth, who is accompanied by her sons, Margaret comments in acid asides on the conversation.¹²⁸ For Shakespeare,

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Zauderer dissects Shakespeare’s portrayal of Margaret as an analogy to Elizabeth Tudor and aspects of feminine rule (“‘. . . Neither mother,’ ” 2015). Lynne Magnusson asserts that the play draws on schoolboy grammar lessons to create the women’s curses (“Grammatical Theatricality,” 2013). Janis Lull, in her introduction to the 2009 New Cambridge edition of the play, argues that the female characters evoke the three Marys of the old Resurrection dramas and help to turn the audience away from identification with Richard (9–12); they also echo the Witches in *Macbeth* (17). For Kristin M. Smith (“Martial Maids and Murdering Mothers,” 2007), the play portrays Margaret as a metaphorical witch whose corruption of England inflicts the demonic Richard on the nation. Katharine Goodland’s “‘Obsequious Laments’ ” (2002) argues that the mourning women embody communal memory. Nicholas Grene, examining prophecies and curses in *Shakespeare’s Serial History Plays* (2002), finds “an indistinct and uncertain pattern of crime and punishment” in the *Henry VI* plays but a “precise engine of destruction” at work in *Richard III* (152). B. S. Lee emphasizes in “Queen Margaret’s Curse” (1994) that Richard’s foe invokes upon him not merely disaster but damnation. In “Reflections of Power” (1986), Patricia-Ann Lee traces the

the overheard and annotated discussion is hardly an unusual device; he employs it to comedic effect in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and a variant of it—the witnessed but not quite heard conversation—for tragic ends in *Othello*. Yet its use with Margaret contributes to a quality unseen in these other plays, and in Shakespeare's portrayals of the Lancastrian queen in the Henry VI plays: the quality of a prophetic ghost. When Margaret finally reveals herself to the quarrelling Yorkists—"Hear me, you wrangling pirates, that fall out / In sharing that which you have pill'd from me . . ." (1.3.157–58)—Richard questions her presence, pointing out that she has been exiled on pain of death. Margaret, however, replies that the potential pains of death are less fearful than those of banishment; in lines that summarize her jeremiad against the house of York in general and Richard in particular, she says:

A husband and a son thou ow'st to me;
 —And thou a kingdom;—all of you, allegiance.
 The sorrow that I have, by right is yours,
 And all the pleasures you usurp are mine. (1.3.169–72)

Margaret's charge is theft; she has been robbed of family, throne, and honor, with Richard, Elizabeth, and the Yorkist nobles acting as the thieves and/or the beneficiaries of the theft.¹²⁹ In the mode of the Old Testament's judicial dictum of "[e]ye for eye, to the

development of Margaret's historical image into the one reflected in Shakespeare's dramatized she-wolf. For S. Carr Mason, the former queen is something of a "Foul Wrinkled Witch," but not quite (1997). Phyllis Rackin asserts that turning history into tragedy both enobles and disempowers the women in *Richard III* ("Engendering the Tragic Audience," 1993). Nina S. Levine (" 'Accursed womb,' " 1992) argues that the play portrays women's bodies as "the source of the destruction as well as the preservation of patriarchal lineage" (18). Harold F. Brooks ("Unhistorical Amplifications," 1980) sees the play's women as influenced by those in Seneca's *Troades*, with Margaret as Helen—"the odd woman out, the alien . . . hostile, hated," but also a victim (725). For Roy E. Aycock ("Dual Progression in 'Richard III,' " 1973), the play has two protagonists: "Richard's character and Margaret's curses" (78), with the latter aiding the former on a dramaturgical level.
¹²⁹ The Lancastrians, of course, are themselves famously the beneficiaries of usurpation, which is admitted by the entire line of kings in Shakespeare's plays. "God knows, my son," Henry IV tells Prince Hal, "By what bypaths and indirect crook'd ways / I met this crown . . ." (*2H4* 4.3.313–15). In turn, Henry V prays on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, "Not today, O Lord, / O not today, think not upon the fault / My father made in compassing the crown" (*H5* 4.1.289–91). And upon York's assertion that Henry IV attained the crown by rebelling against Richard II, Henry VI muses: "I know not what to say. My title's weak" (*3H6* 1.1.134).

for tothe, hande for hande, foote for foote" (Ex. 21:24), she calls upon heaven to see that the house of York suffers similarly: that Edward IV and his son die by "surfeit" and "untimely violence" respectively (1.3.196, 200); that Elizabeth meet her end as "neither mother, wife, nor England's queen" (1.3.208); that Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings be by "some unlooked accident cut off" (1.3.213); and that Richard be gnawed by conscience and suspicion, befriend traitors, be tormented with insomnia and nightmares, and be struck by the "grievous plague" and "indignation" of heaven (1.3.216–26).¹³⁰

Yet in an intrigue-ridden play that caps an intrigue-ridden tetralogy, Margaret makes no personal effort to bring about the downfalls that she so vocally anticipates—this from a woman who is notable in the *Henry VI* plays for her activeness in political and military affairs. In *Richard III*, preferring censure to conspiracy, she repeatedly invokes divine retribution, twice mentioning God specifically (1.3.211, 270) and twice referring to heaven (1.3.194, 214).¹³¹ Noting this lack of direct action, Jeanne Addison Roberts sees the Margaret of *Richard III* as one of early modern drama's "curiously passive" crones—no longer "the active schemer and brutal fighter" of the *Henry VI* plays, she is now "powerless," resembling a "venomous harpy" (130). Katherine Eggert concurs: Margaret turns into "a creature entirely of language" who "foreshadows and illuminates the main action but never directs it" (70).¹³² For Eggert, this change represents a demotion in the

¹³⁰ In her specific curse against Richard, Margaret refers to him as "the troubler of the poor world's peace" (1.3.220), echoing Elijah's accusation that King Ahab has "troubled Israel" (1 Kings 18:18). The former queen thus underscores her prophetic relationship with the future monarch. Shaheen does not note the similarity of language (341).

¹³¹ Lynne Magnusson points out that John Lily's Latin grammar habitually renders words in the optative mood with a reference to God—"God grant I loue" or "Wold God I loued"—rather than using forms such as "O-that and O-if," thus adding "an extra person to the dramatizing of a wish: it is not the direct action of a wishing-/ willing to act . . . [but] a mediated action, a suitor's plea that God intervene on his or her behalf" ("Grammatical" 36). This linguistic practice in a standard schoolbook of the period dovetails neatly with a theology that stresses awaiting divine justice rather than seeking it oneself. Interestingly, the "Proclamation Announcing Injunctions for Religion" of 1559 requires the use by Lily's grammar by all teachers and schoolmasters (215).

¹³² Yet Garber sees Margaret in something of a director's role—her screed is "the true plot of this play, despite the plural 'plots,' inductions, and stratagems so ingeniously devised by Richard" (*After*

course of the First Tetralogy: "After Joan [Puzel], females are stripped of conscious theatrical authority" (70). James R. Siemon likewise writes that the women of *Richard III* "appear more choric than active" ("Introduction" 18), and Phyllis Rackin states:

Assuming their tragic roles as pitiable victims, female characters are no longer represented as dangerous, demonic Others. The subversive theatrical energy of the peasant Joan is replaced by the pathos of suffering English queens. Margaret, the adulterous wife and bloodthirsty warrior of the Henry VI plays, is transformed into a bereaved and suffering prophet of divine vengeance for the crimes of the past. ("Engendering the Tragic Audience" 51)¹³³

Rackin's analysis implicitly mourns this transformation, thus privileging—at least in the universe of the stage—the means of agency over the end toward which that agency is directed. Better, it seems, to be an adulterous and savage monarch than a "bereaved and suffering prophet of divine vengeance." Yet a biblically oriented early-modern audience would hardly have seen the prophetic office as a demotion, and "proclamation over action" is almost a defining characteristic of the prophetic role. "Nearly all prophets are themselves impotent," Avraham Oz writes, "being usually too old or too weak to put their prophecies into effect" (28). The sharp-tongued Margaret hardly leaves an impression of impotence or weakness, but it is true that she herself does not act to further her desires.

The former queen's similarity to a dramatic chorus (which classically comments on the action but is distanced from it) is bolstered by the fact that even though she appears in England after being "banished on pain of death" (1.3.166), she shows no great

All 147). Marguerite A. Tassi remarks that the drama could be titled *Margaret's Revenge* (95). Tillyard also sees her as a key character: "Shakespeare gives it [the play] coherence through the dominant and now scarcely human figure of Queen Margaret" (212). This view probably overstates the case, however.

¹³³ Somewhat *contra* Eggert and Rackin, Kate Wilkinson argues in an essay on Michael Boyd's 2006–2008 staging of the two tetralogies for the Royal Shakespeare Company that "the construction of female gender through the octology can be seen as a single unfolding development of power. . . . [W]hen read in chronological order of historical events, the development of the women characters is positive, from voiceless oppression in *Richard II* to anguished agency in *Richard III*" (" 'A Woman's Hide' " 57).

concern about arrest or prosecution, nor does anyone attempt to lay hands on her despite her seditious harangues against the current regime. “I muse why she’s at liberty,” Rivers remarks after her exit from the scene, but no Brakenburys or Tyrrels are dispatched. On the dramaturgical level, of course, there is good reason for Margaret’s limited action: she never returned to England in real life, and thus involving the character in fictional anti-Yorkist activity might have represented too much tinkering with history even for Shakespeare’s taste.¹³⁴ Yet Margaret’s subtly distanced position vis-à-vis the dramatic action at large contributes to a sense of her as a specter—a sense remarked upon by several critics. Katharine Goodland, arguing that Richard cannot evade “the memory of the dead and the wrongs of the past,” points to how “Margaret materializes from the other side of the [English] channel” (45); Leslie A. Fiedler speculates that she “will disappear when she leaves the land which has never really been hers” (73). Garber compares her to Hamlet’s father, “a living ghost, a revenant of things past. . . . Although she is not literally dead, she comes from the past and from banishment to deliver a message of unrelenting wrath, anger, and revenge” (*After All* 147).¹³⁵ Siemon cites her “eerie appearances and disappearances—manifesting herself invisibly, pronouncing judgment” (“Introduction” 21) and notes that she “moves unimpeded through space and time . . . exiting when she pleases” (*R3* 333 fn).¹³⁶ To the Yorkists whose doom Margaret

¹³⁴ Siemon dates the scene in question to the year after the historical Margaret’s death in France (*R3* 176 fn). Of course, *Richard III* still can serve as Exhibit A of the playwright’s willingness to make historicity bow to theatricality: “Into the opening episodes come the funeral of Henry VI from 1471, Richard’s marriage with Anne Neville from 1472, the imprisonment of Clarence from 1478, and the last illness of Edward from 1483” (Smallwood 154).

¹³⁵ Garber elsewhere points out that modern productions of the play—e.g., Laurence Olivier’s and Richard Loncraine’s films—often pre-emptively return Margaret to the grave by cutting her character altogether: “Revived from the dead by Shakespeare to act as a monitory chorus in his play, Margaret is often now ‘disappeared’ by directors, as Richard continues to dominate the stage” (*Modern Culture* 116).

¹³⁶ S. Carr Mason speculates that Margaret’s presence alone might have led early modern playgoers who knew their history to see her as supernaturally empowered (27–28). The text, however, gives no strong indication of concern on the characters’ part. Lisa Jardine describes Margaret as “somewhere between witch and prophet: uttering truths no one else dare voice,

predicts, she is a redoubtable and unquestionable presence—and yet in a society in which inconvenient nobles and outspoken women find themselves in the Tower or on a scaffold, she seems curiously outside of danger, as if she were not present in the same sense that all about her are.¹³⁷

In this role, Margaret is the Shakespearean corollary of a truly unusual biblical figure: the dead prophet. Late in Saul's reign, the Israelite king faces a military threat from the Philistines; estranged from God, he receives no answer when he inquires of the Lord. Desperate for supernatural guidance, he consults a medium at Endor who calls up the spirit of the deceased Samuel, who says to the king:

Why hast thou vnquieted me, to make me be brought vp? . . . Wherefore doest thou aske of me, while the Lord is gone from thee, and is become thyne enemy? Trulie the Lord hath done to him, euen as he spake by my hand: For the Lorde hath rent the kingdome out of thyne hand, and geuen it thy neyghbour Daud. (1 Sam. 28:15–17)

The Torah, of course, forbids necromancy (Lev. 19:31); the prelude to the episode notes that “Saul had put away the sorcerers, and the soothsayers out of the land” (1 Sam. 28:3), and the medium is reluctant to deal with her client, who has arrived by night and in disguise (28:8). The entire encounter thus occurs in a space distanced from “normal” life. The prophet, “brought vp” from the grave, tells Saul that he has become the enemy of God and that his kingdom is being taken from him. “And moreouer,” the spirit declares,

accompanied by the curses which wreak . . . actual bodily harm on the protagonists . . .” (117). The 2011 documentary film *Richard III, An Arab V.I.P.* picks up on this thought, according to Adele Lee's description: the former queen's “appearance, mannerisms and setting endow her with all the qualities associated with a witch,” and she wears “a dress upon which are sewn shells, beads and coins—items commonly used for witchcraft and fortune-telling” (163–64).

¹³⁷ Margaret seems to possess the same kind of immunity that George Savran sees as typical of Hebrew prophets in their face-offs with royalty: “Despite the imbalance of power, the prophet is usually impervious to the threats of the king . . .” (162). B. S. Lee attributes Richard's indifference toward Margaret to the fact that she has “no political power” (20). Yet Richard is precisely the ruthlessly thoroughgoing type who would tie up such loose ends; Garber points out that he has the princes killed even though the act is “entirely gratuitous,” although she attributes the deed to “the habit of murdering” (*After All* 154). Irene Dash remarks on the odd fact that “kings are murdered to make way for kings but queens in number are permitted to survive” (*Wooing* 200).

“the Lord will deliuer Israel with thee into the handes of the Philistines: To morrow shalt thou and thy sonnes be with me, and the Lorde shall geue the hoast of Israel into the handes of the Philistines” (28:19). The king (and his sons) soon will be among the dead, and Israel will be defeated in battle—predictions that indeed come to pass.

The episode exhibits notable parallels to Shakespeare’s scene, not the least of which is Richard’s addressing Margaret as “Foul wrinkled witch” (1.3.163).¹³⁸ Like Samuel’s spirit, Margaret (who certainly can be described as “vnquiet”) suddenly appears in a realm where she does not belong, in the midst of a politically threatening situation: Edward IV is sick, the heir is underage, and Elizabeth distrusts the presumed regent (1.3.1–2, 11–13). Margaret declares that the kingdom does not belong to the currently reigning house, and her devout hope—literally devout, in that she asks God to bring about her wishes—is that the realm will pass into different hands. Further, just as Samuel says Saul and his sons soon will be “with me”—in Hamlet’s “undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (*Ham.* 3.1.78–79)¹³⁹—so Margaret points to her own offspring’s presence in the afterlife and prays that he will have Yorkist company: “Witness my son, now in the shade of death As it [your high position] is won with blood, lost be it so” (*R3* 1.3.266, 271). And as Saul is left “sore troubled” after Samuel’s spirit vanishes (1 Sam. 28:21), so Buckingham seems upon Margaret’s exit: “My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses,” he says (1.3.303–04).¹⁴⁰ Thus, in Margaret’s

¹³⁸ The medium in 1 Sam. 28 traditionally is called the “witch of Endor.” However, although the chapter headings of the Bishops’ and Geneva Bibles use the term “witch,” the actual texts refer instead to a woman with “a familiar spirit.”

¹³⁹ Samuel, ironically, does make the journey that the Danish prince describes as impossible.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Brutus’s words to the spirit that ominously promises to meet him at Philippi: “Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil, / That mak’st my blood cold, and my hair to stare?” (*Julius Caesar* 4.3.277–78). Macbeth likewise speaks of a “suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair” (*Macbeth* 1.3.135), and the spirit of Old Hamlet has a similar affect on his son, according to Gertrude: “Your bedded hair like life in excrements / Start up and stand on end” (*Hamlet* 3.4.117–18). I am indebted to Dr. Amy Tigner for this final reference.

disquieting and sudden appearance, the background of turmoil against which she speaks, and her message of death and dynastic upheaval, the play presents an early-modern English version of a biblical ghost-prophet narrative with which many in Shakespeare's audiences would have been familiar.¹⁴¹

Why does the playwright decide to summon Margaret out of her historical French exile, like Samuel from the grave? And if she is to return, why unhistorically alive rather than as an actual ghost, à la the vengeful Old Hamlet or Julius Caesar's portentous spirit? Elizabeth Zauderer raises the possibility that Shakespeare's use of "a historical queen, as opposed to a male figure," in this dramatic function has implications for seeing the play as a salute to Queen Elizabeth—references to Margaret's martial actions might have "evoke[d] . . . images of Elizabeth Tudor as leader of successful campaigns against England's foreign rivals" (147). Yet Zauderer acknowledges that any such analogy has its complications (148). Considering the character of the old queen, any deliberate dramatic echo would seem quite risky. Rather, like Samuel with Saul, Margaret can be seen as *the* representative of the old regime, now calling the ruling house to account for its sins. In the Endor narrative, Saul finds himself standing before the person whom he displaced as leader of Israel; and as pointed out in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, that transfer of power was emotionally fraught (although Samuel's ill feeling was directed against the nation rather than the ascending king). In the play, Shakespeare brings forth the historical center of gravity for the house of Lancaster—a personality with far more presence and perspicuity than Lady Anne in 1.2 and one that (unlike the murdered Henry VI and Prince Edward) could plausibly confront the Yorkists as a living soul, having left English life by exile rather than bier. "Let me put in your minds, if you forget, / What you have been ere

¹⁴¹ 1 Sam. 28 is one of the Evening Prayer readings for April (*BCP* 225).

this, and what you are; / Withal, what I have been, and what I am" (1.3.130–32). The words are Richard's, but they might very well be Margaret's to the Yorkists. The former embodiment of authority gives notice of judgment to the current one, despite its own human fallibilities.

As for the question of deploying a live Margaret versus her shade, Shakespeare clearly had the literary option of having the dead speak to the living. The early-modern poetic text *The Mirror for Magistrates* acts as a literary spectral parade, with deceased historical figures like Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III recalling how God "hath delt with sum of our countrey men . . . for sundrye vices" (65).¹⁴² Richard Plantagenet, for instance, recalls his lopped-off head being decorated with a paper crown: "And she [Margaret] for spite, commanded it anon / To be had to Yorke: where that it might be seen, / They placed it where other traytours been" (189). His lesson is: "Wherfore warne princes not to wade in warre, / For any cause, except the realmes defence . . ." (190). Why not have a ghostly Margaret, then? I suggest that the reason was dramaturgical. Ghosts are most dramatically effective in one-on-one confrontations; witness the appearance of the spirit to Brutus in *Julius Caesar* and Old Hamlet's conversation with his son.¹⁴³ If the idea is for a single figure of the old regime to confront multiple representatives of the current one (as Margaret does in both her scenes), the use of a living person avoids the potential draining of dramatic energy involved in having a ghost who appears to several people simultaneously and engages in a lengthy political conversation. Too, given the multiple apparitions on the eve of Bosworth Field, Shakespeare's use of a living Margaret avoids the problem of a surfeit of spirits.

¹⁴² A twentieth-century literary counterpart is Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), in which the dead residents of a small Illinois town discuss their lives in free-verse poems.

¹⁴³ In *Hamlet*, of course, the Ghost is seen in 1.1 by Marcellus, Barnardo, and Horatio and then in 1.4 by Marcellus, Horatio, and Hamlet. Thereafter, however, it is seen only by Hamlet. Likewise, Macbeth alone sees the dead Banquo, although the ghost appears during a banquet.

The parallel between the biblical and Shakespearean narratives also can serve to intensify the Shakespearean scene's atmosphere of foreboding and to bolster Margaret's credibility as a voice of doom; because Samuel's predictions of disaster for Saul's house come true, Margaret's likeness to him can increase the audience's anticipation that she too will be proved correct. Given that the biblical writer views the end of Saul's dynasty as divinely ordained, the parallel subtly supports the interpretation that Shakespeare sees the hand of God behind the rise of Richmond and the Tudor dynasty. In this case, Margaret may implicitly point her audience, whether male or female, beyond herself to the elusive source of her predictive power. "Prophecies, prophetic dreams, curses that take effect—all suggest that supernatural forces are involved in the events that Richard believes and claims are completely under his control," Rackin writes (*Stages* 63). In other words, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Richard's philosophy.¹⁴⁴ In 1 Sam. 28, the spirit of Samuel possesses preternatural insight; in this reading, Margaret does as well, whether she realizes it or not. In the Gospel of John, the high priest Caiaphas suggests that the extermination of the troublingly popular Jesus would be preferable to a lethal Roman crackdown on a city perceived as restive—"that one man dye for the people, and not that all the people perishe." The biblical narrator then comments, "This spake he, not of hym selfe, but beyng hye priest that same yere, he prophesied that Iesus shoulde dye for the people . . ." (11:50–51). According to the New Testament writer, Caiaphas unwittingly predicts Jesus's fate and its purpose as well; the gloss in the Geneva Bible says, "Christ doth sometimes so turn the tongues, even of the wicked, that in cursing, they bless" (1078).

¹⁴⁴ Underscoring the play's Endorian echo, of course, is the famous procession of ghosts that visits Richard and Richmond on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth Field. Just as Saul is left "sore afrayde because of the wordes of Samuel" (1 Sam. 28:20), so Richard awakens with a shriek after his dead victims repeatedly bid him "despair and die" (5.3.127, et al.).

Margaret's likeness to a biblical prophet's ghost might suggest to an early modern audience that supernatural knowledge or power is at work in the former queen, even if she is unaware of it—a theological undertone supportive of the Calvinist focus on divine sovereignty.

Further, the lack of active vengeance on the former queen's part, coupled with her invocation of heaven, exemplifies the classic New Testament injunction about revenge: "Dearely beloued, auenge not your selues, but rather geue place vnto wrath. For it is written: Uengeaunce is myne, I wyll repay sayth the Lorde" (Rom. 12:19). Christians are not to take justice into their own hands but rather should trust that God will repay wrongdoing with divine wrath—essentially what Margaret does in calling down doom but not seeking to bring it about. Of course, if the former queen technically obeys Rom. 12:19, she flamboyantly violates Rom. 12:14: "Blesse them which persecute you, blesse, and curse not."¹⁴⁵ Early modern audiences thus would find Margaret to be a thoroughly mixed bag as a theological and moral exemplar—a possible sign of the all-wise God at work, but far from a saint, even in some acceptably Protestant sense.

"Decline all this": Margaret as calculating rhetorician

When Margaret reappears late in the play, the scene bears a distinct resemblance to her initial advent. Once again she plays the invisible observer, listening to members of the house of York and commenting tartly before revealing herself; once again Elizabeth is a key target of her ire—"Thou didst usurp my place, and dost thou not /

¹⁴⁵ Regarding Margaret's predilection for *Schadenfreude*, Robert G. Hunter asserts that her answer to the question "[I]s God responsible for the evil which results in human suffering?" is "Yes, hallelujah!" (73–74)—again, a rather Reformed view. According to Calvin, hatred is wrong even in the (presumably non-violent) pursuit of a lawsuit: "On the contrary, when minds are filled with malevolence, corrupted by envy, burning with anger, breathing revenge, or . . . so inflamed by the heat of the contest, that they, in some measure, lay aside charity, the whole pleading . . . cannot but be impious" (vol. 2 666). The attitude described could hardly be closer to Margaret's.

Usurp the just proportion of my sorrow?" (4.4.109–10)—and once again she calls disaster down on Elizabeth's brother-in-law:

. . . at hand, at hand
Ensues his piteous and unpitied end.
Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray,
To have him suddenly conveyed from hence.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God I pray,
That I may live and say, "The dog is dead." (4.4.73–78)

Yet in contrast to 1.3, Richard is not initially present—or is he? There is an odd familiarity about the former queen's opening lines:

So now prosperity begins to mellow
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.
Here in these confines slyly have I lurked
To watch the waning of mine enemies.
A dire induction am I witness to,
And will to France, hoping the consequence
Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical. (4.4.1–7)

Siemon remarks upon the similarity between Margaret's phrasing and Richard's "glorious summer" and "induction" in 1.1, noting that Margaret's soliloquy sets off the beginning of the end for Richard in the same way that his words begin the initial dramatic action (*R3* 333 fn). Yet the likeness goes beyond Margaret's seasonal metaphor and her lack of an onstage audience.¹⁴⁶ Just as Richard made clear that the sunlit success of Edward IV's ascent to the throne soon would be overclouded, Margaret juxtaposes a golden "prosperity" and the putrefying death that waits to devour it; just as Richard schemed with

¹⁴⁶ On the link between characters and seasons, Janis Lull remarks: "In Richard's soliloquy, the winter of discontent, his home season, gives way to a 'glorious summer' that he does not want. Now it is autumn, the season most congenial to Margaret . . ." (20, 22). She also writes: "Alone among the characters, Margaret and Richard say things that only the spectators can hear . . . This makes them both more and less 'real' than the other figures in the play: more real because they are closer to the audience, less real because they break the dramatic illusion . . . Richard and Margaret oppose each other as if across a crowded room, speaking over the heads of characters who inhabit only the stage-play world" (20). Lull's assertion that the two royals are alone in this quality, however, overlooks the Scrivener, who famously mutters to himself and the audience about Hastings's fraudulent indictment: "Who is so gross / That cannot see this palpable device? / Yet who is so bold but says he sees it not?" (3.6.10–12).

his siblings specifically in mind (1.1.34–35), so Margaret has deliberately watched her foes; just as Richard described himself as “subtle” and “false” (1.1.37), so Margaret confesses that “slyly have I lurked.” Richard’s aim was to “set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate, the one against the other” (1.1.34–35); Margaret hopes to see “bitter, black and tragical” results for the Yorkists. In brief, in her soliloquy Margaret emerges as a kind of female, Lancastrian Richard, one who anticipates harm befalling others and takes pleasure in the prospect. This aspect shows itself aesthetically as well: the self-conscious craft of Margaret’s rhetoric likens her simultaneously to both the more poetic of the Hebrew prophetic writers and to her Yorkist foe. Shakespeare’s picture of a female prophet thus complicates itself: one may prophesy and prophesy, and still be like a villain.

The similarity of the two characters has not gone unmarked. In Richard P. Wheeler’s view, “Margaret finds the same cruel delight in her bloodthirsty success that Richard does” (306); Mary Steible writes that her “uncontrolled anger . . . implies the disorder that results from loss of control, and, in some ways, parallels the loss of control that leads Richard to his fated end” (13). Elizabeth Zauderer goes beyond the emotional to the physical, writing that descriptions such as “wrinkled witch” and “withered hag” (1.3.163, 214) underline “the significance of physical attributes in the construction of character in a manner comparable only to Shakespeare’s construction of Richard” (148). In addition, Margaret manipulates her language to accomplish her purpose just as Richard maneuvers other people to accomplish his ends. In her interactions with Elizabeth and the Duchess, Margaret crafts verbal pictures of Richard as a ruthless “hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death” (4.4.48) and Elizabeth as a woman bereft of all that she has had—the former portrait reminding her two listeners that their grief has come from their own house, and the latter, like salt in a stab wound, exacerbating Elizabeth’s

pain. Richard, of course, manipulates Edward into imprisoning Clarence as a danger to the royal line; he physically positions himself with two bishops and a prayer book to pose publically as a man of “devotion and right Christian zeal” (3.7.102); and, most famously, he persuades Lady Anne to marry him. Of course, as the last example indicates, Richard’s artifice inevitably involves language; the conversation in 1.2 is marked repeatedly by Richard’s catching Anne’s rhetorical bullets in his teeth and spitting them back at her in such a way that she, not he, is the one struck.¹⁴⁷ The shadow that Margaret’s rhetoric casts on the floor of the stage, then, bears a distant but tantalizing resemblance to that of a certain “foul bunch-backed toad” (4.4.81).¹⁴⁸

On the most obvious levels, of course, Margaret remains Richard’s opposite number rather than his twin; likewise, 4.4 presents contrasts to 1.3 as well as similarities. As in her previous appearance, Margaret at first comments unnoticed by the other characters, eventually breaks into the discussion, and then holds forth on wrongs and retribution before she exits mid-scene, but the initial staging of the confrontation is reversed: Margaret opens the scene and is interrupted by the Yorkists rather than vice

¹⁴⁷ However, Lull argues that language is an area of difference between Richard and his female critics; there exists a “contrast between the formality of the women’s dialogue and the casualness of Richard’s speech. This difference in styles reinforces the thematic division between the women’s identification with the social group and Richard’s individualism” (22). Richard’s rhetorical style becomes a point of contention in a reader’s note in *The Mirror for Magistrates*. When some of the poet-contributors object to the meter of Richard’s fictional confession, one writer argues that, to the contrary, it is appropriate: “Seyng that kyng Rychard never kept measure in any of his doings, seing also he speaketh in Hel, whereas is no order: it were agaynst the *decorum* of his personage, to vse eyther good Meter or order” (371; italic in original). The rough style thus reflects the disordered personality.

¹⁴⁸ In something of a reversal of the argument made here, Rackin sees Richard’s verbal faceoff with Margaret in 1.3 as an example of “a major source of Richard’s theatrical power—his appropriation of the woman’s part.” He “commands the female power of erotic seduction,” most obviously in his bending Anne to his will (“Engendering the Tragic Audience” 54). In this view, Richard casts a Margaret-esque (i.e., feminine) shadow rather than vice versa. Richard can even be seen as Margaret’s metaphorical offspring. Kristin M. Smith argues that her unfeminine corruption of England turns her into a witch à la Puzel and brings about the Ricardian regime: “But while Joan conjures fiends, Margaret uses her murders of York and Rutland to (inadvertently) conjure a much worse devil: Richard, Duke of Gloucester. . . . Margaret ‘births’ Richard in the same way Joan ‘birthed’ her fiends: fed by blood and summoned by feminine language” (152).

versa. The overheard discussion involves Elizabeth and the Duchess of York rather than Richard, Rivers, and Grey, yet Margaret has little interest in female solidarity as such. “As she had done with her dead husband, the always singular Margaret dissociates herself from these women too; rather, this is her final triumph,” write Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancellia Shea (93).¹⁴⁹ Of course, much of what Margaret invoked in 1.3. has now come to pass, allowing the former queen to annotate the past rather than predict the future; having been “hungry for revenge,” she tells the Duchess, “now I cloy me with beholding it” (4.4.61–62). However, Margaret’s manner of conversation alters perceptibly between the two scenes. In 1.3—partly because of the larger number of listeners, partly because of the quick-witted Richard, and perhaps partly because the speakers are not yet worn down by grief—Margaret is forced to interact to a substantial degree with those present. In 4.4, she is far more in command of the situation.

As if in response, she adopts a distinctly more formal, structured rhetorical style:

I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
 I had a husband, till a Richard killed him.
 Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him.
 Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him. (4.4.40–43)¹⁵⁰

The additional unstressed syllable at the end of these lines creates a repeated brief pause, slowing the speaker and contributing to the measured rhythm. The speech has a incantatory style, with the Duchess’s reply—“I had a Richard too, and thou didst kill him; / I had a Rutland too; thou holp’st to kill him” (4.4.44–45)—giving the women’s exchange a

¹⁴⁹ DusiBerre concurs on the fractiousness in the play: “The forsaken queens . . . lacerate with their tongues not the men who have wronged them, but the women attached to those men” (280). Madonne M. Miner, however, sees the conversation in 4.4 as the culmination of a progression among the female characters “from a condition of bickering rivalry” to one of “sympathetic camaraderie. In the midst of loss, the women turn to each other” (45). Yet S. Carr Mason writes that Elizabeth, “though she asks to be taught how to curse, never curses; she argues with Richard on another level. There is no real joining of forces between Elizabeth and Margaret” (32).

¹⁵⁰ These lines are a classic instance of *symploce*, one of the rhetorical “figure of repetition”—a combination of *anaphora*, in which clauses begin with the same word, and *epistrophe*, in which they end with the same word (Rauh 79).

liturgical air. Just as priest and parishioners respond to one another in set phrases, so do Margaret and the Duchess.¹⁵¹ S. Carr Mason hears “a ritual of grief and anger that in its repetitions becomes a parody of the ritual plea for mercy, the Litany” (32); for Robert G. Hunter, the scene “has a choral quality which is, appropriately, as much ecclesiastical as dramatic, turning it into a kind of mass for the dead with the *Kyrie eleison* of Elizabeth set against Margaret’s *Dies irae*” (74)—a prayer for divine mercy versus an anticipation of divine wrath. Yet if the passage becomes a Requiem Mass, the purpose is not to help relieve the pains of the dead but rather to sharpen the pangs of the living.¹⁵² As Sister Miriam Joseph Rauh notes in a discussion of the rhetorical “figures of vehemence,” the passage exemplifies *anamnesis*—“a recital of matters past, most often of woes or injuries” (247–48). For Margaret, the past is a weapon—a fact that, along with the formal structure, becomes even more marked in her final long speech to Elizabeth. “I called thee then vain flourish of my fortune; / I called thee then, poor shadow, painted queen,” Margaret says (4.4.82–83), querying her counterpart:

Where is thy husband now? Where be thy brothers?
 Where are thy two sons? Wherein dost thou joy?
 Who sues, and kneels, and says, “God save the queen”?
 Where be the bending peers that flattered thee?
 Where be the thronging troops that followed thee? (4.4.92–96)

As Siemon notes, the questions adopt the *ubi sunt* formula of the Middle Ages (R3 341 fn). However, whereas Siemon specifically mentions the lament aspect of this motif,

¹⁵¹ Greenblatt observes that “an atmosphere of ritual lingers over much of *Richard III*, tinging the rhetorically elaborate expressions of grief and anger . . .” (“Richard III” 509). Sister Miriam Joseph Rauh, comparing Margaret’s style to that of Constance in *King John*, writes that the former’s “lamentations in the recital of her woes are rhetorical in the Senecan style, more formal, less varied, less human than Constance’s effusion of grief . . .” (262).

¹⁵² A major theme of Greenblatt’s *Hamlet in Purgatory* is that under the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, remembering the dead translated to relieving their postmortem suffering through Masses, prayers, almsgiving, etc. Katharine Goodland remarks that the play’s “mourning women repeatedly obstruct his [Richard’s] progress with their vigils for the dead” (41). The past and its business, in other words, get in the nobleman’s way.

Margaret's chant does not have the sorrowful air of, say, the Anglo-Saxon work *The Wanderer*; rather, she attributes Elizabeth's bereft status to "the course of justice" (4.4.105).¹⁵³ The passage can be seen as an inverted *ubi sunt*: rather than a mourner commemorating a world lost or ruined, Margaret embodies that ruin and invokes it in order to goad the mourner.¹⁵⁴

Margaret's relationship with time, in fact, is multifaceted—although the former queen "functions as a kind of Cassandra figure, predicting future woes," Maurice Charney writes, she also acts as "the voice of memory to remind Richard of his heinous deeds" and as "a kind of arbiter of history, setting the record straight for Richard and his henchmen" (*Wrinkled* 131–33). Like the Hebrew prophets with their references to Israel's history, Margaret makes use of the past in her denunciations of the present. Kirby Farrell suggests that the play involves "a verbal struggle to control the future," with Richard deploying "drunken prophecies" to further his schemes and Margaret (among others) "invoking a world to come which will confound and subsume Richard" (18). Richard's predictions, of course, are meant to function purely on the level of earthly intrigue, sans supernaturalism, persuading Edward that his brother Clarence is a menace to the royal heirs.¹⁵⁵ Margaret, by contrast, actually invokes the heavens against her foe. Both characters, however, deliberately use the future as a weapon against their opponents.

¹⁵³ Roy Battenhouse asserts that the "choral *ubi sunt*" of the mothers of Richard's victims "marks their recognition of the vanity of goods devoid of justice" ("King Richard III" 338), but such a reading may overstate their degree of insight.

¹⁵⁴ In *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Elizabeth's husband Edward IV recites a more traditional *ubi sunt*: "Where is now my conquest and my victory? / Where is my ritches, and royall array? / Where be my coursers and my horses hye? / Where is my mirth, my solas, and playe?" (238). However, Edward's mourning has the same self-focus that characterizes some of Margaret's utterances.

¹⁵⁵ In *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Clarence condemns the obscurity of the "G" prediction and tells his audience to "warne alle princes prophecies to eschue / That are to darke or doubtful to be knowen . . ." (234). Curiously, although Clarence condemns "false namde prophecies, / That go by letters, siphers, armes, or signes" (228), he argues for the trustworthiness of predictions that use animal symbols: "By knowen beastes thus truth doth playne declare / What men they be . . . / For God by beastes expresseth mens condicions . . ." (228).

Altering her rhetorical mode, Margaret continues:

Decline all this, and see what now thou art:
For happy wife, a most distressed widow;
For joyful mother, one that wails the name;
For queen, a very caitiff crowned with care;
For one being sued to, one that humbly sues . . . (4.4.97–100)

Margaret works her way methodically through Elizabeth's various statuses (wife, mother, granter of boons, queen, wielder of scorn, object of fear, issuer of commands) and disposes of them in balanced phrases. The passage's "exhaustiveness and formulaic nature"—only part of it is quoted here—"suggests the grammatical exercise of declining a word through different cases" (*R3* 341 fn).¹⁵⁶ In addition, the scene also is marked by rhyming couplets, including pairs that are split between speakers (4.4.24–25, 124–25) and several that are spoken by Margaret alone:

Hover about her [Elizabeth]; say that right for right
Hath dimmed your infant morn to aged night. (4.4.15–16)

Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet;
Edward for Edward pays a dying debt. (4.4.20–21)

Farewell, York's wife, and queen of sad mischance.
These English woes shall make me smile in France. (4.4.114–15)

Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse.
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (4.4.122–23)

The use of couplets, a poetic device unseen in the conversation in 1.3, contributes to the more studied rhetorical level of 4.4.¹⁵⁷ In sum, Margaret's speaking style in this scene is significantly less naturalistic than in her previous confrontation with the Yorkists. The overall effect is the creation of a character who is, paradoxically, elemental in her passions and consciously (even cold-bloodedly) artistic in her speech, a Richard of

¹⁵⁶ "It is very clear," Lynne Magnusson states, "that the main preparation or rehearsal ground for [the portrayal of] the queens and duchesses in *Richard III* . . . is not only the grammar school's rhetorical training and oratorical practice but also, and fundamentally, the early forms' drilling in and performative vocal recitation of grammatical declensions" ("Grammatical" 38).

¹⁵⁷ Rhyme is "relatively infrequent" in the play and is "used for emphasis," Lull writes (23).

rhetoric—an effect enhanced by her use of verbal devices familiar to early modern audiences from sermons and Bible study.

This rhetorical shift on Margaret's part aligns her with those biblical prophets whose work is marked by instances of particularly clear artifice—passages whose poetics display, in a literary context, the sort of conscious calculation that Richard employs in his constant scheming. Luis Alonso Schökel describes Isaiah's writing, for instance, as characterized by "a formal perfection and a particularity of style, achieved by numerous resources which he handles masterfully"; the prophet, whose work is "intensely rhetorical," wants to "create a particular reaction in his listeners: he wants to affect them, shake them . . ." (166). Of course, this comparison between Shakespearean and scriptural language requires qualification from the outset. The Margaret whom M. L. Stapleton describes as an expert in "sententiae and tropes of exhortation and imprecation" ("I of Old" 105) is herself a dramatic creation, and one who speaks in blank verse, so that describing certain of her lines as *particularly* crafted is to place them on a spectrum of already-existing artifice rather than sorting them into piles that can be plausibly marked as "natural" or "artificial." In similar fashion, biblical texts are the products of conscious decisions, so that a certain level of art—word choices, formal considerations, etc.—is intrinsically involved whether the passage in question is a straightforward narrative about an Assyrian invasion (Isa. 36:1–22) or a poetic declaration of judgment against the invaders (Isa. 37:22–29). For the reader of Scripture, this level-of-artifice question is complicated by matters of translation and background knowledge; poetry notoriously suffers when moved from one language to another, and the appreciation of any text depends partially on one's understanding of the original culture—a factor that becomes all the more important when that culture is unfamiliar, historically distant, or difficult to recover. An ordinary churchgoer of Shakespeare's day could hardly

be expected to make fine distinctions about Hebrew poetics. Yet one still can point to passages in the biblical prophetic literature that exhibit not only the kind of conscious craft seen in Margaret's declamations (which in turn employ the calculating turn of mind typical of Richard) but thematic similarities as well.

Margaret's conversation in 4.4 is most obviously marked by rhetorical questions ("Where is thy husband now? . . .") and parallelism ("For happy wife, a most distressed widow . . .").¹⁵⁸ An example of the former is seen in Isaiah:

Who hath measured the waters in his fist? who hath measured heauen with his spanne, and hath comprehended all the earth of the worlde in three measures? who hath wayed the mountaynes and hylles in a ballaunce? Who hath directed the spirite of the Lorde? or who gaue hym counsayle, and shewed hym? Who is of his counsayle, and geueth hym vnderstandyng, and hath taught hym the path of iudgement? (40:12–14)

The writer delineates the divine nature in terms of dominion over creation as well as wisdom. Who can treat earth, sea, and sky as an artisan or merchant might treat goods—things that can be easily measured, and weighed? Who has advised and taught God, increasing his understanding? The answer(s): Only the God of Israel can deal with the world in such a way, and no one is capable of adding to his knowledge and wisdom. Isaiah's rhetorical approach is essentially negative: The implied response to the first set of questions is "No one (except for the Lord)";¹⁵⁹ the implied answer to the second set is simply "No one." Margaret's interrogation of Elizabeth takes a similarly negative approach. Where, the former queen asks, are her Yorkist counterpart's family, joys, supplicants, noble toadies, and attendants? The implied answer is "Nowhere"—they are dead or vanished.¹⁶⁰ In addition, the questions of both Isaiah and Margaret deal with

¹⁵⁸ The rhetorical question was known as the figure *erotema* (Rauh 246).

¹⁵⁹ The Geneva Bible's gloss on Isa. 40:12 says "God only hath all power . . ." (715).

¹⁶⁰ Sister Miriam Joseph cites Margaret's querying of Elizabeth as an example of the rhetorical figure *pysma*, in which the speaker "asks many questions requiring diverse answers, in order to gain attention, to provoke, to confirm, or to confute" (222). However, as noted, the questions in this case essentially have the same implicit reply.

power and potential agency. The biblical prophet depicts a deity who has the ability to do anything he wishes (what is impossible to one who can treat the earth and seas like sacks of grain?) and wisdom to match (what is not understood by one who has no worthy instructors?). The Shakespearean prophet, by contrast, portrays a queen stripped of sovereignty and efficacy. As Elizabeth says, remarking on the meaning of a king's death to his spouse, "The loss of such a lord includes all harms" (1.3.8). Elizabeth essentially has reverted to her old status as the Widow Grey of *3 Henry VI*: she has no spouse and no royal sons, and the machinery of the court is in the hands of a man—previously Edward IV, and now Richard—who can deal with her as he pleases.

However, an even closer biblical counterpart to Margaret's carefully constructed speech is Isaiah's use of parallelism. Typified by "several poetic lines of a roughly comparable length that stand in a semantic relationship," parallelism is the "dominant feature in Hebrew poetry"—so much so that students of the Old Testament's prophetic texts "confront hundreds of lines of speeches composed using parallel lines" (Petersen 25). One of the more familiar texts in Isaiah consists of several sets of partially nested parallelisms.¹⁶¹ The speaker asserts and then explicates his divine calling:

The spirite of the Lord is vpon me: for the Lord hath annoynted me, and sent me to preache good tidinges vnto the poore, that I might binde vp the wounded heartes, that I might preache deliuerance to the captiue, and open the prison to the that are bounde: That I might declare the acceptable yere of the Lorde, and the day of the vengeance of our God: that I might comfort all them that are in heauinesse: That I might geue vnto them that mourne in Sion, that I might geue [I say] beautie in steede of asshes, ioyfull oyntment for sighing, pleasaunt rayment for an heaue minde . . . (61:1–3; interpolation in original)

Isaiah says God has graced him with the divine presence and chosen him to preach good news to the poor. He further describes his mandate using (in the Bishops' Bible

¹⁶¹ The passage is one of the Morning Prayer readings for December (*BCP* 233). Jesus quotes from it in Luke 4:16–19, which is one of the Morning Prayer readings for February (*BCP* 223).

translation) five parallel clauses; he has been sent “that [he] might” (1) bandage wounded hearts; (2) proclaim deliverance and open prisons; (3) declare divine acceptance and vengeance; (4) comfort the downhearted; and (5) give certain things to the mourners of Zion. One could argue that the text extends the use of parallelism by subdividing the second and third clauses, so that the prophet both preaches deliverance and opens prisons, as well as declaring both a positive time and a negative one. The fifth clause in turn opens up like a biblical *matryoshka* doll. The writer is tasked with giving three things to those who mourn: beauty instead of ashes, “joyful ointment” instead of sighing, and pleasant raiment instead of a heavy mind.¹⁶² The full passage thus consists of multiple parallel clauses, some nested within others, the result of careful poetic calculation; the structure of the final verse in particular echoes that of the latter part of Margaret’s long speech: “For happy wife, a most distressed widow . . .” (4.4.98).

However, this is not the only such text in Isaiah. In an oracle charging Judah’s elite with oppressing and despoiling the lower classes (3:14–15), the prophet points to “daughters of Sion” who have “waxen proude” (3:16) and predicts that their days of overindulgent finery are numbered:

In that day shall the Lord take away the gorgiousnesse of the attire about their feete The sweete perfumes, and the bracelettes, and the mufflers, The bonnettes, and the sloppes, and the head bandes, and the tablettes, and the earynges, And rynges, and nose iewels: The costly apparell, and the vayles, and the wimples, & the crispyng pinnes, And the glasses, and the fine linnen, and the hoodes . . . (3:18–23)

The prophet rhetorically emphasizes the thoroughness of the coming judgment on Zion’s haughty and extravagant women by exhaustively enumerating what they will lose: perfumes, beautiful clothing, jewelry. Then he states that terrible reversals will occur: “And in steade of good smell there shalbe stincke, and in steade of their girdle a rent, and

¹⁶² A twentieth-century translation speaks of “a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit” (*New Revised Standard Version*).

for well set heere there shalbe baldnesse, in steade of a stomacher a sacke cloth, & [sunne] burnyng for beautie. Thy men shal perishe with the sword, and thy valiaunt souldiours in the battayle . . .” (3:24–25; interpolation in original). As in Isa. 61:3, the writer uses balanced phrases to press his point: Foul odors will replace fair ones; baldness will replace sleek coiffures; sackcloth will replace fine clothing; burned flesh will replace beauty. Nor will the devastation end with the women’s material possessions: Blades will cut down the men in their lives, and war will devour their troops. Although Isaiah speaks to many individuals and Margaret to one, their speeches are remarkably similar both in target (female) and form (a series of paired parallel clauses—instead of X, there will be Y) as well as the overall image being drawn: women going from pride and privilege to bereavement, dispossession, and powerlessness, left to grieve the bloody deaths of their men.

Thus, in Margaret’s calculated use of verbal devices such as parallelism and ritualistic rhetorical questions, Shakespeare’s former queen follows in the footsteps of biblical writers who took a crafted approach to their work. In the view of various critics, however, much of what has been said about Margaret could apply to *Richard III* as a whole. “The repetitive verbal patterns define and confirm the thematic structure of the action: all those figures which relentlessly create symmetrical structures are part of the overall pattern of curse/fulfillment, deed/consequences, crime/punishment,” writes Inga-Stina Ewbank (59–60). For Lull, the play’s style is appropriate “because its subject, the end of a long and necessarily repetitious civil war, fits the repetition-with-variation that lies at the heart of formal rhetoric” (22). Robert B. Pierce remarks: “The tone of the play is lofty and severely ornate. Emotional climaxes use a highly stylized language that almost completely obscures individual voices . . .” (91); in addition, “the patterned severity” of

certain characters' language "suggests the order that Richard tries to destroy" (119). The Margaret of verbal craft and formality, then, is a microcosm of the play that she inhabits.

Margaret's use of the prophets' rhetorical palette imbues her with a faintly holy color, yet the stylistic devices that, in her speeches, echo the work of holy men also subtly evoke the traits of the decidedly unholy Richard—something from which Shakespeare's original audiences might have drawn two lessons. For the historically aware (and perhaps the cynical), the likeness might have recalled the fact that both sides in England's (un)civil war let slip similar kinds of havoc and could be impugned with similar charges of rebellion against anointed kings. A rose by any other color still stank of death—a truth underlined by Richard's citing of "the faultless blood of pretty Rutland" and Margaret's riposte of "my lovely Edward's death" (1.3.177, 191). For the theologically minded (at least those of a less Calvinist bent), the similarity was a reminder of the importance of free will: the creativity of mind and tongue that God bestowed on humanity could be turned to plotting worthy of the demonic or praise worthy of the divine, all depending on the decision of the individual bearer of the *imago Dei*.

"[A] sodayne vtter destruction shall come vpon thee": Announcer of doom

Although Margaret's oratorical style resembles that of the Old Testament prophets, the more important resemblance is not in rhetoric but in the end to which the rhetoric is used. Margaret's major claim to prophetic status lies in her role as announcer—or perhaps invoker—of doom. "Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?" she says. "Why, then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses" (1.3.194–95). Her lines, M. L. Stapleton remarks, "carry enough rhetorical weight to blister the whitewash off a medieval church wall . . ." ("I of Old" 126). As noted previously, she wishes that Edward IV and his namesake die, that Elizabeth be robbed of position and family, that the Yorkist nobles die unnatural deaths, and that Richard especially suffer the

wrath of heaven. Such fates, she asserts, are deserved for the wrongs suffered by the house of Lancaster: her loss of “honor, state and seat” and subsequent “woeful banishment” (1.3.111, 192), the killing of Henry VI and his son Prince Edward (1.3.118–19), and Clarence’s desertion of Warwick in his renewed support for Edward IV (1.3.134–36). The sins that provoke her castigation, therefore, are those of political violence—intensely personal to Margaret, of course, but committed on a field of (dis)honor broader than mere personal conflict. The biblical prophets predict doom on many grounds—idolatry, oppression of the vulnerable, etc.—but one prominent complaint involves bloody-handedness and self-serving in the pursuit of advantage, power, or dominion. Margaret thus becomes an embodied signifier of the moral limits of the quest for power, and of the peril of crossing those lines—an ironic role, since her own hands are far from clean.

Ironically, some scattered instances of this theme of political ruthlessness in the Bible concern nations that have overstepped their mandate as instruments of divine punishment of Israel for its national sins, thus putting God in the position of disciplining his own discipliners-by-proxy. In an oracle in Isaiah, God castigates the Babylonians: “I was so wroth with my people, that I punished myne inheritance, and gaue them into thy power, neuerthelesse thou shewedst them no mercy, but euen the very aged of them diddest thou oppresse right sore with the yoke” (Isa. 47:6). God turned Judah over to the Babylonians in punishment for its national sins, but the conquerors went beyond the pale, even abusing the elderly.¹⁶³ These excesses will now be punished: “Heare nowe therefore thou delicate one that sittest so carelesse Mischiefe shall fal vpon thee, which thou shalt not be able to put of, a sodayne vtter destruction shall come vpon thee

¹⁶³ “They abused God’s judgments, thinking that he punished the Israelites, because he would utterly cast them off, and therefore instead of pitying their misery, thou didst increase it” (Geneva Bible 723). A thematically similar gloss on Zech. 1:15 says “the enemy would have destroyed them [God’s people] also, and considered not the end of my [God’s] chastisements” (931).

or euer thou be ware” (47:8, 11). The Babylonians are currently without care, but unavoidable disaster is about to strike.

This theme of judgment for political/military violence also is found in more elaborated forms. One of the more obscure examples, but one with surprising similarities to Margaret’s screed, is the Book of Obadiah. Addressed to Edom—a nation linked in the Bible to Esau, brother of the patriarch Jacob—the one-chapter text declares: “And thy strong men . . . shalbe afraid: because euey one of the mout of Esau shalbe cut of by slaughter. For thy crueltie against thy brother Iacob shame shall couer thee, and thou shalt be cut of for euer” (vv. 9–10). God plans to strike the Edomites, shaming and devastating the nation. Further, the disaster is linked to treachery: “All the men of thy confederacie haue driuen thee to the borders, the men that were at peace with thee haue deceaued thee, and preuailed against thee . . .” (v. 7). The Edomites’ allies turn against and deceive them. What sparks this prediction of divine judgment? Obadiah points to Edom’s behavior during an invasion of Judah by unnamed foreigners: “When thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the straungers caried away his substaunce, and straungers entred into his gates, and cast lottes vpon Hierusalem, euen thou wast as one of them. . . . [N]either shouldest thou haue reioyced ouer the childre of Iuda in the day of their destruction . . . Thou shouldest not haue entred into the gate of my people in the day of their destruction, neither shouldest thou haue . . . layd handes on their substaunce in the day of their destruction . . .” (vv. 11–13). The picture is one of taking advantage of others’ misfortune: standing aside during the invasion and plundering, joining in the pillaging. The punishment will be reciprocal: “as thou hast done, it shalbe done to thee, thy rewarde shall returne vpon thyne head” (v. 15).

Margaret’s condemnation of the Yorkists in 1.3 bears many of the marks of Obadiah’s oracle against the Edomites. According to Margaret, she has been plundered

of husband, son, kingdom, and allegiance (1.3.170); she accuses Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings of being “standers-by” during the killing of her son Edward (1.3.209–11); she hopes that Richard will suspect his friends of disloyalty and take traitors as his friends (1.3.222–23). Curiously, both Margaret and her biblical counterpart employ images of height and birds. The former queen warns Dorset, “They that stand high have many blasts to shake them, / And if they fall, they dash themselves to pieces” (1.3.258–59); she tells Richard, “Your aerie buildeth in our aerie’s nest” (1.3.269). Obadiah says of Edom: “The pride of thine heart hath deceaved thee, thou that dwellest in the cleftes of the rockes, whose habitation [is] hie Yea though thou exalt thy selfe as the egle, and make they nest among the starres, thence wil I bring thee downe, sayth the Lorde” (vv. 3–4; interpolation in original).¹⁶⁴ In both instances, the audiences are described in terms of loftiness, pride, and resemblance to birds of prey. England’s reigning house is the early-modern Christian counterpart of a pagan people who have backstabbed their kin to feather their own nest and now are can expect to tumble from their high perch.

A similar and more complexly structured example is the group of oracles that opens the Book of Amos. Systematically addressing the nations neighboring Judah and Israel—the methodical nature of the presentation calls to mind Margaret’s speech to Elizabeth in 4.4.97–104—the prophet condemns each for its actions against another people. “Thus sayth the Lord, For three wickednesses of Damascus, and for foure I will not spare her: because they haue threshed Gilead with iron flaes. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it shall deuoure the palaces of Benhadad” (1:3–4). God declares that the sins of Damascus (a synecdoche for the kingdom of Aram) have

¹⁶⁴ In his examination of this Shakespearean conversation, Shaheen cites Ezek. 17:3, 22, which refer to an eagle and to the top branches of cedars, but he does not mention Obadiah (342).

provoked judgment.¹⁶⁵ The wrongdoing cited is the subjection of the Israelite region of Gilead to “thresh[ing] . . . with iron flaes,” an agricultural metaphor suggesting brutal beating. For this, the Lord says, the royal palaces of Damascus will be destroyed. The prophet proceeds to address Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab with the same poetic formula of judgment, accusation, and sentence. The Philistines of Gaza are condemned because they “caried away prisoners into captiuitie to shut them vp in Edom” (1:6); the Phoenicians of Tyre “shut the whole captiuitie in Edom, and haue not remembred the brotherly couenaunt” (1:9); Edom “pursued his brother with the sworde, and did cast of al pitie, and in his anger spoyled him continually” (1:11); the Ammonites “ript vp the women with childe of Gilead, that they might enlarge their borders” (1:13); Moab “burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime” (2:1). Each crime is that of political/military ambition run amok: misuse of prisoners, violation of treaty obligations, pitiless bloodshed, killing of pregnant women, and desecration of the dead.¹⁶⁶

Margaret’s declamation in this particular Isaiah-Obadiah-Amos register implicitly paganizes the house of York, aligning it with the idolatrous nations surrounding Israel whose temporary ascendancy cannot preclude a disastrous fall. Richard’s pious posturing with the two bishops in 3.7 thus becomes even more hollow; he may appear to be a “Christian prince” and a “holy man” (3.7.95, 98), but his actions have placed him in the same dock occupied by the opportunistic and violent—and doomed—enemies of ancient Israel. In addition, Margaret’s words invite early modern audiences to act as critical thinkers on a national or international level; in criticizing the doings of England’s

¹⁶⁵ The construction “for three . . . and for foure” is a literary device seen elsewhere in Scripture—for instance, “These sixe thinges doth the Lorde hate, and the seuenth he vtterly abhorreth . . .” (Prov. 6:17) and “There be three thynges whiche are wonderfull to me, yea foure whiche passe my vnderstandyng . . .” (Prov. 30:18).

¹⁶⁶ Biblical scholar Herbert Marks cites this passage as an example of the “magnificent rhetoric” of Amos, whom he describes as “supreme among the Twelve [Minor Prophets]” (222).

reigning house, she raises the possibility that one might stand in judgment of one's own rulers. In *Henry V*, the disguised monarch remarks before the Battle of Agincourt, "Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented as in the King's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honourable," to which the soldier Michael Williams retorts: "That's more than we know" (*H5* 4.1.126–29). As it happens, Williams is primarily concerned about the potential eternal consequences of dying in a wrongful cause, but his statement involves an implicit judgment upon (or at least a questioning of) the French campaign, and this by a mere commoner—a radical idea indeed for early modern England. David Harris Sacks notes that Francis Bacon praised the giving of political counsel, but "for Bacon, the giving of this sort of counsel belonged to duly appointed counsellors . . . or to peers and courtiers, not to the elected representatives of the people" (125). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Elizabeth—piqued at lawmakers' previous pressure on her to marry—made it clear that members of Parliament "should do well to meddle with no matters of State, but such as should be propounded unto them . . ." (quoted in Sacks 124). How much less welcome, then, would criticism from the people themselves have been? To gauge the official attitude about riffraff trying to help steer the ship of state in a public manner, one need look no further than the infamous case of John Stubbs, a Puritan who lost his right hand in 1579 for publishing a pamphlet objecting to an English-French royal marital alliance (McDonald 314). The intimation in *Richard III*, then, that someone outside the approved circles (and a woman at that) might condemn the self-interested violence of the authorities has a radical edge—yet in doing so, Margaret follows in prophetic footsteps that provide such an act with a cachet of biblical approval.

"To watch the waning of mine adversaries": The prophetic as personal

The content of Margaret's speeches, finally, raises the question of (im)partiality and how this affects her standing as a biblical-style prophet. One cannot argue that

Margaret represents disinterested justice. John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen note that although the early-modern dramatist Thomas Heywood “identified her as one of the nine female worthies of England,” Shakespeare “not only perpetuated the received view” of historians Polydore Vergil and Edmund Hall but reworked it to focus on (among other things) the queen’s “hot temper, cruelty and vengefulness” (141). Any audience familiar with the First Tetralogy knows Margaret as an active, even savage Lancastrian partisan, as witness her participation in the mocking and stabbing of Richard Plantagenet in 3 *Henry VI*.¹⁶⁷ In *Richard III*, her opening lines are a *sotto voce* prayer that Elizabeth’s happiness as queen will be “lessened” because “[t]hy honour, state and seat is due to me” (1.3.110–11), and this personal element dominates her discourse in both 1.3 and 4.4.¹⁶⁸ Her attitude is quite at odds with the Christian ideas of forgiving one’s enemies, turning the other cheek, and controlling the tongue. The official homily “A Sermon Against Contention and Brawling” admonishes:

He that hath been a railing scolder, now let him be a sober counsellor.
He that hath been a malicious slanderer, now let him be a loving comforter. . . . He that hath abused his tongue in cursing, now let him use it in blessing. He that hath abused his tongue in evil-speaking, now let him use it in speaking well. All bitterness, anger, railing, and blasphemy, let it be avoided from you. (*Homilies* 139–40)

¹⁶⁷ Michael Ratcliffe describes Patricia Routledge’s Margaret in a 1984 RSC production as “wrapped in a huge Lancastrian flag” (quoted in Wilkinson “*Richard III* on Stage” 59). Commenting on the conversation in 4.4, Liebler and Shea write, “Margaret revels in the unhappiness of those who hurt her as *she has done throughout the action of the plays . . .*” (94; emphasis added). Adele Lee points out that the movie *Richard III, An Arab V.I.P.* opens with a shot of actress Amal Omran: “‘I am Margaret,’ she announces . . . ‘you needn’t be concerned about me: we lost’ ” (163)—a line that underscores the character’s clannish self-identification.

¹⁶⁸ This egoism reinforces the previously noted resemblance between Margaret and Richard. Both are immensely self-focused, the difference being that Margaret does pursue the interests of others—to a certain degree her husband, and to a greater degree her son—as well as her own. By contrast, Richard is purely self-centered and willing to have his closest kin murdered to achieve his ends—a somewhat quixotic act, as Robert G. Hunter points out, given that the house of York is “his natural power base” (88). As Marilyn L. Williamson remarks, Richard is “more unnatural than Margaret” because he is “quite devoid of the ability to love” (“When” 53).

Barring the masculine pronouns, the homily almost could be personal spiritual counsel directed at Margaret. “Railing scolder” certainly describes the former queen better than “sober counsellor,” and she has little loving comfort for the house of York.¹⁶⁹ James R. Siemon goes so far as to say, “Any ethical or political vision transcending feudal clan loyalties and competitive grudges lies beyond her” (“Introduction” 21). In contrast, the Old Testament prophets are almost by definition other-focused—the other being, most obviously, God and/or their audience. The prophet’s message or miraculous act is not typically partisan or self-beneficial; classically, he proclaims hope and reassurance, calls for virtue and righteousness, or denounces wrongdoing—the last of these activities being famously uncondusive to personal popularity, advancement, and perhaps longevity. At various points, for instance, Jeremiah is beaten (20:2, 37:15), threatened with death by religious leaders (26:8), sought for arrest by royal officials (36:26), and left to die in a mud-filled cistern (38:6). In certain instances, however, prophets do speak or act in ways that focus more on themselves than is frequently the case. Even in her self-focus, then, Margaret retains her prophetic mantle, although in this aspect of the role she comes dangerously close to blurring the line between the prophet who invokes divine action in a righteous (but self-involved) cause and the witch who attempts to manipulate supernatural power for personal advantage.

A typical biblical example of prophetic self-involvement is the encounter, discussed in Chapter 3, between Amos and the priest Amaziah. When the latter orders the seer to return to his native Judah and cease preaching at the royal shrine in the northern kingdom of Israel, Amos replies: “Therefore thus sayth the Lorde, Thy wyfe

¹⁶⁹ Writing about Margaret, Cox and Rasmussen argue that “to condemn her as a ‘railer,’ ” as occurs in *3H6* 5.5.38, “is to perpetuate the miosogynistic response to women who speak out in the presence of men” (147). However, the two critics themselves admit on the same page that York’s famously caustic description of Margaret in *3H6* 1.4 as a French she-wolf, among other things, is not beyond the pale. The sobriquet “railer” thus certainly seems reasonable by comparison.

shalbe an harlot in the cite, and thy sonnes and thy daughters shall fall by the sworde, and thy land shalbe deuided by line, and thou shalt die in a polluted land . . .” (7:17).¹⁷⁰ On the surface, at least, the prophet’s words are similar in form and tone to Margaret’s curses against the Yorkists; each speaker references God in the context of a doom spoken against the speaker’s opponent(s). The Book of Jeremiah contains a number of similar passages. “The Lorde therefore spake thus of the citizens of Anathoth that sought to slay me Beholde, I will visit you, your young me shal perishe with the sworde, your sonnes and your daughters shall vtterly dye of hunger . . .” (11:21–22). In response to a death plot, God proclaims through the prophet that the schemers’ families will be struck down by weapon and starvation. After an important priest has Jeremiah beaten and confined, the seer declares: “For thus saith the Lorde: Beholde, I wil make thee afraide, euen thy selfe, and all that fauour thee, which shall perishe with the sworde of their enemies thou shalt go into captiuitie with all thyne housholde, and to Babylon shalt thou come, where thou shalt dye and be buried . . .” (20:4, 6). According to the prophet, God will bring terror on the priest and his friends; the priest and his family will be deported and die in a foreign land. Two other texts of this kind involve Elijah and Elisha. Elijah twice calls down fire from heaven on royal soldiers who attempt to take him into custody (2 Kings 1:9–12). In the Elisha narrative, a crowd of “litle children” jeer at the prophet, “Go vp thou balde head, go vp thou balde head.” Elisha then curses them in the Lord’s name: “And there came two shee beares out of the wood, and tare fourtie and two children of them” (2 Kings 2:23–24).¹⁷¹ In all of these instances, opposition to the

¹⁷⁰ “Thus God used to approve the authority of his Prophets, by his plagues and judgments against them which were malicious enemies . . .” (Geneva Bible 907).

¹⁷¹ According to Donald J. Wiseman, the Hebrew term that the Bishops’ Bible translates as “litle children” would be better rendered “youths” and is “used of servants or persons in early life of marriageable age” (198). The meaning of the insult is also unclear; Wiseman writes that the mockers may be telling Elisha to ascend to heaven as Elijah did earlier in 2 Kings 2.

prophet—sometimes expressed verbally but often in planned or outright violence—is met with predictions of death and/or exile made in God’s name (or, in the Elijah narrative, in actual death). The biblical accounts, however, often record only the prophecy and not the outcome.¹⁷²

To what extent, then, do Margaret’s curses have corollaries in the prophetic literature? As the examples indicate, there is clearly evidence of prophets invoking God in situations in which their own interests are at stake. In addition, the seers do not hesitate to call down the direst of consequences on their opponents: death, exile, destruction of the family line. Similarly, B. S. Lee notes the use between the ninth and twelfth centuries of “the liturgical Clamor or Malediction, a litany of curses from Deuteronomy or the Psalms, as a plea for divine justice on malefactors who disturbed the peace” (19). All of this is echoed in the behavior of Henry VI’s widow. Kirby Farrell writes about the theological justification of cursing by seriously wronged parties: “To suffer injury from another is to suffer effacement, while the aggressor appropriates the victim’s personal force, magnifying himself and his own strength. And so the victim’s curse serves to restore a static, just relationship in the time to come, forcing destiny and yet not violating the taboo against self-aggrandizement” (23). Yet Keith Thomas records that in witchcraft trials and writings on demonology, a successful curse, even if “deserved,” generally was looked upon as the work of dark forces rather than the opposite. “If the curse was provoked by a genuine injury, it is hard to understand why contemporaries should have been so reluctant to see the outcome as a divine judgement,” Thomas writes. “Yet reluctant they generally were . . . [Seventeenth-century writer] Thomas Cooper apparently saw no irony about declaring that, when the witch resorted to ‘invocating upon

¹⁷² A semi-exception is the bear narrative, which does not preserve Elisha’s actual curse or clearly indicate whether the maulings were fatal. Shaheen, incidentally, argues that “the bear in *The Winter’s Tale* can hardly be said to be based on” this passage (719).

her bare knees (for so the manner is) the vengeance of God' upon her oppressors, the resulting evil was nevertheless the work not of God but of Satan" (611). Cooper's words are almost eerily evocative of Margaret's actions, suggesting the ambivalence with which she might have been viewed by playgoers—her vehemence potentially erodes the empathy that her dispossession of place and family might evoke. The former queen certainly has suffered the effacement of which Farrell writes, yet concern about self-aggrandizement is hardly one of her traits. Further, certain differences complicate comparisons between her and the cited biblical prophets.

First, the maledictions in the scriptural examples are essentially reactive rather than active. Amos's judgment of death and destruction against Amaziah comes after the Israelite priest confronts him; Jeremiah's predictions come in the wake of arrest and the threat of death; Elijah calls down fire in the face of fifty-to-one odds. There is thus a strong element of immediate provocation and/or self-defense in the biblical episodes—something that is missing in Margaret's confrontations. "Here in these confines slyly have I lurked / To watch the waning of mine adversaries," the former queen muses (4.4.3–4), and although she never says outright that she has returned to England purely to deliver her maledictions and await their fulfillment, she seems to have no other reason to be there.¹⁷³ Further, to the extent that the biblical prophets act as ambassadors or messengers for God, one can understand them as reacting to offenses not against themselves (or at least not purely against themselves) but against the deity whom they represent. Victor H. Matthews, writing about ancient Mesopotamia, notes that those known as *ša sikkim* messengers "served as proxies for their monarchs. . . . Hosts

¹⁷³ On the dramaturgical level, of course, this is precisely why she is there, given that the historical Margaret did not return to England. In her desire to witness her adversaries' fall, Margaret is reminiscent of the biblical prophet Jonah, who predicts the destruction of the pagan city Nineveh and then waits nearby to see what will happen.

lavished them with food, clothing, and slaves, sensing that to honor a monarch's messenger was to honor that king himself" (25). The corollary would be that treating such a messenger contemptuously would show disdain for the monarch. *King Lear* employs this convention when Kent is put in the stocks for beating Oswald. "You shall do small respect, show too bold malice / Against the grace and person of my master, / Stocking his messenger," Kent protests (*KL* 2.2.128–30). Commenting on King Ahaziah's sending of troops for Elijah, who had earlier predicted that the idolatrous monarch would not recover from an injurious fall (2 Kings 1:3–4), Donald J. Wiseman argues: "Ahaziah is desperate to get a reversal of the prophecy against him and would use massive force if needed"; the king's act is thus an implicit rebellion against the Lord, and so "Elijah acted not out of private vengeance but for the Name of God . . ." (193). In contrast to this idea that biblical prophets are speaking and acting primarily for their spiritual liege and not themselves, Margaret is inextricably identified with the Lancastrians whose wrongs she calls upon God to avenge.¹⁷⁴ Kent "can vent clamour from [his] throat" (*KL* 1.1.166) and retain the audience's full sympathy because his condemnation of the division of the kingdom and the mistreatment of Cordelia serves no clear interest of his.¹⁷⁵ Margaret, on the other hand, excoriates the Yorkists less in terms of sins against God (or even the house of Lancaster) than in terms of sins against her own person. The "wrangling pirates" of York, she says, "fall out / In sharing that which you have pill'd from me" (1.3.158–59);

¹⁷⁴ Commenting on Margaret's exiting *Richard III* to be followed by Richmond, Harold F. Brooks writes: "The old type of vengeance, . . . perpetuating the Senecan chain of wrong and curse on royal houses, is embodied in her; it is superseded by vengeance which is God's, is just, and calls for no further vengeance, when Richmond is made the minister of chastisement" (722). Margaret thus incarnates an approach to retribution that is more pagan than Christian. Robert B. Pierce likewise sees her as "the voice of nemesis in a cursed land," whereas "Richmond and the Duchess of York embody the Providence of a redeemed land" (121–22). S. Carr Mason, rather than alluding to Seneca, views Margaret and Richmond as respectively representing "Old Testament revenge" and "New Testament reconciliation" (27).

¹⁷⁵ Indeed, like the biblical prophets, Kent puts himself in harm's way with his words. Lear evokes the dangers of a metaphorical dragon (1.1.123) and arrow (1.1.144) before flatly declaring, "Kent, on thy life, no more" (1.1.155).

“all the pleasures you usurp are mine” (1.3.172); “[u]ncharitably with me have you dealt, / And shamefully my hopes by you are butchered” (1.3.274–75). It is “my husband Henry” and “Edward, my poor son” who are killed (1.3.118–19), rather than “the king” and “the heir apparent.”¹⁷⁶ The wrongs for which Margaret seeks divine justice are indeed wrongs, and thus potential subjects for denunciations in the biblical mode—but unlike the Hebrew prophets, the former queen gives herself pride of place in the denouncing and thus tends to complicate the likeness.

On this aspect of Margaret’s actions, a look at the “imprecatory psalms” may provide insight.¹⁷⁷ In these poems, “curses and revengeful punishments are invoked upon the enemy” (Thomson “Book of Psalms” 1058); examples include Psalms 35, 69, 109, and 139, in part or whole (Sampey 2494). Derek Kidner’s assessment of their content rings eerily familiar to the reader of Margaret’s speeches: “Hatred is sometimes met with hatred, cruelty by cruelty” (27). Ps. 35 calls for disgrace for the writer’s foes: “Let them be put to confusion & shame [all] together that reioyce at my trouble: let them be clothed with rebuke and dishonour that exalt them selues against me” (35:26; interpolation in original). The writer of Ps. 69 wishes that his enemies “be blynded” and “their habitation be desolate”—“[l]et them be wyped out of the booke of the lyuyng: and not to be written among the righteous” (69:23, 25, 28).¹⁷⁸ Ps. 137, written in the wake of the Babylonian conquest, begins mournfully—“By the waters of Babylon we sat downe there: also we wept when we remembred Sion”—but ends with a gruesomely vengeful image of wartime

¹⁷⁶ Patricia-Ann Lee provides a possible historical rationale for this attitude: “During the final years of Lancaster’s struggle and decline, Margaret came to be regarded by most writers[,] and possibly by most of her husband’s subjects, as the leader of the royal party. Accounts spoke of *her* army, mentioned *her* whereabouts, and described *her* policy” (192–93; emphasis in original).

¹⁷⁷ Sister Miriam Joseph specifically mentions these psalms as well as *Richard III* and Margaret in a discussion of Shakespeare’s use of the rhetorical figure *ara*—cursing (259).

¹⁷⁸ The Geneva Bible interprets the blindness of 69:23 as a loss of judgment (586) rather than loss of physical vision.

infanticide: “happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast serued vs. Blessed shall he be: that taketh & throweth thy litle children against the stone” (137:1, 8–9). The material that is perhaps closest in tone to *Richard III* comes from Ps. 109:

Let his dayes be fewe: and let another take his office. Let his chyldren be fatherlesse: and his wyfe a wydowe. Let his children be vagaboundes and go a begging Let there be no man to shewe hym any gentlenes: nor to haue compassion vpon his fatherlesse children. Let his posteritie come to destruction: and in the next generation let his name be cleane put out. (109:8–10, 12–13)

The overall image is that of death, loss of place, rejection, and familial destruction—precisely the sort of fate that Margaret wishes on the house of York.

The Book of Psalms, of course, is not stereotypical prophetic literature; in the threefold division of Torah, Prophets, and Writings seen in early Christian and Jewish thought (Petersen 1), the Psalter falls into the last. However, the passages cited certainly are cut from cloth that can be found in the Prophets: appeals to God for the judgment of wrongdoers and/or the vindication of the speaker. In at least one way, however, the imprecatory psalms more closely parallel Margaret’s curses than does much of the traditional prophetic material: the tone of the former is personal in a sense that the latter’s frequently is not. The trademark phrase of the prophets is “Thus saith the Lorde”; as ambassadors of God, they are about the business of heaven. If, as discussed previously, they act as intermediaries for someone else, they are pleading that person’s case. In contrast, the imprecatory psalms generally concentrate on the writer’s cause. “Pleade thou my cause O God, with them that striue with me: and fight thou agaynst them that fight against me” (Ps. 35:1); “[t]hey that sit in the gate speake agaynst me: and they that drynke strong drynke [make] songes [vpon me]” (Ps. 69:12; interpolation in original); “they haue spoken against me with a false tongue. And they haue compassed me about with hatefull wordes . . .” (Ps. 109:2–3). As with Margaret, the use of the first person is constant.

On the other hand, as with the more personal of the prophetic material, Margaret's parallel with these psalms also is not precise, on at least two grounds. First, the psalmist sometimes indicates that his cause is also God's, and the Lord thus should intervene because he too is under attack: "For thy sake haue I suffered reprove and the rebukes of them that rebuked thee, are fallen vpon me" (Ps. 69:7, 9). Similarly, the writer of Ps. 139 speaks of those who "do speake vnto thee [God] in guilefull maner Do not I hate them O God that hate thee? and am not I greeued with those that rise vp agaynst thee? Yea I hate them from the bottome of myne heart: euen as though they were myne enemies" (139:20–22). To love the all-good God is also to detest what he detests. John Richard Sampey comments: "The champion of Jeh's [God's] people prays for the overthrow of His foes. The enemies cursed are men who break every moral law and defy God. . . . Thus the psalmists pray with God's glory in view" (2494). Similarly, the homily "An Information for Them Which Take Offence at Certain Places of the Holy Scripture" says we should not "be offended at such prayers of David, being a prophet as he was, singularly beloved of God, and rapt in spirit, with an ardent zeal to God's glory. He spake not of a private hatred, and in a stomach against their persons; but wished spiritually the destruction of such corrupt errors and vices, which reigned in all devilish persons, set against God" (*Homilies* 352).

Further, the writers of the imprecatory psalms often stress that they are innocent victims of the persecutors whom they condemn. "For without a cause they haue priuily layde for me a pit [full] of their nettes: without a cause they haue made a digyng vnto my soule. . . . False witnessse did rise vp: they layde thinges to my charge that I know not" (Ps. 35:7, 11; interpolation in original).¹⁷⁹ The psalmist's attackers have attempted to trap

¹⁷⁹ According to the Geneva Bible, verse 7 demonstrates "that we may not call God to be a revenger but only for his glory, and when our cause is just" (565).

him for no reason; they have entangled him in wrongful accusations. The author of Ps. 109 declares: "For the mouth of the vngodly and the mouth of the deceitfull is opened vpon me: they haue spoken against me with a false tongue. And they haue compassed me about with hatefull words: and fought against me without a cause. . . . Thus haue they rewarded me euill for good: and hatred for my good wyll" (109:2–3, 5). The writer is the victim of falsehood, hatred, and causeless opposition; his adversaries have returned evil and hatred for good. In contrast, Margaret's speeches to the men and women of York stress neither the godliness of her cause nor her own innocence. Although the former queen appeals more than once to heaven—"O God, that seest it, do not suffer it; / As it is won with blood, lost be it so" (1.3.270–71)—she does not try to argue specifically that God is on the side of the Lancastrian battalion. Nor does Margaret assert that her opponents have "fought against [her] without a cause." Indeed, when Richard and the nobles verbally pummel her for the paper-crown mocking of Richard Plantagenet and the killing of Rutland, she does not defend herself—even though, in *3 Henry VI*, Rutland dies in her absence and at Clifford's hands.¹⁸⁰ Instead, in what Nicholas Grene terms "a spirit of impenitence and disbelief" (152), Margaret merely questions whether the elder York's curse on her was so potent that the Lancastrians' catastrophic collapse was the "answer for that peevisish brat" (1.3.193), and she then returns fire with her own curses.¹⁸¹ As Roy

¹⁸⁰ Nina S. Levine argues that "Shakespeare makes an important alteration in *Richard III*, recasting Margaret and not Clifford as the schoolboy's murderer" (23). As Siemon notes, Richard's and Hastings's lines "creates a strong impression" that Margaret herself killed Rutland (*R3* 181 fn); Levine thus indicates that the accusation should be understood as accurate in the play's universe. However, I prefer a reading in which the two Yorkists are indulging in overheated rhetoric rather than one in which the playwright revises not only history but his own dramatization of that history. ¹⁸¹ Ironically, the assertions of guiltlessness in 1.3 come from the Yorkists, with Elizabeth disclaiming any wrongdoing against Margaret (1.3.308) and saying, "So just is God, to right the innocent" by plaguing the Lancastrians for bloodshed (1.3.181). A disingenuous Richard even cedes the former queen some of the moral high ground: "She hath had too much wrong" (1.3.306).

E. Aycock observes, this is “not a case of untarnished purity and innocence sent to destroy the Devil Richard”—rather, it is “one sinner pursuing another sinner” (74).

The self-focused mode of Margaret’s oracles, in which she is a Lancastrian sun almost effaced by the lowering clouds of York, thus goes beyond the occasional self-defensive note of the Hebrew prophets and ventures into the more personal territory of the imprecatory psalms—but even by that standard, the former queen comes off as something of a partisan Fury rather than a persecuted yet passionate seeker of biblical justice. Margaret “tarnishes the purity of the sacred,” Richard P. Wheeler writes, “for she serves God only as she serves her own gluttonous revenge . . .” (306).

Margaret occupies an ambiguous position in the line of Shakespeare’s female prophets, a liminal figure in a group in which Paulina and Katherine stake out the heroic territory and Lady Macbeth, the Witches, and Joan Puzel (as will be seen) occupy the more villainous ground. A comparison of Margaret and Katherine is particularly instructive. Both are intensely wrapped up in their personal plights; both are foreign spouses of English kings, staring at the dissolution of their royal worlds, calling for redress, and decrying powerful enemies with dramatic intensity. If one takes into account the Margaret of the entire First Tetralogy (and particularly *3 Henry VI*) rather than merely that of *Richard III*, Margaret is by far the more active of the two characters; this is the queen who presses her husband to defend their son’s right to rule, who leads English troops, who confronts the rebellious Richard Plantagenet, and who (at least in Shakespeare’s fictionalized history) risks death to beard the lions of York in their English den. Katherine, by contrast, is a woman on the defensive. Even before the end of Act 1 of *Henry VIII*, the long-married king has remarked to Anne Bullen, “The fairest hand I ever touched. O Beauty, / Till now I never knew thee” (1.4.75–76), and by the end of the subsequent scene, a gentleman has remarked of the queen, “The Cardinal / Will have his

will, and she must fall” (2.1.165–66). As any historically aware audience would know from the rising of the curtain, Katherine is a queen boxed in on a foreign chessboard; she cannot win the game. The critic’s temptation is to place Margaret on a pedestal for her activity and put Katherine in a corner for her passivity. Yet it is Margaret’s very use of her agency that renders her the less effective and sympathetic of the two in the prophetic task of speaking truth to power. When Richard Crookback reminds her that she mocked his father with a paper crown, “with thy scorns drew’st rivers from his eyes, / And then to dry them, gav’st the Duke a clout / Steep’d in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland” (R3 1.3.175–77), the former queen does not—cannot?—defend her deeds or even disavow Rutland’s stabbing.¹⁸² (One wonders whether some in the play’s original audience, disillusioned with the redoubtable and aging Queen Elizabeth, found Margaret an uncomfortable familiar figure.) In Cristina León Alfar’s view, “the women of *Richard III* pose a powerful and heart-wrenching critique of the potential for tyranny in a violent system of rule . . .” (83). However, Margaret’s part in that critique is undermined by her own willing violence—a thorough compromising of the prophetic authority otherwise exemplified in her biting eloquence and her undeniable courage in the lonely denunciations of her foes.

The former queen, in fact, occupies a space in which the prophetic office blurs into something suggesting witchcraft. “Margaret’s purpose conforms to a divine end,” Wheeler writes, “but her presence suggests what [Mircea] Eliade describes as the ‘magico-religious paraphernalia’ of ‘hybrid forms of black magic and sheer travesty of religion’ . . .” (306). In Shakespeare’s society, the possibility of supernatural activity in the

¹⁸² In a comparison of Medea and the Joan of *1 Henry VI*, M. L. Stapleton writes that the audience response to these two women’s violence “is necessarily vexed. One is invited to sympathize with the troubles of both characters and to decry the injustices perpetuated against them. Yet one is never allowed to ignore their occasional baldfaced evil” (“‘Shine It’ ”234). If such can be said about Joan, it is all the more true of Margaret, who is far more personally brutal than Joan.

natural world was generally granted, but the question then became: Is this seeming miracle or inspired utterance the work of God or Satan?¹⁸³ In any given case, the answer might be less than obvious. Similarly, from one viewpoint Margaret requests God to act in consonance with his expressed will for justice; but from another viewpoint, she attempts to manipulate the heavenly power into fulfilling her own will—an act that smacks of magical practice. In the old queen, then, Shakespeare creates an antiheroic figure who embodies the occasional difficulty of discerning religious truth that so occupied his contemporaries.

¹⁸³ A third possibility, of course, is that the event was explicable in ordinary human terms.

Chapter 5

“That I may pour my spirits in thine ear”: Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters as False Prophets

What is conspicuously present in *Henry VIII*, *Richard III* and *The Winter's Tale* is prophetic proclamation; what is absent is an invasive sense of the supernatural. Katherine's vision, the ghostly figures in the dreams of Richard and Richmond, the Delphos oracle, Paulina's protest against any idea that she might be aided by “wicked powers” in the course of “unlawful business” (5.3.91, 96)—such are the cameo appearances of the preternatural in these plays. The situation in *Macbeth*, a drama “rife with scenes of evil supernaturalism” (Miola x), is entirely different, with its bloody-haired specter of Banquo, Lady Macbeth's invocation of occult “murth'ring ministers” (1.5.48), and (most notoriously) the trio of predictive Witches. “Shakespeare makes use of the supernatural from time to time . . . but there is no other play in which witches and witchcraft are such an integral element of the plot,” observes Stephen Orgel (345). Stephen Greenblatt asserts that the Ghost in *Hamlet* is *sui generis*—“It does not have very many lines . . . but it is amazingly disturbing and vivid” (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 4)—but something similar could easily be said of the Weird Sisters. The manner in which the female characters of “the Scottish play” echo Scripture is also different from that seen so far in this dissertation. “Shakespeare's biblical allusions are almost always contrastive or ironic; they sometimes may seem almost blasphemous,” Hannibal Hamlin asserts (85), and here is just such an instance. Instead of acting as analogs of the orthodox seers of Israel, the Witches and Lady Macbeth echo the “false prophets”—those who are partisans of a pagan deity or who are presented as misrepresenting the God of Israel. Rather than rebuking injustice or pleading the cause of the marginalized, these women inveigle the play's title character (and in Lady Macbeth's case, herself) into a bloody

veneration of the “gods” of ambition and power. In so doing, however, they also participate in the roles of the orthodox prophet as witness to dynastic change (a role that can have its own ambiguities) as well as counselor and guide. Yet even as Lady Macbeth seeks to steer her spouse past everything “that impedes [him] from the golden round” (1.5.28), she ironically imitates Old Testament figures who feel inadequate to their tasks and receive supernatural empowerment—which in her case leads not to righteousness but to regicide. In a society in which religion and its practice are inextricably linked to political loyalty, the play’s threatening women, whose actions lead to the overthrow of Scotland’s reigning king, become stand-ins for the specter of Catholic opposition to England’s Protestant state and church. James I, whose claimed descent from Banquo places him in the line of monarchs predicted by the Witches, might also see an implicit warning about insufficient rigor in the cause of anti-popery.

“Let vs go after straunge gods”: The Weird Sisters

In the Witches’ verbal game of catch-and-toss that opens the play, the final line is “Hover through the fog and filthy air” (1.1.12), and one of the things that hangs in the atmosphere of the first two scenes, simultaneously unseen and overshadowing the talk of warriors and Witches alike, is the character of Macbeth.¹⁸⁴ Although the initial mention of

¹⁸⁴ In “Wicked Women in *Macbeth*” (1992), Dymphna Callaghan sees a play that features a “kingdom of darkness” that is “unequivocally female, unequivocally matriarchal,” but also one that features a “domestication of the forces of maternity” (358–59, 365). Sandra Clark views comic portrayals of the Witches as consonant with the hybridity in the play’s presentation of witchcraft (“*Macbeth* and the Weird Sisters,” 2008). Stephanie Irene Spoto argues that witchcraft trials, where many of the plaintiffs as well as defendants were female, actually afforded early modern women with a forum to voice their concerns (“Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power,” 2010). Joanna Levin uses Lady Macbeth to explore the emerging concept of hysteria and its link to demonic influence (“Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria,” 2002). Bryan Adams Hampton sees pervasive elements of purgation and exorcism (“Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilizing Process in *Macbeth*,” 2011). Ken Colston understands the play as an exploration of sin rather than crime, and marked by clearly Catholic thought, with a sliver of hope for Macbeth’s soul if not that of his wife (“*Macbeth* and the Tragedy of Sin,” 2010). Peter Milward perceives in the background not only references to the contemporary religious scene but also allusions to the Passion of Christ (“Meta-drama in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*,” 2006). Julia MacDonald considers how Macbeth creates a world in which time is out of joint (“Demonic Time in *Macbeth*,” 2010), while Kristen Poole sees his problem as one

the thane is cryptic enough—the Weird Sisters plan to gather “[u]pon the heath. / There to meet with Macbeth” (1.1.6–7)—Duncan’s conversation with the Captain indicates that the absent man has proven himself a valiant and loyal retainer. Yet just as feline and amphibian familiars call to the Witches (4 fn), they in turn, like the prophets of pagan idolatry in the Old Testament, call Macbeth to an unholy veneration of a golden “god”—the crown of Scotland. Before that encounter, Duncan’s briefing in 1.2 lays a dramatic foundation whose cornerstones are fealty and dedication. The wounded Captain depicts the Scottish loyalists as beleaguered by the “merciless Macdonwald,” his Irish troops, and a temporarily smiling Fortune (1.2.9, 14) until Macbeth cleaves the rebel chieftain in half and, with Banquo’s help, turns the tide against Macdonwald’s Norwegian allies. The Thane of Glamis is described as “brave,” fighting like “Valour’s minion,” as if he “meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha” (1.2.16, 19, 40–41). The bathing image is likely to be understood as one of simple berserker fury, so that Macbeth seeks to immerse himself in sanguinary death. Yet particularly in juxtaposition with the reference to Golgotha (one of the biblical names for the site of Jesus’s death), the phrase also can evoke baptism. A rubric in the 1559 Book of Common Prayer’s baptismal rite says, “Then the Priest shal take the Childe in his handes, and aske the name: and naming the Childe, shal dippe it in the water . . .” (145). The image is thus one of a washing that signals membership in a company dedicated to a spiritual King—a status

of rejecting the physics of John Calvin (“Physics Divined,” 2009). Adrian Streete detects echoes of Old Testament books and Revelation in the play (“‘What bloody man is that?’,” 2009). Mary Floyd-Wilson connects the Macbeths’ yielding to evil with ideas about witches’ influence on weather and humoral balance (“English Epicures and Scottish Witches,” 2006). David Lucking sees Macbeth as attempting unsuccessfully to bypass the social nature of language in his effort to appropriate the title of king (“Imperfect Speakers,” 2006). For Rebecca Lemon, the play’s anti-treason moral is less effective than one might assume (“Scaffolds of Treason in *Macbeth*,” 2002). J. Gregory Keller uses the Macbeths’ mulling of the murder to argue that the act of thinking has the potential to prevent acts of Hannah Arendt’s “banal” evil (“The Moral Thinking of Macbeth,” 2005).

much like Macbeth's vis-à-vis Duncan.¹⁸⁵ Whether viewed through a pugilistic or theological lens, there is a subtext of devotion to service in the scene's lines. Likewise, the picture of Macbeth attempting to "memorize another Golgotha" is subject to alternative interpretations. Who is being crucified on this new Calvary? If it is Macbeth, this implies that, like Christ, he is willing to sacrifice himself to fulfill the will of one greater than he is. Yet if it is the rebel force, Macbeth becomes the executioner, one willing to take life brutally. Again, in either case, the implication is one of deep dedication to duty—an implication further underscored by the phrase "Valour's minion," as if the Scottish noble were at the complete beck and call of some incarnation of martial bravery.

In the play's earliest scenes, then, the yet-unseen Macbeth and his almost palpable loyalty to his lord hover in the background. Yet when the Witches appear to Macbeth and Banquo with their greeting to the former, hailing him as Thane of Glamis and Cawdor and the one who "shalt be King hereafter" (1.3.48–50), the trio begins (or should one say "accelerates"?) Macbeth's conversion from one who bows loyally to the good Duncan to one who bows feverishly to a mental image of himself as king. The three initially have nothing to say to Banquo; it is only after he speaks again, describing himself as one who will "neither beg, nor fear, / Your favours nor your hate" (1.3.60–61), that they respond: "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (1.3.67).¹⁸⁶ In contrast, Macbeth is informed when he asks no questions about himself and ignored when he asks different

¹⁸⁵ An editor's note on the ceremony points out that the 1552 version of the service "makes the moment of baptism the first location of the calling of the child's name" (736). It is at the end of 1.2, after Macbeth has "bathe[d] in reeking wounds," that Duncan commands that he be greeted by a new name: Cawdor. Ironically, during the baptismal service, the priest asks the godparents: "Dost thou forsake the devil and all his workes, the vaine pompe and glorye of the world, with al the covetous desires of the same, . . . so that thou wilt not folow, nor be led by them?" (144). The play essentially asks Macbeth the same question, and his answer is "No."

¹⁸⁶ It is Banquo rather than Macbeth who first calls attention to the trio, although they initially ignore his queries, "lay[ing] their fingers on their lips, as if to signify that they will not, or must not, speak to *him*" (Bradley 315; emphasis in original).

ones; when he demands, "Say from whence / You owe this strange intelligence? or why / Upon this blasted heath you stop our way / With such prophetic greeting?" (1.3.75–78), the trio melts into thin air. As if the Witches are parodies of the the divine inscrutability associated with Calvinism, they say what they will to each man, but no more, and the paths of the two thanes diverge from this point on.

In their initial appearance to the Scottish nobles, the Weird Sisters echo one of the key negative motifs of the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament: the temptation to the worship of other deities. The foundational text, of course, is the first of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt haue none other Gods in my sight" (Ex. 20:3).¹⁸⁷ Israel's loyalty is due to Yahweh alone. So ubiquitous is this theme in the prophetic literature that David Petersen writes, "Only Obadiah, Jonah, and Haggai do not include overt polemics against the veneration of deities other than Yahweh" (41). Likewise, the "Homily Against Peril of Idolatry, and Superfluous Decking of Churches," declares that the Old Testament passages opposing "all idolatry or worshipping of images . . . are so many and plentiful, that it were almost an infinite work, and to be contained in no small volume, to record all the places concerning the same. . . . [C]oncerning none other matter did he [God] give either more or more earnest and express laws to his said people . . ." (161–62).¹⁸⁸ According to Deuteronomy, the possibility of violating the imperative of spiritual fealty might come in unusual forms: "If there aryse among you a prophete or a dreamer of dreames, and geue thee a signe, or a wonder. And that signe or wonder whiche he hath

¹⁸⁷ Calvin writes that one implication of this commandment is "the betaking of ourselves to his [God's] promised aid as the only resource in every case of need" (vol 1 329), a precept that Macbeth obviously violates in the Apparitions scene. The "Proclamation Announcing Injunctions for Religion" requires that "no person shall use charms, sorcery, enchantments, witchcrafts, soothsaying, or any like devilish device, nor shall resort at any time to the same for counsel or help" (214).

¹⁸⁸ The homily is primarily concerned with religious images rather than paganism, but many of the biblical passages would have involved both, or the former as a synecdoche for the latter.

sayde come to passe, and then say: Let vs go after straunge gods (which thou hast not knowen) and let vs serue them: Hearken not thou vnto the wordes of that prophete or dreamer of dreames: For the Lorde thy God proueth you, to knowe whether ye loue the Lorde your God with all your heart and with all your soule” (13:1–3). The audience is warned against being seduced into idolatry via prophecy; even if a seer exercises supernatural power in the name of a foreign god, the Israelites are not to listen.¹⁸⁹ In such a case, so to speak, the signifier (the miraculous wonder) is not connected to the correct signified (the true God).

Such is the implicit appeal of the Weird Sisters to Macbeth and Banquo: an abandonment of their proper loyalty to the licit monarch (in the person of Duncan) in favor of personal ambition. In the Third Witch’s declarations that the former “shalt be King hereafter” and the latter “shalt get kings, though . . . be none,” along with Rosse’s subsequent confirmation of Macbeth’s status as Cawdor, a sign of the Deuteronomist kind has occurred.¹⁹⁰ Until now, the two nobles have been loyal vassals of their king; now they see before them a greater status to be clutched and must decide whether they “loue the Lorde [of Scotland] . . . with all [their] heart and with all [their] soule.” The “Homily Against Idolatry” suggests how early modern audiences might have perceived the danger of the verbal image of kingship to Macbeth: because “men’s nature and inclination” are “bent to idolatry so vehemently” (225), it is impossible, “if images be suffered in churches and temples, . . . to keep the people from worshipping of them, and so to avoid idolatry”

¹⁸⁹ The passage is theologically thorny, given that the writer describes God as using an appeal to idolatry—a practice subject to capital punishment under the Mosaic law—as a test of Israel’s spiritual loyalty. The Geneva Bible comments on Deut. 13:3, “God ordaineth all these things that his [people] may be known” (199).

¹⁹⁰ Rosse also characterizes the title of Cawdor as “an earnest of a greater honour” (1.3.104). Arden editor Kenneth Muir notes the potentially oracular nature of this line, in that there is nothing in Duncan’s instructions to Rosse to support this statement (18 fn).

(219). The mere presence of the physical object inevitably leads to wrongdoing.¹⁹¹ For Macbeth, the Witches' salutation of him as the future monarch hammers out a gleaming icon in his mind—one that eventually seduces him to illicit veneration. The episode has the air of an enigmatic marketplace encounter—which of the customers will be susceptible to the wares on display? Banquo exhibits (or at least proclaims) a certain degree of indifference; he is in a position of self-mastery and has nothing to beg or fear from the Witches—and so, in an instance of dramatic irony, his idle curiosity about the future is satisfied even though the Weird Sisters speak first to his companion. When Macbeth commands, “Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more” (1.3.70), he receives no answer. The rest of the play is a line plotted from these two points: Banquo lets the matter drop and dies with his honor at least partially intact; Macbeth pursues the bargain and empties his moral purse.¹⁹²

Yet why is Macbeth seemingly so easily seduced by the Witch-prophets? He is introduced as a warrior against rebellion, with his own killing of Macdonwald and the death sentence against Cawdor to remind him of the likely result of disloyalty. The Deuteronomist text previously referred to, although speaking about idolatry, warns against listening to such beckoning: “If thy brother, the sonne of thy mother, or thine owne sonne, or thy daughter, or the wyfe that lieth in thy bosome, or thy frende . . . entice thee secretly, saying: Let vs go and serue straunge gods . . . [t]hou shalt not consent

¹⁹¹ The homilist compares the lure to that of illicit sex: “the nature of man is none otherwise bent to worshipping of images (if he may have them, and see them) than it is bent to whoredom and adultery in the company of harlots” (226). Macbeth's tempters, of course, are female.

¹⁹² Bradley argues that “on the last day of his life, we find that he [Banquo] has yielded to evil”—aware of the prophecies (as none of the other nobles is) and suspicious of Macbeth, he remains silent in the hope that the Witches' words about his own descendants will prove true (319–20). Debapriya Sarkar writes that the “different temporal and genealogical” elements in the Witches' statements “shape Macbeth's and Banquo's responses. The prophecies directed to Banquo are futuristic, while the witches' predictions for Macbeth are limited to and realized in moments of presentness” (90). Thus, one explanation for the two men's responses is that a vision of kingship within one's own lifetime is a more powerful psychological goad than a vision of such for one's offspring in a hazy future.

vnto hym, nor hearken vnto hym . . ." (Deut. 13:6,8). A partial answer to the question may be found in another Shakespearean play in which the preternatural makes an appearance. In *Hamlet*, as in *Macbeth*, the drama is prodded into action by a supernatural message; a specter identifies itself as the spirit of Hamlet's father and demands that King Claudius be killed in revenge for his brother's "foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25).¹⁹³ Yet an atmosphere of doubt hangs around the spirit. "While the Ghost describes himself as emanating from purgatory," Alison Shell writes, "it is famously left unclear whether he does" (113). The prince questions whether it is a "goblin damned" with "intents wicked" (1.4.40, 42), and Horatio suggests to Hamlet that it might lure him toward the sea or a cliff, and "there assume some other horrible form / Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason / And draw you into madness" (1.4.72–74). The prince muses that he is "[p]rompted to my revenge by heaven and hell" (2.2.519), a phrase that may suggest doubt about the Ghost's origins (*Hamlet* 277 fn). As G. R. Hibbard asks, if the Ghost "does come from a place of purification, why does it cry for revenge, something expressly forbidden by Christian teaching?" (41).¹⁹⁴ It is not surprising that Hamlet speculates, "The spirit that I have seen / May be a de'il . . ." (2.2.533–34).¹⁹⁵ Thus, although the prince ultimately accepts the Ghost as Old Hamlet's

¹⁹³ As Garber writes, "Thus the appearance of the witches is structurally analogous to the other shocking and otherworldly events at the beginnings of the great tragedies: [among them] the appearance of the ghost of old Hamlet Again, as there, we have a scene of darkness, and a mysterious, inexplicable appearance, a voice or voices that utter prophecies, while the speakers themselves remain shrouded in mists and mysteries" (*After All* 698–99).

¹⁹⁴ "A ghost who describes himself as being from purgatory and then unchristianly calls his auditor to revenge is true to his [theatrical] antecedents," Shell states, "but would never have passed the internal censor of someone who had a serious interest in promoting Catholicism through drama" (115).

¹⁹⁵ Greenblatt notes that, "particularly . . . from the late fourteenth through the seventeenth century," this question was addressed via "a *discretio spirituum*—a means to distinguish between good and evil spirits"—in which supposed ghosts were "forced to submit to a rigorous cross-examination." One version of this third degree involved a formula asking "of which man he is the soul, why he has come, what he wants," and how many Masses or other good deeds (and done by whom) would be necessary to relieve his suffering (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 103–04). According to Greenblatt, Horatio's

spirit and carries out his “dread command” (3.4.105), there also is a repeated questioning of the apparition’s nature and purpose.

As Stephen Orgel remarks, “the reality of the witches in *Macbeth* is not in question; the question, as in *Hamlet*, is why they are present and how far to believe them” (345). And, in fact, Macbeth seems less skeptical of the “imperfect speakers” and their “strange intelligence” (1.3.70, 75) than the Danish prince is of the spirit who speaks to him. When Rosse brings news of Macbeth’s new title of Cawdor, Banquo exclaims, “What! can the Devil speak true?” (1.3.107), and a moment later he warns his companion that “oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of Darkness tell us truths; / Win us with honest trifles, to betray’s / In deepest consequence” (1.3.123–25). Yet despite this caution, Macbeth’s concern is whether the trio’s information can be trusted, not whether they themselves can be.¹⁹⁶ “In his desire to establish the truthfulness of their prophecies,” Debapriya Sarkar writes, “he does not consider whether what they *are* might serve as evidence of their credibility” (90; emphasis in original).¹⁹⁷ Writing about supernatural events in the fourteenth-century text *The Gast of Gy*, Greenblatt states: “Though the return of a dead person arouses terror, the collective impulse is not to flee from and not even simply to ward off the weird apparition, but rather to approach and find out what it is and what it wants. Everyone recognizes, however, that this approach has to

attempted questioning of the Ghost in *Hamlet* 1.1 reflects this practice (210). Macbeth is dealing with witches rather than ghosts, but he conducts no comparable inquisition.

¹⁹⁶ Greenblatt points out, however, that Hamlet’s successful test of the Ghost’s truthfulness (the drama presented by the acting troupe) “notoriously leaves the question of the Ghost’s origin unanswered” (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 239). The protagonists of the two plays thus may not be that different after all. Yet Hamlet at least can argue that the deed proposed by the Ghost is justified, whereas Macbeth can make no comparable claim.

¹⁹⁷ For Sarkar, this is a matter of the Weird Sisters’ “ambiguous ontology” (91) rather than their moral nature or motives, or what powers stand behind them. For Robert Rentoul Reed, Macbeth’s disregard of the Witches’ ambiguity in 4.1 is essentially conscience balm: “An outcast of God and His grace, Macbeth has been repeatedly and painfully reminded by his conscience of the persisting presence of God within him . . . and to question the demons’ promises of indestructibility would be to turn back to the torment of mind from which he seeks desperately to escape” (191).

be extremely cautious" (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 108). Macbeth, however, neglects such caution; mesmerized by the message, he forgets to distrust the "strange god" that is placed before him.¹⁹⁸

Another aspect of the false-prophet motif involves the echoing by the Weird Sisters—and, more broadly, by the play—of the Protestant-Catholic struggle for England's ecclesiastical fealty. When Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne, the nation had behind it the break with Rome under Henry VIII, the publication of the original Book of Common Prayer under Edward VI, and the return to the papal fold under Mary—"the confessional switchbacks of the earlier Tudor period," as Alison Shell puts it (5). Elizabeth's subjects "were, on the whole, Catholic," even if "her political and ecclesiastical ruling class was predominately Calvinist," Lori Anne Ferrell writes (43); thus, "traditional religion and community practices persisted in many localities" (44).¹⁹⁹ However, the ecclesiastical tide clearly had turned: "The Church which Elizabeth I reinvented in the first year of her reign was emphatically anti-Roman . . . ," Patrick Collinson writes (192). According to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, "the Church of *Rome* hath erred, not only in . . . living, and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith" (*BCP* 679; emphasis in original); the "Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping

¹⁹⁸ Peter G. Platt might be thinking about Macbeth when he writes in "Shakespeare and Rhetorical Culture" that "rhetoric's effect can be destructive, false, and harmful; the individual listening to the words—whatever their intent—can be bewitched by an 'evil persuasion'" (277). Macbeth's forgetting to interrogate the Witches' identity and his acceptance of their message can be compared to the world of the theater. Traditionally, the audience's buying into the actors' "message" is tied to their implicit acceptance of (or their refusal to question) the players' identity as the characters. It was precisely such fictitious (i.e., non-factual) elements of drama that led some early modern Protestants to criticize the theater.

¹⁹⁹ Shell sees Elizabeth's own theology as more Lutheran than Calvinist (5), but "one should not underestimate the number of high-ranking clergy with Puritan sympathies . . . [F]or much of Shakespeare's working life, the Church of England was, in effect, a Calvinist church" (10). Collinson concurs with the idea of a Lutheran-leaning queen, but he also points out her "old-fashioned prejudice against a married clergy" and the fact that, "unlike any other Protestant liturgy," the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer possessed a "continuing indebtedness to pre-Reformation forms" (194–95).

and Adoration as well of Images, as of Reliques, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God" (679); the "Bishop of *Rome* hath no jurisdiction in this realm of *England*" (684; emphasis in original).²⁰⁰ Similarly, the official Whitsunday homily asserts that the Roman church is "so far wide from the state of the true church, that nothing can be more" (*Homilies* 433), and that most of the popes have been "worthily accounted among the number of false prophets, and false Christs, which deceived the world a long while" (438). In brief, the church is characterized by "the spirit of arrogancy and pride, the spirit of envy, hatred, contention, cruelty, murder, extortion, *witchcraft, necromancy, &c.*" (437; emphasis added). Official statements of the national church condemn Catholicism on multiple spiritual grounds, with the charges including occult practices and leadership by "false prophets."

In early modern society, of course, theology and politics constituted a seamless garment; faith was "a mark of politics and the state" that "delineate[d] affiliation and loyalty" (Cummings 666). During Elizabeth's reign, Peter Lake writes, the queen "saw outward obedience, conformity, and compliance as the highest political (if not religious) virtues," so that "the profession of certain religious opinions, and the performance . . . of certain 'religious' actions became synonymous certainly with political disloyalty and sometimes even formally with treason . . ." (64). One entire section of the "Homily Against Rebellion" focuses on the specifically political perfidy of Rome. "It is well known . . . that none have either more ambitiously aspired above emperors, kings, and princes, nor have more perniciously moved the ignorant people to rebellion against their princes, than

²⁰⁰ Much of the statement of faith takes issue with Catholic theology; for instance, Article 28 declares that the doctrine of transubstantiation "cannot be proved by holy Writ: but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture . . . and hath given occasion to many superstitions" (681). However, the cited passages specifically mention Rome by name.

certain persons which falsely challenge to themselves to be only counted and called spiritual" (*Homilies* 549). The popes, who are accused of achieving "height and greatness" by "ambition, treason, and usurpation," are pilloried as "special instruments and ministers of the devil" who employ "pestilent suggestions" (552). Nor are the accusations made in merely general terms; the homilist specifically cites not only "the late rebellions in the north and west countries in the times of king Henry and king Edward" (557–58) but also King John's dispute with Innocent III and his difficulties with the French (555–57).²⁰¹

As the island's theological ground shifted, then, practicing Catholics "met in barns and private households" while ardent Protestant believers "inherited the public space of the parish church. . . . The altar was now a communion table; the rood loft with its doom images as well as the images of saints had been removed. The liturgy was in English, not Latin . . ." (Lake 76). The old faith survived, but "a full quarter of the foreign-trained Catholic priests who entered the country under Elizabeth were executed," Lake writes, "their deaths carefully staged dramatizations of the equation between treason and Catholicism And that is not to mention the many other priests who were captured, imprisoned, or exiled" (78). It is true that after James ascended the throne in 1603, zeal for the Protestant house did not not necessarily consume him in day-to-day governance. Although James had learned a "deep aversion" to Rome in his youth (S. J. Johnson 3) and although anti-popery was "almost a religion in itself" in the Jacobean church (Collinson 197), the Stuart monarch adopted a relatively "undogmatic" approach to Catholicism that involved differentiating between moderates and firebrands; "indiscriminate persecution was avoided," S. J. Johnson writes, "lest it drive otherwise

²⁰¹ Ironically, Elizabeth's "Injunctions for Religion," inveighing against slander, bar the use of "these contentious words: papist, or papistical heretic, schismatic, . . . or any such like words of reproach" (216).

loyal subjects to conspiracy or rebellion” (64). Nevertheless, Johnson continues, “the irreconcilable minority continued to seek his destruction” (64). England’s Catholics thus existed in a societal cauldron of theological contention and official suspicion that at best was constantly simmering and that at any time might boil over, with lethal results.²⁰²

In this historical context, Garber notes Macbeth’s characterization of the Witches’ prediction about Birnam Wood as “th’equivocation of the fiend, / That lies like truth” (5.5.43–44) and recalls that “equivocation” was a familiar term of the period, associated with Catholics seeking to dodge hostile interrogation through verbal and mental sleight of hand (*After All* 699).²⁰³ In addition, the drunken Porter’s fantasized greeting to a damned soul—“Faith, here’s an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven . . .” (2.3.8–11)—is often considered a topical allusion to the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot (Cummings 671). The language thus echoes images of Catholicism in a play about political rebellion and regicide, so that Jacobean playgoers might very well wonder whether the Witches metaphorically hail from the city of seven hills. Here is a trio representing spiritual power from the wrong side, stereotypically sworn to the service of a foreign prince, and speaking in terms that hint at the death of the current king.²⁰⁴ “Pope Pius V’s excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570 turned every Catholic into a potential threat, from the government’s point of view,” Shell observes (5). Given this situation along with the rebellion of the northern earls in 1569 and the Gunpowder Plot, the Witches can be seen as transmogrified Catholics seeking to undermine the rightful monarch. Even

²⁰² The Jesuit writer Peter Milward, in fact, sees in the skittishness of Lenox in 3.6 and of Malcom in 4.3 “more than a hint at the suffering of the poor persecuted Catholics of Elizabethan England” (*Jacobean Shakespeare* 50).

²⁰³ The Birnam Wood prediction technically is made by the Third Apparition, but under the aegis of the Witches.

²⁰⁴ Rebecca Lemon classifies their speech as “seditious,” given that English law considered prophecies of a monarch’s death to constitute treason (35).

their sex might have bolstered the association, stirring recollections of other “sisters” from the days before Henry VIII dissolved the religious houses. Michael Hattaway writes that in the Privy Council’s view, “unfit and undecent” matters in plays—“both Divinity and State,” for example— were “likely to be incitements to rebellion and therefore of concern to both magistrates and ministers” (“Tragedy” 103). In this case, however, even aside from the less-than-subtle signal embodied in Macbeth’s severed head, the play can be seen as a warning *against* rebellion in the fact that the thane’s supernatural privy council speaks with a faint Roman accent.²⁰⁵ Even more radically, the drama’s Catholic connections might send a subtle caution to James about the dangers of insufficient rigor against the Scarlet Peril. Upon James’s ascension in 1603, Jessie Childs writes, English recusants had reason to hope: “Here was a King not a Queen, a Stuart not a Tudor, a peace-loving poet and family man with heirs and a recently converted Catholic wife. James had no record of religious persecution and no desire to create one, believing it to be ‘one of the infallible notes of a false church’ ” (276). During his reign, Johnson records, “the subtleties and ambiguities of his policy toward catholics [*sic*] were lost on his protestant subjects. They were shocked by the presence of papists in high places and quick to cast the Earl of Northampton and, later, Count Gondomar, as evil counsellors . . .” (65). The Gunpowder Plot, of course, was a watershed, but the possibility that Banquo’s supposed

²⁰⁵ However, Huston Diehl writes: “When the reformers defied the edicts of the Pope, . . . put obedience to God’s word above obedience to a secular king, . . . [and] celebrated the rebellious acts of Protestant martyrs . . . they called into question established authority (from the Pope to the village priest, the Roman Catholic monarch to the father who remains loyal to the old religion)” (92). Thus, ironically, recusants might have interpreted the Witches as “Protestant” in their implicit anti-authoritarianism. They might also have heard in Macduff’s line about the ravaging of Duncan’s body—“Murder hath broke ope / The Lord’s anointed temple, and stole thence / The life o’th’building!”(2.3.66–68)—an echo of Protestant destruction of church imagery. Milward writes that “to understand the true topical meaning implied in the horrified words of Macduff,” one must recall “that series of real sacrileges”—“the wholesale desecration of the monasteries and shrines of England” under Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII (“Meta-drama” 15–16).

descendant might take a lesson about mollycoddling papists from a play involving scheming witches might have made cheerful even the hearts of anti-theatrical Puritans.

However, the rebellious and mad idolatry to which the Witches call Macbeth can be construed even more darkly than the veneration of a diadem. In the threefold characterization of the thane as Glamis, Cawdor, and future monarch, the Witches in a sense speak of a Macbeth who “was, and is, and is to come”—the language used to describe the enthroned God in Rev. 4:8.²⁰⁶ In one way, the idol of the thane’s story is not so much the throne or crown as himself. Shakespeare’s audience might have recalled the words of Isaiah: “Howe art thou fallen from heauen O Lucifer For thou saydest in thine heart, I wyll clymbe vp into heauen, and exalt my throne aboute beside the starres of God I wyll clymbe vp aboute the cloudes, and wyll be lyke the hyghest of all” (14:12–14). Although the prophet’s message is addressed to the king of Babylon early in the chapter (14:4), the later verses and the sobriquet “Lucifer” often have been applied to Satan.²⁰⁷ “The first author of which rebellion . . . was Lucifer, first God’s most excellent creature, and most bounden subject; who by rebelling against the majesty of God, of the brightest and most glorious angel, is become the blackest and most foul fiend and devil; and from the height of heaven is fallen into the pit and bottom of hell . . .” (*Homilies* 515–16). Like the Lucifer of Isaiah’s original text and of traditional Christian interpretation, Macbeth seeks an exalted throne, where he can wield the powers of life and death—powers that ultimately belong to God alone.²⁰⁸ “Whatever the realities of Renaissance

²⁰⁶ The verse is part of the Epistle reading for Trinity Sunday (*BCP* 338).

²⁰⁷ The term translated as “Lucifer” in the Geneva, King James, and Bishops’ Bibles is often rendered in modern versions as “morning star” or “day star.”

²⁰⁸ Unlike the Oxford/Norton and New Cambridge texts of the Witches’ hails, the Arden Second Series edition retains the First Folio’s capitalization of “King.” To the modern reader, the typographical convention can suggest not merely an earthly monarch but the heavenly one. Ken Colston remarks of Macbeth, “In believing himself invulnerable except when the earth moves or when one not of woman born assails him, he believes himself to be divine” (86). Milward sees the hails as echoing Judas’s treacherous greeting of Jesus just before the latter’s arrest: “Thus

kingship,” Greenblatt writes, “. . . the idea of sovereignty was closely linked to fantasies of divine omnipotence” (“King Lear” 2307). Calvin’s *Institutes* bears out what Greenblatt terms a fantasy: “When those who bear the office of magistrate are called gods, let no one suppose that there is little weight in that appellation. . . . [T]hey are invested with divine authority, and, in fact, represent the person of God, as whose substitutes they in a manner act” (vol. 2 653). However, Macbeth goes beyond this in his effort to “be lyke the hyghest of all.” Kristen Poole writes that in contrast to Calvin, who posits an unruly physical universe held together only by the omnipotence and sovereignty of the Lord, Macbeth seeks to order the world according to his own will: “His obvious theological error leads him to think he controls his own place and time, but . . . he fails to understand himself as part of a cosmic, divinely-driven space and time that is greater than the terms of humanity” (146). Macbeth’s is the ultimate idolatry, in which he genuflects to himself and wishes all to do the same.

Macbeth as the Weird Brother

Still, one need not go as far as Macbeth-as-deity-*manqué*. The temptation also can be seen as, essentially, the thane becoming a witch himself. To paraphrase Sigmund Freud’s famous question: What do witches (female or male) want? To what ends were their arts supposedly used? Keith Thomas notes that Renaissance “cunning men and wise women” might offer to discover theft, help find stolen property, or heal people (252–53).²⁰⁹ A 1542 act of Parliament (which was repealed in 1547) declared it a felony to use

implicitly the witches are betraying Macbeth . . .” (*Biblical* 117). Ironically, by this logic the thane becomes a Christ-figure in the scene.

²⁰⁹ *The Book of Homilies* criticizes the tendency of commoners to seek such services: “For if we stand in necessity of corporeal health, whither go the common people, but to charms, witchcrafts, and other delusions of the devil?” (450). Thomas distinguishes between various classes of supernatural arts, but he admits, “At a popular level every kind of magical activity, including any unacceptable brand of religion, might be lumped together under the blanket title of ‘witchcraft’ . . .” (517–18). This dissertation does not seek to differentiate between the abilities that a “wise woman”

magical arts “to find treasure; to waste or destroy a person’s body, limbs, or goods; [or] to provoke to unlawful love,” among other things (Thomas 525), suggesting reputed activities.²¹⁰ Accusations leveled in Essex during 1560–1680 included causing death and harm to people and animals, burning down barns, spoiling brewings of beer, bewitching a windmill, and keeping cream from turning into butter (Sharpe 41).²¹¹ King James’s book *Dæmonologie* asserts that at witches’ gatherings, “euerie one of them propones vnto him [their master] what wicked turn they would haue done, either for obtaining of riches, or for reuenging them vpon anie whome they have malice at” (43), and Sandra Clark notes that in the first two *Henry VI* plays, Joan Puzel, Margery Jourdain, and the Duchess of Gloucester “resort to witchcraft practices to obtain power which threatens the good of the state” (68). In the early modern mind, then, the appeal of the occult is the ability to achieve wealth, retribution, knowledge, military or political success, and so forth with an ease not available through normal means.²¹² What Thomas says about conjured spirits might be said of the shadow arts as a whole: such things “were thought to offer a short cut to riches, love, knowledge and power of all kinds” (724).²¹³ By these lights, it is not

might claim for herself and those with which she might be (criminally) credited; the point is rather the era’s general concept of the occultic practitioner.

²¹⁰ James Sharpe calls this act “the most harsh of English witchcraft statutes,” but he finds no indication of its enforcement (15).

²¹¹ Sharpe also states, “English witches, on the strength of assize indictments, were rarely accused of raising storms, blasting the crops, sinking ships at sea, impeding human fertility, or consorting with evil spirits” (40). However, Sharpe cautions that because such indictments were devised to obtain convictions under certain statutes, they constitute “a very imperfect guide to wider beliefs about witches’ activities” (41).

²¹² The essential idea of magic, C. S. Lewis writes, is “to subdue reality to the wishes of men” (*Abolition* 48); its devotees “move in a grandiose dream of days when Men shall have been raised to the performance of ‘all things possible’ ” (*English Literature* 14). Lewis also argues that contrary to some perceptions, magic received far more attention in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than in the medieval period (*Abolition* 47)—a view to which *Dæmonologie* and *Macbeth* would lend credence. Lewis’s remarks in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* refer to what he calls “high magic” as differentiated from “mere witchcraft” (7), but I would argue that the presumed motives are quite similar.

²¹³ J. R. R. Tolkien, musing about the role of magic in his fictional works, writes: “The basic motive for *magia* . . . is immediacy: speed, reduction of labour, and reduction also to a minimum (or vanishing point) of the gap between the idea or desire and the result or effect” (200).

merely that the Weird Sisters dangle before Macbeth something for which he yearns; rather, he becomes a witch himself—making an unholy bargain for power and seeking in unnatural fashion to close the gap between his desire to reign and the actual throne.²¹⁴

According to David L. Kranz, the likeness between Macbeth and the Weird Sisters is noticeable as early as the thane's first line; alluding to Macbeth's use of the phrase "fair and foul," Kranz writes: "Whether readers and audiences infer that Macbeth and the witches speak the same language by mere chance or that the latter's words have infiltrated the hero's mind simply by proximity, a close and mysterious connection between the hero and the supernatural hags is established well before the actual staged temptation of the former" (346). Soon enough, the likeness has flowered sufficiently that the trio of traffickers in body parts—"Liver of blaspheming Jew," "Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips," "Finger of birth-strangled babe" (4.1.26, 29–30)—are matched by a Macbeth whose orders leave Banquo with his throat cut and "twenty trenched gashes on his head" (3.4.15, 26).²¹⁵ Witchcraft is inherently an attempt to circumvent the limits of the normally possible, which is precisely what the thane attempts in social and political terms. "Macbeth and his lady 'cancel and tear in pieces' the great bond of civilization with its recurrent demand that men . . . accept the limitation on what is possible for the individual to achieve legitimately," G. K. Hunter writes (138). Robert N. Watson pursues this idea of transgression of boundaries even further, arguing that Macbeth "violate[s] the healthy, orderly cycles of nature" itself, to his inevitable destruction. "Having murdered sleep, he and his Lady endure an endless night of insomnia. Having tried to rob the next human generation of life and inheritance, they die prematurely and childless" (176). In the quest

²¹⁴ A. R. Braunmuller also suggests that Macbeth qualifies as a witch, focusing on the distracting, possessing effect of his missive on his wife, which the critic compares to Lady Macbeth's final state (20). However, Braunmuller is far more interested in the witch-like qualities of the wife.

²¹⁵ Lewis points out that practitioners of magical arts find themselves "ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious" (*Abolition* 48)—something that Macbeth's actions parallel.

for dominion, Macbeth himself becomes one of the “instruments of Darkness” of which Banquo speaks (1.3.124). In a society in which women might find themselves accused of wielding power over others by causing livestock or children to fall ill, *Macbeth* subtly reminds its early-modern patrons that men too (and highborn men at that) can hear the call of dark dominion—women are not the only ones subject to the snare.

“You shall be king”: Witnesses of dynastic change

The Weird Sisters’ prediction of Macbeth’s ascent to the throne, with its hints of seduction to idolatry, also conversely and ironically parallels an aspect of the true biblical prophets: the divinely approved signaling of dynastic establishment or succession. According to “An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion,” God “giveth and setteth up princes” for the “comfort and cherishing” of virtuous subjects and “to the fear and for the punishment of the evil and wicked” (518); further, “*God giveth a prince in his anger, meaning an evil one, and taketh away a prince in his displeasure, meaning specially when he taketh away a good prince for the sins of the people . . .*” (521; italics in original). The official theology of the English state church thus saw the ultimate hand behind the rise and fall of both good and evil monarchs as that of God, and this theology rests largely on a Bible whose narratives on such matters sometimes involve prophets. For example, Nathan plays a key role in the ascension of Solomon (rather than his older half brother Adonijah) to the throne after David, although Nathan cites no divine message, pointing rather to David’s oath on the matter (1 Kings 1:13). An unnamed member of Elisha’s circle anoints the army commander Jehu as king over Israel and tells him to destroy the house of the reigning monarch, Joram, in punishment for its persecution of the prophets (2 Kings 9:6–7)—a mission that Jehu fulfills with a vengeance. One of the episodes most relevant to *Macbeth*, however, involves David and the prophet-judge Samuel, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Israelite

monarchy with the anointing of Saul. In 1 Sam. 16, the book's namesake anoints David to succeed Saul (bypassing Jonathan, Saul's son and David's close friend, and the king's other sons), but Samuel gives David no indication of how or when this will occur. The situation poses a theological-ethical-political problem for a society that takes a high view of the hereditary rights of kings and, at the same time, the authority of sacred writ that describes the abrogation of such rights: Can a throne be legitimately seized? Can supernatural affirmation of ascension be seen as permission to seize it?

In Tudor England, not only did the king have two bodies but the nation had two minds as well.²¹⁶ "In the contradictory Henrician propaganda to which Elizabeth was heir," W. R. Elton writes, "the monarch could not be usurped. But if the latter were, the usurper himself should not be replaced, for the orderliness of the commonwealth had priority" (30). The early modern believer in political resistance might have pointed back to Thomas Aquinas: "If to provide itself with a king belongs to the right of a given multitude, it is not unjust that the king be deposed or have his power restricted by that same multitude if, becoming a tyrant, he abuses the royal power. It must not be thought that such a multitude is acting unfaithfully in deposing the tyrant . . ." (quoted in Robin Wells 116). Charles R. Forker notes that writers like John Fortescue and Henry de Bracton likewise asserted that the English tradition was that of a limited monarchy and that reflexive obedience was "repugnant to common law as ordinarily understood. . . . This constitutional view of royal power enjoyed wide respect during Elizabeth's reign and seems to have been held by many loyal subjects of humanist and intellectual bent . . ." (19). In terms of the house of Stuart, S. J. Johnson writes that both James's tutor George Buchanan and the Scottish Reformer John Knox saw monarchs as subject to their

²¹⁶ Scholar Ernst Kantorowicz is particularly responsible for the high critical profile of the political concept of the two bodies.

subjects to a certain degree. The former taught the young James that kings originally were selected by and accountable to the aristocracy and that “a king’s authority had no divine sanction: if he ruled badly he could be deposed, even killed.” Knox argued that “godly people were duty-bound to remove an ungodly prince whose behaviour was unacceptable to God” (Johnson 3).²¹⁷ In the minds of many, “the crowne endureth not for euer,” to borrow an Old Testament phrase (Prov. 27:24), or at least not necessarily.

Of course, Shakespeare himself toys with this complex issue; a key question in the two tetralogies is “whether subjects have the right to judge and if necessary depose their rulers” (Robin Wells 116). Ambiguity on the question marks the plays as a whole. *Richard II* depicts a deposed king who becomes ever more sympathetic as Henry Bolingbroke usurps the throne, executes former royal favorites, drops a remark that leads to Richard’s death—“Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?” (5.4.2)—and then repudiates the killer. Yet at the same time, the former monarch seems to deserve his political fate, if not his ultimate one. The dying John of Gaunt, looking at the results of Richard’s reign, mourns that the kingdom is “now leased out—I die pronouncing it— / Like to a tenement or pelting farm” (2.1.59–60). Upon Gaunt’s death, Richard coolly appropriates his son Bolingbroke’s inheritance despite a prescient warning from an aghast York: “If you do wrongfully seize Hereford’s rights . . . You pluck a thousand dangers on your head . . .” (2.1.201, 205).²¹⁸ Later in the play, the gardeners speak of the “wasteful King” (3.4.55) and compare the land to a garden “full of weeds” (3.4.44). The play balances sympathy for Richard the man with antipathy for Richard the king

²¹⁷ James in his turn, as Johnson notes (3), advises his son in *Basilikon Doron* to read histories, but not “such infamous invectives as Buchanan’s or Knox’s chronicles; and if any of these infamous libels remain until your days, use the law upon the keepers thereof” (*True Law* 149).

²¹⁸ Forker remarks, “York replicates the role of prophet that Gaunt had played earlier” (*R2* 263 fn).

(which implies sympathy for Bolingbroke the usurper); the drama raises “the disquieting possibility that the institution of hereditary monarchy may itself be unviable” (Forker 1).

In *2 Henry IV*, the dying king reminds his heir that his crown was “an honour snatched with boist’rous hand” (4.3.321) that led to “quarrel and to bloodshed, / Wounding supposed peace” (4.3.324–25). René Weis writes that this play “sternly emphasizes that the crown cannot descend to Hal without a full avowal of guilt by the man who first illicitly snatched it from Richard II” (6).²¹⁹ Hal, however, has no plans to relinquish the diadem; he tells his father, “You won it, wore it, kept it, gave it me; / Then plain and right must my possession be, / Which I with more than with a common pain / ’Gainst all the world will rightfully maintain” (4.3.351–54). For the man who would be King Henry V, possession is nine-tenths of the throne. His own namesake play presents him as bold, charismatic, decisive, and successful, thereby implicitly endorsing his rule. Yet in the tense night before the Battle of Agincourt, even Henry petitions God to avoid considering (at least temporarily) his father’s method of ascension—a prayer uttered during a military campaign meant, ironically, to establish his own “true titles to some certain dukedoms, / And generally to the crown and seat of France” (1.1.87–88).²²⁰ And when Henry VI seeks to end the Wars of the Roses by ceding the crown to the Duke of York after his own death, his nobles furiously repudiate his action, and Queen Margaret deserts the husband she calls “so unnatural a father” and a “timorous wretch” (1.1.218,

²¹⁹ “As Shakespeare knew from reading Holinshed, and as he intimates in his four plays dealing with the period from 1398 to 1422, the people of England never fully accepted Bolingbroke’s legitimacy,” Weis writes (44). Weis later goes so far as to say: “Bolingbroke is a prototypical Macbeth figure. The difference is that he is comforted by the thought that if he defiled his soul it will have been for the benefit of his own son ultimately” (48). Macbeth, of course, gnashes his teeth at the thought that he has given his “eternal jewel” to “the common Enemy of man / To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!” (3.1.67–69).

²²⁰ T. W. Craik, addressing the objection that sincerity on Henry’s part would mean resigning the English crown, counters with “But to whom?” Craik points out that Edmund Mortimer, an earl with a claim to succeed Richard II, does not appear in this play, and in *1 Henry IV* (in which Mortimer is confused with an eponymous relative), “he is discredited by his willingness to partition the realm between himself, Hotspur and Glendower” (*H5* 57 fn).

231). John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen, like Margaret, see Henry's solution as "politically and personally suicidal" (73), yet the king's ill-fated agreement represents an awareness of the parlous state of not only the Lancastrian claim but the realm as well.

In his own studies of English political science, then, Shakespeare tugs at the various threads of a tangled skein of succession, usurpation, and political violence—something that also occurs in the less obviously historical *Macbeth*. For Stephen Greenblatt, the playwright is a realist and a pragmatist: "None of Shakespeare's plays, not even *Macbeth*, unequivocally endorses the view that every act of usurpation is automatically evil, and none condemns as necessarily unethical the use of violence to topple the established order. Unlike the most conservative voices of his time, Shakespeare did not position himself squarely against the bloody unthroning even of anointed monarchs. Violence, he well understood, was one of the principal mechanisms of regime change" (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 76).²²¹

Yet unsurprisingly, the official religio-political orthodoxy of the playwright's era had no place for the overturning of established authorities. The "Homily Against Rebellion," examining King David's path to power, draws the lesson for early modern parishioners. Acknowledging that "David was no common or absolute subject, but heir apparent to the crown and kingdom, by God appointed to reign after Saul," the writer nevertheless states: "Yet would David neither himself slay nor hurt such an enemy, for that he was his prince and lord, nor would suffer any other to kill, hurt, or lay hand upon him, when he might have been slain without any stir, tumult, or danger of any man's life" (529). For the homilist, the question of whether even a divinely chosen successor may

²²¹ Commenting on the historical backdrop of *Macbeth*, Alvin Kernan writes: "The history of Scotland tells, insofar as it can be known, a story of endless clan warfare Most often in the past one king had come to power by killing another and had held his throne only as long as his sword could keep him there. Nine of the ten kings who preceded Macbeth were murdered, and earlier times had been equally bloody" (78).

use violence to facilitate the ascent to the throne, even when the current (and divinely rejected) monarch is unjustly trying to kill the anointed successor, is elementary: the answer is “no.” David does not do so, even when—shades of *Macbeth*—he is presented with the opportunity as Saul sleeps (1 Sam. 26) or is relieving himself in a cave (1 Sam. 24). Furthermore, the homilist writes, “if they, who do disobey an evil and unkind prince, be most unlike unto David, that good subject; what be they who do rebel against a most natural and loving prince? . . . Surely no mortal man can express with words, nor conceive in mind, the horrible and most dreadful damnation that such be worthy of . . .” (531). If David should be imitated in his toleration of an evil king, what excuse can be presented for those who rebel against a good monarch? The human mind cannot conceive such a person’s just deserts. The homilist proceeds to argue, with a methodical thoroughness that might have served as an example of *inventio* for a rhetoric handbook, that rebellion entails the breaking of the entire Decalogue, the committing of all the seven deadly sins, and the suffering of the biblical tribulations of famine, pestilence, and war (*Homilies* 534–39).²²² In an anticipation of George Orwell’s concept of “thoughtcrime,” another sermon declares: “And let no man think that he can escape unpunished, that committeth treason, conspiracy, or rebellion against his sovereign lord the king, though he commit the same never so secretly, either in thought, word, or deed, never so privily,

²²² In another indicator of the seriousness with which authorities viewed this issue, the homily and its prayers occupy forty-seven closely printed pages in one edition of the book. In addition, the “Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates” and its accompanying material take up another twelve pages. Similarly, *The Mirror for Magistrates* declares “how horrible a thing is division in a realme, to how many myschiefes is it the mother, what vice is not therby kindled, what vertue left vnquenched?” (196). Writing from a Catholic viewpoint, Ken Colston echoes the Anglican homilist by asserting, “Macbeth is soon materially guilty of breaking all ten commandments,” and then elaborating on how the thane does so. Colston admits that “the sixth and tenth, not committing adultery and not coveting the neighbor’s wife, are not violated”; however, he asserts, “Macbeth is certainly concupiscent and unfaithful as a subject” (83).

in his privy chamber by himself . . ." (*Homilies* 108).²²³ Even the dagger that exists only in the mind, so to speak, renders one culpable.

Such a deed threatens the warp and woof of hierarchy and authority that thread their way through early modern society. As J. Gregory Keller points out, "When Macbeth contemplates killing the king, removing himself from the kingship-subject relationship, he kills more than the king. This deed rends the fabric on which kingship depends. Anarchy results. When anyone may kill the king, there can be no king" (45).²²⁴ The kind of chaos thus engendered was familiar to Shakespeare's audiences from tales of the Wars of the Roses, including the stories that the playwright himself had spun.²²⁵ Such threatened societal confusion recalls the final verse in the Book of Judges, which follows accounts of fratricidal warfare: "In those dayes there was no king in Israel: but euey man dyd that whiche seemed right in his owne eyes" (Judg. 21:25).²²⁶ In a similar vein, David Lucking writes that "the only means by which he [Macbeth] can secure the loftiest title that the realm affords, that of king itself, is to murder the man who alone has the authority to confer titles" (420). The thane's action not only lets slip the dogs of disorder and internecine war but is inherently self-defeating, in that he destroys his own means of legitimacy.

²²³ The homilist cites Eccles. 10:20: "Wische the king no euil in thy thought . . . for a byrde of the ayre shall betray thy voyce, and with her fethers shall she bewray thy words." The Geneva Bible's gloss on this verse states, "Thou canst not work evil so secretly, but it shall be known" (671)

²²⁴ Prov. 14:28 touches on the relationship from a different but related angle: "In the multitude of people is the kynges honour: but the decay of the people is the confusion of the prince." A monarch's status thus rises or falls with the number of his (or her) people. James I famously states, "No bishop, no king" (Johnson 58); for the biblical writer, it is "No subject, no king."

²²⁵ The chaos involved in Macbeth's actions, however, is even darker than that of the York-Lancaster conflict, which involved open warfare over a question of legitimate succession. In contrast, Macbeth murders in secret without publicly contesting Malcolm's right to the throne.

²²⁶ Historically, the passage refers to a time before the Israelite monarchy rather than one in which the throne was contested or vacant. However, the specter of anarchy—which "the sacred history sets down . . . among the vices," Calvin states (vol. 2 658)—remains the same.

The biblical episode that most strikingly parallels the Weird Sisters' predictions and their role of witnessing prophets is found in 2 Kings 8:7–15.²²⁷ The Syrian monarch Ben-hadad dispatches his emissary Hazael to ask Elisha whether he will recover from an illness. "And Elisa sayde vnto him [Hazael]: Go, and say vnto him, Thou shalt recouer: howbeit, the Lorde hath shewed me that he shall surely dye" (8:10). Declaring, "The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king of Syria" (8:12–13), the horrified seer predicts that Hazael will wage war against Israel, even killing children and pregnant women. When Hazael returns to his master, he tells Ben-hadad that he will recover, but "on the morowe it fortun'd, that he toke a thicke cloth, and dipt it in water, and spread it on his face: & he died, and Hazael raigned in his steade" (8:15). As in *Macbeth*, a man in royal service is told, via supernatural knowledge, that he will become king; soon thereafter, he murders his liege in his bed. Furthering the parallel, the biblical text speaks of the slaying of young soldiers, women, and children—shades of Scotland's internecine bloodshed and the slaughter of Macduff's wife and offspring. Ambiguity hangs over both narratives; Elisha predicts Hazael's possession of the Aramean throne, yet he says nothing about *how* Hazael will achieve the crown.²²⁸ And the intent of the prophet's reply is murky: Is he instructing Hazael to lie, or is he saying that the illness itself is non-fatal but that the king will die nonetheless (Wiseman 214)?²²⁹ Shakespeare thus creates a Scottish version of the Hebrew episode, with the provocative twist that the news is heralded by associates of Hecate rather than a representative of the Lord.

²²⁷ Shaheen's index of biblical references contains no entry for this passage in any play (779).

²²⁸ According to the biblical writer, Hazael's succession is divinely willed. Although Elisha merely predicts Hazael's ascension rather than actively anointing him for it, the account is a sequel to 1 Kings 19:15–16, in which God tells Elijah to designate Elisha as his prophetic successor and Hazael as king of Aram.

²²⁹ The Geneva Bible's note on 8:10 opts for the latter interpretation: "Meaning that he [the king] should recover of this disease: but he [Elisha] knew that this messenger Hazael should slay him to obtain the kingdom" (384). Susan Snyder writes, "In the Hebrew, Hazael is to tell Ben-hadad, 'Living, you shall live,' though God has shown Elisha that 'dying, he shall die'" (176).

Issues of supernatural and human responsibility hover through the two narratives. Raising the “question of divine entrapment,” Susan Snyder writes of the biblical episode: “Did the prophet’s double assurance, that the king would surely die and that his servant would be king of Syria, create in a previously blameless Hazael the will to murder Ben-hadad?” (176). The similarity of the Syrian usurper to his Scottish counterpart is clear: “We’re back at the basic question, for both Hazael and Macbeth: if they both have the potential for corruption and they are both moved to actualize that potential by an authoritative prophecy, to what extent does the agency of that prophecy share with the human murderers responsibility for their crimes?” (176–77). In one sense, as has been discussed, the Witches subtly call Macbeth to the veneration of an illicit god—what another scheming Shakespearean noble calls “a glorious crown” (3 *H6* 3.2.171) and its attendant power. David Bevington, who compares Macbeth’s prophesied situation to that of Oedipus (*Shakespeare* 150), asks: “Can he make any other choice than to kill Duncan? The witches have known that it will happen” (154). Such a scenario would almost turn Macbeth into a Scottish “Manchurian Candidate” who will inevitably kill the man in power at the sounding of the proper mental chord. The moral burden thus falls on the Weird Sisters. Yet Bevington’s idea fails at least on technical grounds—in contrast to Elisha, who states flatly that Ben-hadad will die, the Weird Sisters never actually predict Duncan’s death, much less his murder by Macbeth.²³⁰ In another sense, the Witches urge nothing on Macbeth; rather, they merely present the future and let the Thane of Glamis and Cawdor decide how, or if, he will act. Macbeth himself observes, “If

²³⁰ Macbeth theoretically could become king through Duncan’s abdication or deposition rather than his death. Admittedly, this is dicing the matter rather finely.

Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me, / Without my stir" (1.3.144–45).²³¹ Yet unlike David of old, Macbeth opts for violent action over passive waiting.²³²

The Elisha-Hazael episode and Samuel's anointing of David provide a potentially useful lens through which to view the Witches and this aspect of their prophetic role. The Hebrew prophet serves as a proclaimer of the divine will (or at least a revealer of supernatural knowledge), but their responsibility for the results of the message is not always a matter of concern for the biblical author. The writer of 2 Kings records no existential angst on Elisha's part for telling Hazael that he will be king (although the prophet is shocked by a premonition of war), nor is Samuel recorded as mulling over whether David will actively seize Saul's throne or wait him out. The prophet announces, and then the focus turns to the message's recipient: What will this person do? The Weird Sisters act as a demonic version of the biblical witnesses to the passing of power—glimpsed briefly in the spotlight but then vanishing whence they came to allow attention to focus on the recipient of supernatural intelligence. It is possible, of course, to see the Witches in a far more active—even activist—light. Commenting on the cauldron scene in 4.1, Diane Purkiss writes, "The effect of the witches' cookery is to give them power over Macbeth . . . to remove a tyrant, right a wrong, restore lawful rule" (228). The Weird Sisters thus become the behind-the-scenes rescuers of Scotland.²³³ Terry Eagleton, in turn, views the Witches as "prophetesses" who "scorn male power and lay bare the

²³¹ As Bradley points out, "the natural death of an old man might have fulfilled the prophecy any day. In any case, the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his [Macbeth's] own" (286).

²³² Julia MacDonald paints Macbeth's decision in somewhat cosmic terms, saying that the thane turns his back on "temporal synchronicity"—the fortuitous meeting of the dimensions of time as related to oneself, the world at large, and God (78–80). "Macbeth consciously chooses to destroy a gracious time when he murders 'the gracious Duncan,'" MacDonald writes. "His is the tragedy of *choosing* asynchronism in time" (80; emphasis in original).

²³³ Purkiss's statement implies that the Weird Sisters' intentions in this scene are benign. However counterintuitive such a view is, it points out that the trio whose declarations in 1.3 lead to Macbeth's ascendancy is the same one whose pronouncements precede his downfall—a fact that echoes, in a darkly parodic form, the belief that God is behind both the rise and fall of kings.

hollow sound and fury at its heart” (3); by unleashing Macbeth’s ambition, they “expose a reverence for hierarchical social order for what it is, as the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare” (2). In such a vision, the Weird Sisters implicitly move from being announcers of dynastic change to becoming instigators of societal chaos.²³⁴ One is reminded of the scene in *Julius Caesar* in which Mark Antony’s rhetoric sets the Roman mob on the conspirators and others, after which he coolly says: “Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot: / Take what course thou wilt” (3.2.251–52). Yet as Eagleton himself notes, the play’s original audience would not have seen the Witches, as he does, as “the heroines of the piece” (2). Rather, narratives such as *Macbeth* and *2 Kings* 8 might have reinforced their understanding that the shifts of power described in such texts are an old story, one in which unseen or half-seen forces may be at work but in which the human players are always key.

“Will come to know his destiny”: Dark narratives of prediction

Macbeth’s initial encounter with the Weird Sisters leaves him with a vision of himself as king—a title whose powers he comes to use in ways that usurp the divine privilege over life and death. One might in fact argue that in addition to the other Old Testament parallels in the play, the Witches play the Edenic serpent to Macbeth’s Adam—or to be precise, Eve, who is told that “ye shall be as gods” upon eating the

²³⁴ For Eagleton, however, there is chaos and chaos: “There is a style of transgression which is play and poetic non-sense, a dark carnival in which all formal values are satirized and deranged”—that of the Witches—and then “the different but related disruptiveness of bourgeois individualist appetite, which . . . sunders every constraint and lapses back into nothing”—that of Macbeth (5). Yet as the critic himself admits, his valorizing of the Weird Sisters apparently is contrary to the view of Shakespeare, the playwright’s contemporaries, “almost all literary critics,” and even “the play itself” (2). In another vision of societal critique, Robert N. Watson argues that the Weird Sisters can be seen as avatars of a contradictory early modern world: “The changes in Shakespeare’s world, like the witches in *Macbeth*’s, generated a foggy, confusing moral landscape, and then destroyed people for not finding the same old path through them. They tempted people to ambitious activity with glorious prophecies—rule the world, know the universe—and then brutally punished them for not passively accepting their given conditions” (178). The argument would work better, of course, for a play in which refusing to accept one’s condition did not involve murdering an aged king under the cloak of hospitality.

forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:5). The second meeting between the characters likewise bears the marks of Macbeth's attempts to push beyond nature's boundaries. After Banquo's Ghost appears at the banquet, the agitated king declares his intent to consult the Witches:

"More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know, / By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good, / All causes shall give way . . ." (3.4.133–35). Macbeth's frame of mind manifests itself in several ways. He plans to pry information from beings whom he acknowledges as "supernatural" and enigmatic (1.3.130–31) and who Banquo suggested are "instruments of Darkness" (1.3.124)—a tactic that he himself sees as promising the "worst" intelligence by "the worst means."²³⁵ Thus, he has no compunctions about dealing with dark entities. Further, he implies a willingness to use force in his attempt: "More *shall* they speak"—the outcome is settled; they will have no choice. To compel action requires power, or at least advantage, and Macbeth thus indicates his belief that the Weird Sisters' preternatural nature will not prevail against his will.²³⁶ Finally, he puts himself in the front rank of the moral cosmos. "For mine own good, / All causes shall give way"—nothing must be allowed to take precedence over his self-preservation. Macbeth's plan therefore denotes more than simple desperation; it smacks of egotism and (to borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis about Goethe's *Faust*) "the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell" (*Screwtape* ix). In the event, however, Macbeth's will to power is stymied by the Weird Sisters' foggy language—a cloud of half-knowing that evokes some of the Old Testament's stranger narratives.

²³⁵ King James's *Dæmonologie* states that every Christian "ought assuredly to know that since the coming of Christ in the flesh, and establishing of his Church by the Apostles, all miracles, visions, prophecies, & appearances of Angels or good sprites are ceased" (65-66). By this light, the trio appearing to the thanes cannot possibly be of God.

²³⁶ The resolution that Macbeth shows here corresponds to what Bradley sees as his wife's distinguishing characteristic: "And from the beginning to the end . . . her will never fails her. Its grasp upon her nature may destroy her, but it is never relaxed" (305).

Macbeth's conjuration of the Witches upon his entrance in 4.1 continues his diabolic self-focus:

Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the Churches; though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodg'd, and trees blown down;²³⁷
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces, and pyramids, do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of Nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken, answer me
To what I ask you. (4.1.52–61)

Come what may, Macbeth says, he will have answers; if the discovery of the information means the unleashing of forces that batter sacred buildings, drown ships, lay waste to cultivation, flatten the stoutest architecture, and throw nature into chaos, so be it. So eager is he for information that he accepts, seemingly without hesitation, when asked if he wishes the answers straight from the trio's "masters" (4.1.63), an offer that might give many pause. However, the Witches soon make clear that what might have seemed a caving-in—"Speak." "Demand." "We'll answer" (4.1.61)—was nothing of the kind. Repeatedly, the king's efforts to conduct the conversation with the three Apparitions on his own grounds are rebuffed. "Hear his speech, but say thou nought" (4.1.70), "He will not be commanded" (4.1.75), "Listen, but speak not to't" (4.1.89), "Seek to know no more" (4.1.103)—at every turn, the man who would be more than king is reminded that his

²³⁷ In his comments on 4.1.52–55, Naseeb Shaheen cites Rev. 7:1, which describes angels restraining the world's four winds. Shakespeare's verses are "[m]ost likely an analogy rather than a reference" (634). Mary Floyd-Wilson connects this passage to early modern beliefs that witches in northern climes could control the weather and traded in winds (147–49). Keith Thomas writes that in England, witchcraft "was very seldom invoked to explain bad weather . . . in the way that was so common on the Continent" (642). King James, however, famously records in *News From Scotland* a confession that certain witches had raised "such a tempest in the Sea, as a greater hath not beene seene," that sank a boat bearing gifts for the queen, and that they also raised such winds against the king's fleet that "his Maiestie had neuer come safelye from the Sea, if his faith had not preuailed above their ententions" (17).

“sovereign sway and masterdom” (1.5.70) do not extend here.²³⁸ And when he continues to press—“I will be satisfied: deny me this, / And an eternal curse fall on you!” (4.1.104–05)—the Witches oblige him with the vision of Banquo’s royal descendants that leaves him shaken and cursing.

The revelations of 4.1 evoke two of the more curious episodes of Old Testament prophecy, in which elements of heterodox and orthodox prophetic activity mingle strangely—what might be called dark narratives of prediction. The first such story is the famous “witch of Endor” text of 1 Sam. 28 (explored in Chapter 4), an episode so greatly resembling Macbeth’s second encounter with the Weird Sisters that one can hardly doubt Shakespeare had it in mind when composing this scene.²³⁹ Facing a military threat and hungry for supernatural aid, King Saul finds a female medium at Endor. At Saul’s request, the ghost of the prophet Samuel appears.²⁴⁰ The spirit rebukes Saul and tells him that “the Lord will deliuer Israel with thee into the handes of the Philistines: To morrow shalt thou and thy sonnes be with me” (1 Sam. 28:19)—a prediction that is fulfilled when three of the sons are killed in battle and Saul falls on his sword (31:2–4). In both the biblical and Shakespearean narratives, a king in great mental stress consults a woman (or more than one) known to practice occult and forbidden arts; a spirit (or spirits) appears and predicts future events, leaving the monarch badly rattled at the end of the encounter.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Hamlin writes: “Macbeth’s appeal to the witches is essentially in the mode of Psalm 39:5, ‘Lord, let me know myne end, and the number of my daies: that I may be certified how long I have to live’ . . .” (301). By this light, Macbeth illicitly puts the Weird Sisters and/or their master in the place of God, and (adopting the sovereignty of heaven) they indeed treat him on their terms rather than his.

²³⁹ Hamlin, in fact, states flatly that Shakespeare’s episode is “modeled on” the biblical narrative (288). Peter Milward (*Biblical* 142) and Shaheen (635) also point out the similarities.

²⁴⁰ Although the biblical writer consistently describes the entity as Samuel, the Geneva Bible’s note on 28:14 identifies it as “Satan, who to blind his [Saul’s] eyes took upon him the form of Samuel, as he can do of an Angel of light” (310).

²⁴¹ Interestingly, King James advises his son, “Consult . . . with no necromancer nor false prophet upon the success of your wars, remembering on King Saul’s miserable end . . .” (*True Law* 130).

The second such account is less well known and more theologically ambiguous. When King Ahab of Israel attempts to enlist King Jehoshaphat of Judah in a military venture against the city of Ramoth Gilead, the latter asks that a prophet of Yahweh be consulted. When the seer Micaiah arrives, already having been warned that a company of four hundred other prophets has blessed Ahab's plan, he initially agrees with them—apparently sarcastically, as he then proceeds to predict a military rout and explain the other prophets' pronouncements. Micaiah relates a vision in which the Lord asks members of his heavenly retinue how Ahab can be persuaded to go to his doom at Ramoth Gilead. A "certayne spirite" volunteers to be "a false spirite in the mouth of all his [Ahab's] prophetes," and God approves the mission. "Nowe therefore beholde," Micaiah says to Ahab, "the Lorde hath put a lying spirite in the mouth of all these thy prophetes, and the Lorde hath spoken euyll towarde thee" (1 Kings 22:19–23). As with the 1 Samuel text, a king seeks information from a supernatural source and receives a prediction of his own death and the defeat of his forces, a prediction that comes true with Ahab's fatal wounding during battle (1 Kings 22:35). However, the 1 Kings text is particularly anomalous in that Micaiah's vision depicts God as not only planning Ahab's death but doing so by placing "a lying spirite in the mouth of all these thy prophetes."²⁴² In the Endor episode, the spirit of Samuel merely announces Saul's death; in this case, false prophecy is depicted as a divine device meant to bring about the death of an evil king. Together, the passages create an image of God as sovereign, inscrutable, unpredictable—a thoroughly Calvinist view, in other words.²⁴³

²⁴² At one point, the episode exhibits a blackly humorous aspect: Upon hearing Micaiah's story, the opposition prophet Zedekiah strikes him and asks, "When went the spirite of the Lorde from me, to speake vnto thee?" (22:24).

²⁴³ Calvin cites the 1 Kings episode after remarking, "Sometimes he deprives them [the enemies of God's people] of all presence of mind, so that they cannot undertake anything soundly or soberly" (vol. 1 189).

The similarities between the theatrical and biblical passages are matched by differences. Shakespeare's Witches are far more in control of their situation than is their counterpart in 1 Sam. 28. Even before Saul consults the medium, the biblical writer notes that the king "had put away the sorcerers, and the soothsayers out of the land" (28:3), and the woman herself raises the same issue before discovering her client's identity: "Beholde, thou knowest what Saul hath done . . . Wherefore then layest thou a snare for my soule, to cause me to die?" (28:9). In contrast to the biblical medium's clear trepidation, the three Witches betray no obvious fear of Macbeth, despite their knowledge of his capabilities and Hecate's reminder that he is "a wayward son, / Spiteful, and wrathful" (3.5.11–12).²⁴⁴ The Witches' acquiescence to Macbeth's demand for information carries a whiff of arch accommodation that implicitly says, "We provide service with a smile—and enough rope to hang yourself with."²⁴⁵ As in 1 Sam. 28, truth perversely arrives via a forbidden source. However, when comparing Shakespeare's scene with 1 Kings 28, the roles shift; the Witches do not correspond to the false prophet Zedekiah and his colleagues but rather to the orthodox prophet Micaiah—or, more precisely, to both. Like Micaiah, they tell Macbeth the truth; but just as Zedekiah's message of divine support for the expedition lures Ahab to his death, so the Weird Sisters' information contributes to Macbeth's fall via his misplaced belief in his invincibility.²⁴⁶

In the Apparitions scene and the Witches' initial appearance to Macbeth, Shakespeare engages with the theological foundation underlying the early modern belief in evil magic—or, more basically, evil in general. "For witchcraft to operate," James

²⁴⁴ Hecate's "wayward" is similar to the spelling used of the "Weird" Sisters at 1.5.8 and 2.1.20 in the First Folio (14 fn)—another hint that Macbeth and the Witches are cut from similar cloth.

²⁴⁵ What Robert G. Hunter argues about the discomfiting contemplation of divine providence can apply equally well to the illicit seeking of enlightenment about the future: "We learn from tragedy what we have been told by theology: the coveting of knowledge is a kind of madness" (70).

²⁴⁶ The ironies increase when it is noted that Ahab summons Micaiah only at Jehoshaphat's request; unlike Macbeth, the Israelite king does not actively seek the information he receives.

Sharpe writes, “three elements were needed: divine permission, satanic power and malevolence, and human agency in the shape of the witch” (17). The devil provides power to his mortal cat’s paws, who employ their agency in acting at his behest or their own, but all parties—demonic and human—ultimately can do only what God, omniscient and omnipotent, allows.²⁴⁷ According to Beezaleel Carter in *A Sermon of Gods Omnipotence and Providence*, “God hath the Devil in a chain, and greater is He that is in us, than he which is in the world” (quoted in Oldridge 48). In 1 Samuel, a spirit comes at the call of the practitioner of occult arts—but it is that of a prophet of God, who rebukes Saul and predicts divine judgment on him. In 1 Kings, the pro-court prophets speak through the power of “a lying spirite” that acts by God’s consent. In the play, the focus is on the human and demonic actors: the Witches, Macbeth, Hecate, and the Apparitions. The play replicates the moral/theological ambiguity of the two biblical episodes, although the nature of that ambiguity is different.

In 1 Samuel and 1 Kings, the cloudiness springs from the fact that God is depicted as the sovereign force behind the situation, but under circumstances that do not dovetail easily with his overall portrait in the Bible. In one case, divine judgment is declared in the context of an activity forbidden by the Torah; in the other, a prophet states that the Lord has used a “lying spirite” to set up a similar judgment. The declared action of God is thus the primary source of ambiguity. In *Macbeth*, on the other hand, the ambiguity springs from the *absence* of a clear controlling hand. Who is accountable for the thane’s tragic course? “Are they [the Witches] responsible, by magical influence or by planting the idea in his mind, for his decision to kill Duncan?” Greenblatt asks (“Macbeth” 2559). The simple argument is that the idea of murder does not emerge with clarity until

²⁴⁷ “The role allocated to divine power was of central importance,” Sharpe writes (17); in fact, some Protestant authors pressed on their readers the idea that “most of the misfortunes they attributed to witches were, in fact, attributable to God” (19).

after Macbeth hears that he will be king and possesses evidence of the Witches' reliability in the news that he is already Cawdor—hence the blood is on the Weird Sisters' hands. Katherine Eggert says the Witches' predictions “seem to hem Macbeth in upon a dreadful path to a single end” (151). Cristina León Alfar asserts that the Witches clearly “hold power over mortal men” (117), which would point the finger of responsibility in their direction.²⁴⁸ A. D. Nuttall sees a certain experimentalism on the dramaturgical level, “as if Shakespeare has become interested in how small a thing, how simple a thing, could impinge from outside and radically transform the sequence of events”—the “prod with a small metal object” that affects an organism's development (289). This idea, too, would seem to gesture toward the Weird Sisters. It is, admittedly, never clear why the Witches seek out and deal with Macbeth. Hecate's rebuke of the trio—“And I, the mistress of your charms . . . Was never call'd to bear my part” (3.5.6, 8)—implies a certain rogue activity on their part; the three have acted “without her permission” (Clark 69). Robert Rentoul Reed Jr. argues that “they are not merely amusing themselves: they have both a fundamental purpose and a compelling interest in the [initial] intended meeting. Behind the scenes is a conspiracy, almost certainly of demonic character” (166). For Reed, the answer is that in the flush of military success, “Macbeth has had thoughts of a traitorous mold and, in consequence, has become vulnerable to the devil” and his three eldritch servants; he has lost the divine protection that he might otherwise have had (168). In early modern thought, Darren Oldridge writes, “the corrupted nature of humankind was

²⁴⁸ Maurice Charney points out the link between “weird” and the Anglo-Saxon “wyrd” and characterizes the trio as “the three Fates in the play,” who “cannot either determine or alter his [Macbeth's] fate” (*Wrinkled* 140). However, Bradley flatly dismisses the idea of the three as goddesses or fates—“this is perversion,” he snaps (282)—and describes them as mere “old women,” albeit ones who have “received from evil spirits certain supernatural powers” (283). Nuttall memorably describes the three as part of “a northern, Brueghelesque world of cooking pots and greasy kitchen scraps” (286), a characterization that strengthens the Witches' parallel to biblical false prophets—at bottom, they are human.

apparent in both the body and the mind,” and the mind was “especially prey to the temptation of pride” (68)—precisely the vice that might lead to regicidal ambition. Oldridge also notes the popularity of early modern “crime pamphlets that identified Satan as the source of murderous thoughts” (105). The vulnerability-to-supernatural-evil scenario has a certain logic, particularly for an early modern audience accustomed to thinking in terms of demonic influence as a constant danger; however, such an explanation for the Weird Sisters’ actions is a matter of tantalizing hint rather than clarity. The Witches’ motives remain opaque, suggesting a scientific experiment seen from the rat’s viewpoint—and therefore tending to place responsibility for the results on the three bearded experimenters.²⁴⁹

Yet if the finger tends to gesture toward the Weird Sisters, and if the thane’s heart is ground that is (relatively) unplowed by evil, how is it that murder springs so quickly to mind and is entertained at all? Why the start, noticed by Banquo, at the Witches’ triple hailing of Macbeth?²⁵⁰ Given that the end of magic is the supernaturally empowered accomplishment of one’s will—i.e., the ability to *do* successfully—what is remarkable is how little the Weird Sisters in fact do. Greenblatt remarks that although “their malevolent energy apparently informs action . . . it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything, they do or even what, if anything, they are” (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 192). Garber sees them as enabling: “If the witches are causative, it is not because they

²⁴⁹ In this sense, the play is a tragic version of the biblical story of Job, in which Satan wagers with the Lord that misfortune will cause the book’s virtuous namesake to renounce God. Job clings to his spiritual loyalty despite his spouse’s arguments and Satan’s manipulations. “Macbeth, unlike Job, is to yield to the persuasions of his wife” (Reed 197); he responds to the prodding of dark forces with the ultimate rejection of his lord: murder. On a textual note, Shaheen notes that the phrase “man that’s born of woman” (5.3.6) is almost identical to wording in Job 14:1, but he argues that Shakespeare’s primary source for the language is Holinshed rather than Scripture or the prayer book, given that this prophecy figured in the underlying tale “from the very beginning” (639). However, Hamlin (301) points to the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer.

²⁵⁰ Nuttall, who sees this stage business as a clear indicator of Macbeth’s guilty conscience, calls it the “most economical feat of dramaturgy ever, the place where most is done in least time” (284).

tell Macbeth what to do—or, in fact, because they *tell* him anything—but because, like Iago, they allow him to interpret things as he wants to see them” (*After All* 698; emphasis in original). Macbeth, after all, is merely told that he will achieve the throne; whether this will occur through bloodshed, disease, old age, or even abdication is left up in the (filthy) air. Roy Battenhouse, citing Augustine’s idea of a “froward will” that ends in moral decay, sees a clue in the play’s opening battle: “A froward will is indicated by the extravagant ferocity of the swordsmanship reported of Macbeth in scene 2, a kind of courage more concerned with its own excellence than with subduing the enemy It is this forwardness that makes Macbeth vulnerable to the suggestion of murder . . .” (“Macbeth” 473).²⁵¹ Drawing some interestingly fine distinctions, Robert G. Hunter suggests four diagnoses of Macbeth’s character: He is “criminal” (the “horrid image[s]” of 1.3.135 spring from within but lie within his will’s control), “insane” (the images come from within but overpower him), “self-damned” (the images are supernatural in origin but resistible), or “reprobate” (the images are supernatural but irresistible—i.e., he is divinely abandoned to sin). In other Shakespearean tragedies, Hunter argues, the likely explanation for the protagonist’s deeds is reasonably clear, but “in the case of Macbeth, I think, Shakespeare keeps the possibilities in suspension so that, at the play’s end, the mystery is extraordinarily complex . . .” (168–69). And for Hunter, the ambiguities do not end here; even “the diabolical temptations and torments to which Macbeth is subjected may also be manifestations of divine grace” (173). The very horror of the thane’s homicidal mental images can be a warning against the temptation; the illusory bloodstained dagger might

²⁵¹ Philippa Sheppard, looking at this same passage, characterizes Macbeth as a “ferocious killer,” although she qualifies this by noting that he is defending his nation (240). Peter Milward is less sanguine: “Even from the beginning, he is by no means the brave, loyal general he is sometimes made out to be. Rather, he is shown as a man of blood . . .” (*Jacobean Shakespeare* 42). Yet this raises the question of why Banquo, whom the same battle report also describes as ferocious, refuses to follow Macbeth’s lead in securing the throne for his progeny.

be a “barrier in his way”; the cry of “Sleep no more!” (2.2.34) may be a “threat of divine justice”; Banquo’s Ghost may be a goad toward repentance: “Thus the whole series of psychic or supernatural phenomena partake of a possible double nature . . .” (174). The answer, ultimately, is lost in the foggy atmosphere of a drama in which moral responsibility can be difficult to pin down neatly.

For an early modern audience, the Witches are most obviously representatives of the powers of darkness that in the marketplace of the inner life coyly offer merchandise that, like a dangerous cup of wine, “goeth downe sweetely, but at the last it byteth like a serpent, and stingeth lyke an adder” (Prov. 23:32). Banquo asks, “What! can the Devil speak true?” (1.3.107) The answer is “yes”—but the mere “truth” of the answer is not the whole story. The three Sisters also weirdly echo aspects of the kind of divine inscrutability that would have been familiar to playgoers who lived and moved and had their being in an England whose religious life increasingly was infused with a Reformed theology that foregrounded the ultimately unaccountable sovereignty of God. Whether facing toward the darkness or the light, one might encounter a cloud of unknowing.

“Mutual . . . helpe”: Lady Macbeth as prophetic guide

Lady Macbeth’s dramatic function in the play is neatly encapsulated early in 1.7: As Macbeth reconsiders the murder plot, he muses that he has “no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition . . .” (1.7.25–27)—and before he has spoken ten more words, his wife appears, as if conjured up specifically to fill the void that he notes. Her opening thoughts in the play in 1.5 (after her actual first lines, which comprise part of a letter from Macbeth) concentrate on her perception of a lack or a not-yet-ness in her spouse:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promis’d.—Yet do I fear thy nature:
It is too full o’the’ milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;

Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it . . . (1.5.15–20)

Lady Macbeth initially ticks off the titles that Macbeth holds but then proceeds to the one that is still ungrasped, and hence to what she sees as the flaws in his psyche. She notes that her husband has the desire for greatness, but the observation itself indicates that the desire is not yet (fully) realized. He is “not without ambition” (a syntactical construction that actually emphasizes the glass-half-empty status of that quality in his heart), but the aspiration that he possesses yet lacks something to make it perfect—and she, of course, is the person fit to supply that need. In this capacity, Lady Macbeth emulates one of the more obscure aspects of the biblical prophets: that of adviser and guide. In so doing, however, she raises the specter of the counselor who births chaos rather than order, acting in pursuit of some form of personal advantage rather than the good of the commonwealth. In Lady Macbeth’s hands, the role of helpmeet becomes a sterile parody of the societal tradition.

The roles of “announcer of judgment” and “speaker of truth to power” are so prominent in the common image of the prophets that it is easy to overlook their more pedestrian activities. For instance, the prophet Nathan gives an initial go-ahead to King David’s idea to build a temple to replace the tabernacle, the elaborate tent housing the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 7:3).²⁵² During David’s time as a fugitive pursued by King Saul, the prophet Gad advises him to enter the land of Judah rather than stay in a stronghold (1 Sam. 22:5). The Old Testament contains other narratives in which prophets provide guidance; for example, Jeremiah tells King Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem to surrender to a besieging Babylonian army (Jer. 21:9, 38:17). However, this

²⁵² However, his encouragement is almost immediately countermanded by a divine message declaring that David’s offspring will build the temple (2 Sam. 7:4–13). The implication, as the Geneva Bible’s comment on 7:5 states, is that Nathan initially was “speaking according to man’s judgment and not by the spirit of prophecy” (319).

and other such texts typically describe the prophet as relaying a divine message. In contrast, in the narratives involving Nathan and Gad cited above, God is not cited as the source of the counsel, suggesting that prophets occasionally spoke on their own account.

A biblical episode of prophet-as-guide with certain parallels to Lady Macbeth's situation is that of 1 Kings 1, cited previously in this chapter, in which Nathan intervenes in the question of who will succeed the aged David. After the charismatic prince Adonijah puts together an escort and garners important support within the court, he arranges a feast for his brothers and the royal officials but does not invite his brother Solomon or Nathan. The prophet goes to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, and advises her on how to counter this pre-emptive bid for the throne: "Nowe therefore come, and I will geue thee counsell howe to saue thyne owne lyfe, and the lyfe of thy sonne Solomon. Go and get thee in vnto king Daud, & say vnto him: Diddest not thou my lorde O king, sweare vnto thy handmayde, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy sonne shall raigne after me, and he shall sit vpon my seate?" (1 Kings 1:12–13). When Bathsheba makes her plea to the king, Nathan arrives at the court in the middle of the conversation and courteously asks whether Adonijah's claim to the throne has his father's support; David then confirms Solomon as heir and has him proclaimed king. Nathan thus intervenes in a succession question by rhetorically pressing the players (initially Bathsheba, but later David as well) to act in a situation overshadowed by the possibility of violence—the seer anticipates danger to Solomon and Bathsheba if Adonijah is successful.²⁵³ Shakespeare's scene

²⁵³ In the event, Adonijah later seals his fate by asking that he be given one of David's beautiful concubines to marry, a request for which King Solomon has him executed (1 Kings 2:13–25). There is an ironic parallel to Shakespeare's depictions elsewhere of Henry VI and Edward IV, whose desire for the attractive Margaret of Anjou and Lady Grey, respectively, creates political trouble for them. Nor is this implicit criticism limited to Shakespeare; in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Henry says he broke "a better precontract" in marrying Margaret, and "after mariage ioynde Quene Margarete and me, / For one mishap afore, I dayly met with three . . ." (216). In the same work, the Duke of Suffolk remarks of Henry's marriage, "Thus vertue starves, but lustfoode must be larded" (166), and Warwick likewise complains that Edward was "to a widowe rashly wedded" because the king was

reverses the moral polarity: the adviser anticipates using “the valour of my tongue” (1.5.27) to push Macbeth into shedding blood—an increase in “illness” (1.5.20)—to snatch a crown that would not otherwise be his. The early modern playgoer might well recall the advantage-seeking courtiers and favorites of the sort condemned in *Richard II* as devouring “caterpillars” (2.3.166, 3.4.47)—something for which James’s court was notorious—or Elizabeth’s difficulties with the ambitious and eventually rebellious Essex. Lady Macbeth becomes a travesty of the biblical counselor, one whose wisdom should promote the common good but instead engenders disorder.

In Lady Macbeth’s case, the prophetic role of counselor/guide dovetails with the gender role of wife as supporter and helper that early modern women were expected to fill.²⁵⁴ As the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer famously declares, one of “the causes for the which matrimonye was ordeined” is “the mutual socieitie, helpe, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other” (157). Joan Larsen Klein, in fact, writes that Lady Macbeth “conceives of herself almost exclusively as a wife, a helpmate”; in her first scene, “she speaks not to herself but to her husband . . . Nowhere does she mention Macbeth’s implied bribe—that she, too, has been promised ‘greatness’ . . .” (243). It is easy enough to see Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth in the same terms as the historical noblewoman depicted in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*—“speciallie his wife lay sore vpon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene” (quoted in Muir 172)—but Klein sees someone focused not

“so bent to lust” (206–07). Adrian Streete sees a similarity between Macbeth and David’s son Absalom, a “tragic figure of patriarchal rebellion and death” who tries to overthrow his father and is killed during the ensuing conflict after being caught in a tree (31).

²⁵⁴ Shaheen writes: “Some have argued that the relationship between Macbeth and his wife was inspired by the account of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings 21, but these arguments are unconvincing” (622). In the passage in question, Jezebel arranges for the execution of the vineyard owner Naboth so Ahab can take possession of the land—again, an instance in which the figure alongside the king feeds the worst instead of the best in him.

on herself but on the good of her husband.²⁵⁵ Yet, Klein argues, Lady Macbeth is constitutionally incapable of being the Renaissance wife to Macbeth because she is “without charity” or faith and therefore “cannot give him that lasting companionship under God which the *Homilies* saw as true marriage” (241–42). Further, Klein writes, she ultimately “cannot act out of cruelty” (in that she is unable to kill Duncan), yet “she refuses to act out of what [Hugh] Latimer called ‘charitable’ love. As she forfeits the power for good which derives from the practice of pity, she is left only with loss and weakness” (243).²⁵⁶ The irony, then, is that (in this analysis) the woman who wishes to give counsel and whose dramatic purpose is to goad her husband into action is herself incapable of full-blown, meaningful action, for good or evil. Just as her husband’s illegitimate pursuit (through murder) of a legitimate good (political authority) leaves him in the withering nothingness of evil, so her twisted fulfillment (goaded to bloodshed) of a legitimate role (supporter of her spouse) ultimately leaves her capable only of reliving waking horrors in nightmarish sleep: “One; two: why, then ’tis time to do’t.—Hell is murky” (5.1.33–34).²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Sinead Cusack, discussing her 1986 interpretation of Lady Macbeth for RSC director Adrian Noble, sees a woman whose loss of her child has left her “obsessive about the man [Macbeth] and about his happiness and security,” one who had “turned, not in on herself, but completely in on him” (Rutter with Cusack 121). In Cusack’s view, the “milk for gall” soliloquy is a Faustian bargain that has Macbeth as the ultimate beneficiary: “I will throw away my sexuality . . . I will never have children again—if I can have this. . . . In order to achieve this for him, I will deny my *self*” (124; emphasis in original). Alfar also views Lady Macbeth as acting out of something other than self-interest: “Her speech is not motivated by an individualized agency—as a desire for her own power—because it serves to support the power and desire of another” (125). However, this statement is made in the context of an argument that Lady Macbeth’s participation in murder “is not evidence of an inherent evil but of her subjection to the patrilineal order’s definitions of gender and power” (125)—a reading that essentially absolves her while damning the patrilineal order.

²⁵⁶ Dymphna Callaghan, however, writes: “Lady Macbeth becomes troubled with feminine remorse, guilt, and madness familiar in modern conceptions of femininity. Significantly, Lady Macbeth is finally unable to relinquish her maternity. She remains one who has ‘given suck’ and knows ‘How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me’ . . .” (363). It is unclear, however, whether Callaghan sees this as a remnant of virtue or an indication of co-optation by patriarchal culture.

²⁵⁷ Cf. the picture of Lady Macbeth’s interior state created by the sleepwalking scene to C. S. Lewis’s depiction of a damned soul in his novel *Perelandra*: “The intoxicated will which had been slowly poisoning the intelligence and the affections had now at last poisoned itself and the whole psychic organism had fallen to pieces. Only a ghost was left—an everlasting unrest, a crumbling, a ruin, an odour of decay” (130).

Yet where Klein sees Lady Macbeth as ultimately impotent (so to speak) in terms of the helpmate role, Cristina León Alfar essentially argues the opposite: she is too much of the traditionally supportive good thing. If she turns ruthlessly, lethally (and stereotypically) masculine, “it is because she must do so to reflect—as conduct manuals demand—the bloody desire of her husband,” Alfar writes (113). She thus becomes a “parodic depiction of wifely duty” whose “behavior adheres to rather than transgresses her gender role” (113), thereby subjecting such roles, and political violence as well, to critique. But another interpretive possibility presents itself: in a society in which the wife is an extension of her husband, Lady Macbeth proposes to reverse the situation; she will infuse her spouse with her own passions, remaking him in her own image and likeness. (Adelman writes that “Macbeth’s bloodthirsty masculinity is partly a response to Lady Macbeth’s desire, in effect an extension of her will” [138].) According to Lady Macbeth, the thane has ambition but not the “illness should attend it.” Ruthlessness, amorality—the space where such stuff should go is now “too full o’the’ milk of human kindness.” Therefore, she must displace that psychic fluid with one more conducive to her ends: “Hie thee hither,” she says to her absent spouse, “That I may pour my spirits in thine ear . . .” (1.5.25–26). For the psychoanalytic interpreter, the picture is one of impregnation, with Lady Macbeth verbally siring a homicide on the receptive thane. “As Lady Macbeth goads Macbeth on to murder,” Joanna Levin writes, “their interaction can be read as a sexualized relation in which murderous intent emerges as the final product” (42). The idea parodically reflects the medieval belief that the conception of Jesus occurred as “the direct result of the Annunciation, that Mary had conceived as she heard God’s speech addressed to her by the Archangel Gabriel” (Woolgar 85).²⁵⁸ In *Hamlet*, of course, what is

²⁵⁸ According to Bryan Adams Hampton, “medieval and Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation . . . commonly represented [Mary] with a dove at her ear, or a cartouche

poured into a man's ear kills him; the intent of Lady Macbeth is to jolt the recipient into what she sees as full life—and to bring about the death of a king.

Shakespeare's original audience understood the value and necessity of the voice of counsel and support, both in the domestic sphere ("mutual societie, helpe, and comfort") and that of national politics. "Although Elizabeth always insisted that she—and she alone—could take the final decision on all matters of importance," Paul E. J. Hammer writes, "she recognized that a sovereign must also take advice By her choices [of Privy Council members after her ascension], Elizabeth reassured her subjects that their young and still-unmarried Queen recognized the need to surround herself with men of demonstrable sense and standing" (35–36). And as this dissertation makes clear, the office of the biblical prophet is intimately linked to the throne and its moral guidance. In Lady Macbeth's performance of this role, Shakespeare depicts the privy councilor gone wrong—what is possible when the prophet/adviser acts from a distorted view of the good of the spouse, king, or realm. In her advising of her husband, Lady Macbeth leans on her own understanding; what she finds is, "There is a way which seemeth right vnto a man: but the ende therof are the wayes of death" (Prov. 14:12).

"Fill me, from the crown to the toe": Inadequacy and empowerment

"[T]hou art wayed in the balauce, and art founde wanting"—such, to borrow the words of the prophet Daniel (5:27), is Lady Macbeth's implicit verdict on her spouse. Yet at the same time, she summons supernatural powers to her own aid:

Come, you Spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,

representing the passing of the words from the heavens or the angel's lips into her ear" (339). Hampton views this similarity through the lens of spiritual possession rather than impregnation, although he also writes that "Macbeth gives monstrous birth to a series of murders" (340) in the killing of Macduff's family.

Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
 That no compunctious visitings of Nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
 And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
 Wherever in your sightless substances
 You wait on Nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
 That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
 Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
 To cry, 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.40–54)

Lady Macbeth implicitly points to her role as Macbeth's twin in this aspect of the narrative. Even as she sees the thane as inadequate to the task, she seeks to shore up her own ability to ensure that "the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under [her] battlements" (1.5.39–40) is indeed lethal. As she will be to Macbeth, so the shadows she invokes will be to her, pouring themselves into her ear. Her husband is "too full o'the'milk of human kindness," a fault that must be remedied; she asks that her own nourishing milk be syphoned off.²⁵⁹ In this consciousness of inadequacy, Lady Macbeth parallels the experience of Hebrew prophets who are consequently supernaturally empowered to fulfill their roles. But whereas the biblical figures are cleansed and filled with the word of God, and thereby linked to the divine nature, Lady Macbeth's aim is to become more demonic and less human—or at least less traditionally womanly.

Calling on night and preternatural observers of humanity, Lady Macbeth seeks "direst cruelty," invulnerability to remorse, alienation between her and nature, and surroundings marked by darkness and hiddenness from heaven. Provocatively, her

²⁵⁹ One is reminded of the First Witch's plan for the unnamed master of the *Tiger*: "I'll drain him dry as hay" (1.3.18). In both cases, a person is emptied of vital substances, the difference being that the sailor's curse is Lady Macbeth's physic, in her view. For Adelman, the passage's liquid imagery evokes "attempts to undo reproductive functioning and perhaps to stop the menstrual blood that is the sign of its potential" (135); A. R. Braunmuller concurs and also sees gender implications in "stopping up the circulation . . . of blood that makes her more compassionate ('compunctious') than a male" (33). Hampton, writing about the perceived benefits of various forms of "purgation," chooses a different bodily metaphor: "Instead of healthful purgation, Lady Macbeth's invocation conveys the opposite: physical, emotional, and spiritual constipation" (338).

petition is conspicuously marked by gender language: “unsex me here Come to my woman’s breasts, / And take my milk for gall . . .” (1.5.41, 47–48). What are the underlying assumptions about femininity and masculinity? Lisa Jardine, working with the phraseology of the pamphlet *Hic Mulier*, writes of a “misogynistic tradition” that produces characters like Lady Macbeth who are “represented as ‘not-woman’ at the peak of dramatic tension before committing ‘unwomanly’ acts—generally murder. She is ‘Masculine in (her) gender’, ‘most mankind, and most monstrous’ . . .” (94–95).²⁶⁰ Yet if these fictional women who commit murder and other such acts are “Masculine” and “most mankind,” then the tradition that breeds such characters is at least as misandrist as misogynist, given its gendering of mayhem as masculine. Macbeth is “[h]ardened by Lady Macbeth to regard maleness and violence as equivalent,” Adelman writes (133) , but as Catherine Belsey says, “Lady Macbeth is wrong: masculinity is not by nature criminal . . .” (“Gender” 134).²⁶¹ It is questionable whether Lady Macbeth, even in the desired sloughing-off of her femininity, holds some form of masculinity as her true goal. “I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more, is none,” Macbeth says later (1.7.46–47); Lady Macbeth’s invocation suggests that she indeed wishes to do more than might become a man (*man* as in human being, as well as male)—she will take on the qualities of “murth’ring ministers” whose thoughts are not those of normal mortals.²⁶² Sinead

²⁶⁰ Robert N. Watson says of Macbeth, “His manhood erases his humanity . . .” (176). As with Jardine, the implication is that bloody-handedness is gendered (hyper)masculine, so that Macbeth’s heart essentially suffers from testosterone poisoning. Yet Hampton implies the opposite when he writes, “Macbeth purges reason, the stereotypical male faculty, entirely from his actions when he declares, ‘[t]he very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand’ . . .” (340). By this logic, Macbeth’s decision to be more ruthless makes him *less* masculine.

²⁶¹ Similarly, Irene Dash asserts that the common mistake of Lady Macbeth and of Eleanor in 2 *Henry VI* is confusing manliness with ruthlessness (166).

²⁶² To the degree that Lady Macbeth can thus be seen as wishing to transcend human gender, she becomes a counter-figure to Adelman’s description of Duncan as the “ideally androgynous parent” who “initially seems to combine in himself the attributes of both father and mother: he is the center of authority, the source of lineage and honor, the giver of name and gift; but he is also the source of all nurturance, planting the children to his throne and making them grow” (131–32). Yet Adelman also sees this androgyny as “the object of enormous ambivalence” in the play (132).

Cusack, although seeing eroticism as key to the couple's relationship, interprets the "unsex me" plea not as "make me an un-woman, a pseudo-man," but as "make me invulnerable to love"—the emotional openness that might otherwise hinder her plan (Rutter with Cusack 124).²⁶³

The request also makes sense in light of Gail Kern Paster's comments about identity in view of Galenic physiological theory. "[T]he bodily fluids . . . were thought to affect mood, disposition, desires, and emotions—sources of the self," Paster writes, and a particular concern in Shakespeare is constancy; even though emotions were seen as "essential for survival," they also were believed "to cloud the judgement, corrupt the will, and seduce the reason" (144).²⁶⁴ Further, inconstancy was considered "a trait synonymous with woman" (151). Phyllis Mack writes, "Since there was no strong inner scaffolding, no reliable core or conscience, [the female] mind was easily permeated not only by outside influences but by her own strong inner drives" (27). Given that Lady Macbeth's concern is that her husband lacks the wherewithal to do what is necessary, her plea can be seen as a Galenic prophylactic against emotions that might undermine her resolve.²⁶⁵ Yet because emotions are part of the human condition, her request becomes one that goes beyond un-gendering to dehumanization. Adelman suggests that Lady Macbeth's invitation to "take my milk for gall," rather than indicating an exchange of

²⁶³ Orgel raises another interpretive possibility: "Lady Macbeth unsexing herself . . . renders herself, unexpectedly, not a man but a child, and thus incapable of murder" when she sees a likeness between Duncan and her father (346).

²⁶⁴ Ironically, the original context for Paster's remarks is male Shakespearean characters, and her essay mentions *Macbeth* only in passing (150). If constancy is thus viewed as a particularly male concern, one might indeed argue that Lady Macbeth is seeking to masculinize herself.

²⁶⁵ Robert G. Hunter argues that Lady Macbeth's lack is precisely what dooms her: "All in all she is a frightening demonstration of the stupidity of the will when it is not informed by imagination. Her reason foresees results but not consequences, so she can invite evil to possess her without regarding the invitation as more than a necessary pre-condition for Duncan's murder" (177). Orgel is more sanguine about Lady Macbeth's mental capabilities: "probably the most frightening thing in the play is the genuine power of Lady Macbeth's mind—not just her powers of analysis and persuasion, but her intimate apprehension of her husband's deepest desires . . ." (354).

the latter for the former in her body, is an offer to the spirits that they nurse from her and “find in her milk their sustaining poison” (135).²⁶⁶ If so, this strengthens the likeness between her and the evil spirits, simultaneously distancing her from normal mortals, whether men or women. Indeed, Roland Mushat Frye states flatly that her plea “is essentially a repudiation of humanity in the interests of evil” (223). In this light, Lady Macbeth’s quest is not so much a heinously intentioned version of Beatrice’s wish in *Much Ado About Nothing*—“O, that I were a man!” (4.1.302)—as a desire to be transmuted into a dark force of unfettered violence.²⁶⁷

In her expressions of insufficiency and the appeal for aid in the committing of a grim deed, Lady Macbeth is the dark twin of various biblical prophets who voice feelings of inadequacy and unholiness in response to the call and the divine presence. Typically, “the human who has been singled out by God . . . demurs and protests that he is unworthy or incapable of doing the job” (Matthews 28). Yet again, the seminal personality is Moses, who expresses reluctance to accept the divinely appointed task of leading Israel on multiple grounds: He is not the right person (Ex. 3:11), he does not know God’s name (3:13), he lacks the means to compel belief (4:1), he is not a good speaker (4:10), and the Lord simply needs to send another person (4:13). In each case, God provides an answer—e.g., Moses is empowered to perform corroborating miracles, and he is told that his brother Aaron will accompany him as a speaker. A similar account is that of Isaiah, who records a vision of God in the temple, attended by angelic beings:

²⁶⁶ This request to be drained of something integral to one’s nature in preparation for a definitive act perversely echoes the Christian concept of *kenosis*, the idea that the Son of God emptied himself of certain aspects of divinity in the Incarnation (Easton 1792–93). By this light, Lady Macbeth becomes an anti-Christ figure. Adrian Streete sees both the Macbeths as “types of antichrist as well as mirrors of other biblically compromised figures” (21).

²⁶⁷ Beatrice, of course, also wishes to commit bloodshed. However, her desire to harm Claudio is a matter of Hero’s slandered honor (and caused by the deceit of others) rather than her own advantage, and it occurs in a comic context.

Then sayd I, Wo is me, for I am lost, in as much as I am a man of vnclene lippes Then flewe one of the Seraphims vnto me, hauing a hote cole in his hand, whiche he had taken from the aulter with the tongues, And layde it vpon my mouth, and sayde: Lo, [this] hath touched thy lippes, and thine vnrighteousnesse shalbe taken away, and thy sinne forgeuen. Also I hearde the voyce of the Lorde on this maner: whom shall I sende, and who wyll be our messenger? Then I sayde, Here am I, sende me. (6:5–8; interpolation in original)

Awestruck in the divine presence, the writer experiences an awareness of sin and a feeling of doom. Although he makes no direct request, a seraph touches his lips with a coal from the altar and pronounces him forgiven. When God calls for an ambassador, the now-empowered Isaiah volunteers. Taking a page from Moses's book, Jeremiah objects to God's declaration that he will be a prophet, arguing that he is not old enough: "And the Lorde aunswered me thus: Say not so, I am to young: for thou shalt go to all that I shall sende thee vnto, and whatsoever I commaunde thee, that shalt thou speake. . . . And with that the Lorde stretched out his hande and touched my mouth: and the same Lorde sayde vnto me, Beholde, I put my wordes in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:7, 9). Although both this narrative and that of Isaiah involve supernatural physical contact, in the former account the touch is negative, one of cleansing removal ("thine vnrighteousnesse shalbe taken away"); in the latter it is positive, one of empowering impartation ("I put my wordes in thy mouth"). In all three cases, the narrative depicts a person confronted with an intimidating prospect and feelings of inadequacy, the solution to which is supernatural intervention. In a sense, such passages encapsulate the doctrine of human depravity: Human beings are fatally sinful and can only be saved by divine action, which changes them and enables them to please God. In the formulation of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, "man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil," and "we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing [i.e., going before] us . . ." (*BCP* 676).

Lady Macbeth's invocation is a dark parody of this line of thought as exemplified in the Old Testament texts and their prophet-protagonists. Faced with a daunting task and noting a lack of wherewithal to accomplish it (explicitly expressed in terms of her husband, and implicitly acknowledged in terms of herself), she finds her answer in the supernatural—but the demonic rather than the divine. The contrast is underscored by the fact that whereas the Hebrew prophets are empowered (and not at their own instigation) to do God's work, Lady Macbeth willfully seeks dark power to fulfill her own purposes—yet another instance of the “ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell” (Lewis *Screwtape* ix). The parallel to Jeremiah is particularly notable; just as the young Hebrew's mouth is touched by God and filled with divine words, so Lady Macbeth asks spirits to “fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty!” Her request of the spirits is also striking in its ironic reversing of Isaiah. Whereas the seraph's fiery touch signals the removal of unrighteousness and the forgiveness of sin, Lady Macbeth—who muses that her husband is “without / The illness [that] should attend” greatness—specifically asks that “murth'ring ministers” fill her with mercilessness and “[s]top up th'access and passage to remorse.” Isaiah is appalled by his uncleanness—the Geneva Bible comments on Isa. 6:7, “This declareth that man cannot render due obedience to God, til he have purged us” (684)—but Lady Macbeth embraces her uncleanness and wishes to increase it.

Less obvious, but still noteworthy, is a similarity of image in Isaiah's and Shakespeare's scenes. In the prophet's vision of God, he describes the temple as “full of smoke” (6:4), perhaps from the altar. Lady Macbeth, too, mentions smoke, but rather than being linked to the presence of “the kyng the Lorde of hoastes,” it is “the dunnest smoke of Hell” that she hopes will shroud her deed so that neither heaven nor even her own “keen knife” can see it. In the biblical text, the fumes are associated with holiness; in

the play, with its opposite.²⁶⁸ The unholy murk that Lady Macbeth calls down on herself before Duncan's murder is precisely what casts a pall over her soul afterward; she gets what she wishes for. Adelman also implicitly touches on the fulfillment of Lady Macbeth's prayer; commenting on her later question to her husband, "What cannot you and I perform upon / Th'unguarded Duncan?" (1.7.70–71), Adelman sees an invitation to Macbeth "to share in her fantasy of *omnipotent malevolence*" (138; emphasis added). Lady Macbeth thus feels herself empowered at this point in ways that she was not previously.²⁶⁹ If the implications of Adelman's characterization are followed, Lady Macbeth essentially has come to the same place as her husband: she has set herself on a dark altar, the object of her own worship.

In its conjuring of societal concerns about both rebellion and religion, *Macbeth* sets out a cauldron of powerful broth to simmer on the stage. The original audiences could look back on a history—for some, within living memory—in which the northern earls had risen against Elizabeth in 1569 and the participants in the Gunpowder Plot had hoped to blow up king and Parliament in 1605. In the words and actions of the Weird Sisters and Lady Macbeth, the playgoers could see the kind of summons to treason against which they were warned in the official homilies read from the nation's pulpits: "How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is, cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof. For he that nameth rebellion . . . nameth the whole

²⁶⁸ Peter Milward argues, "The [initial] appearance of the witches amid 'the fog and filthy air' present a . . . parody of the divine theophany in *Exod.xx.16* in 'a thick cloud' " (*Biblical* 115). Bradley sees this gloominess as a quality of the entire play—"Darkness, we may even say blackness, broods over this tragedy"—but he also points out: "The failure of nature in Lady Macbeth is marked by her fear of darkness And in the one phrase of fear that escapes her lips even in sleep, it is of the darkness of the place of torment that she speaks" (277).

²⁶⁹ "The tragic flaw of the Shakespearian hero is not *hybris*, the classical presumption that nothing can happen to you, but pride and the anxiety of insufficiency, the determination to *become* self-sufficient," W. H. Auden writes (313; emphasis in original). Yet one also can argue that Lady Macbeth shows self-sufficiency from the start; writing about the relationship between the spouses, Bradley says: "She helps him, but never asks his help. She leans on nothing but herself" (305). In classic theology, of course, total self-sufficiency is an attribute of God alone.

puddle and sink of all sins against God and man . . .” (*Homilies* 534). Indeed, one of the embodiments of disloyalty with whom early modern churchgoers would have been familiar was the biblical figure of the false prophet, the tempter of the Israelites to idolatry. In their appeals to Macbeth’s ambition, the play’s female characters call the thane to a metaphorical idolatry, a veneration of wood (the throne) and gold (the crown). Yet at the same time, the efficient cause of Duncan’s murder remains unclear—does it lie in the actions of the Witches or those of Macbeth? In a nation whose official faith was a Calvinist-tinged Protestantism in which God was sovereign and sometimes mysterious, playgoers would have seen an ambiguity reproducing, in a darkly parodic form, the mystery found in biblical texts dealing with the connection between divine actions and the changing of human dynasties. And in a society in which many saw the Roman church as the Enemy spiritually and politically, the Witches easily could have become crypto-Catholics. In such a reading, the Weird Sisters, simultaneously prophets and witches, embody the threat of a “foreign” institution characterized by both dark supernatural power (or at least superstition) and a predilection for instigating political unrest against legitimate—indeed, God-ordained—rulers. If the implicit message of some of Shakespeare’s other prophetic characters is that women no less than men can critique and oppose injustice in biblical style—and, indeed, sometimes triumph over it—then the implication of these female characters’ actions is that the opposite remains true: women can help sire chaos and injustice in the time-honored biblical fashion of men.

Chapter 6

“And fightest with the sword of Deborah”: Joan Puzel in *1 Henry VI*

Paulina, Katherine, Margaret, Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters, Joan Puzel—the irony is that of all these prophetic figures, the only one who actually claims a mandate from heaven is in fact allied with hell. Like Margaret, the Maid of Orleans has the distinction of being styled a seer by other characters—she is a “holy prophetess, new risen up,” according to an English military messenger (*1 Henry VI* 1.4.101), and a “glorious prophetess” in the view of the French Dolphin (1.5.47). Yet Margaret, who repeatedly invokes God and whose fire-and-brimstone curses by and large do come true, never actually asserts a divine commission. Similarly, Paulina and Katherine call for righteousness and decry wrong in prophetic fashion but do not bolster their proclamations with “Thus saith the Lorde.” By contrast, Joan flatly declares that she is on a holy mission: “God’s mother deigned to appear to me / And, in a vision full of majesty, / Willed me to leave my base vocation / And free my country from calamity” (1.2.68, 78–81). Both the French and the English, in fact, apparently accept the reality of Joan’s link to the supernatural—the disagreement lies in whether her powers come (to use an early modern stage metaphor) from the heavens above or the trap below. Moreover, Joan is unique among the female characters examined here in that her prophetic mission is both specifically and impersonally political: “Assigned am I to be the English scourge,” she tells Charles and the French nobles (1.2.129). Paulina’s concern is the marital injustice committed against Hermione; Katherine’s is the marital injustice committed against herself. Margaret’s rhetorical business, of course, is deeply political but also thoroughly personal, and much the same can be said of Lady Macbeth. Joan, on the other hand, presents herself as the devoted weapon of France—a female counterpart to the heroic

Talbot.²⁷⁰ In a drama dominated by Englishmen fixated on self and faction, she evinces relatively little interest in personal power and glory. Yet compared to the other women in the plays, Joan finds fewer parallels in the biblical prophetic accounts; her call is to arms rather than to abstract righteousness.

The possibility of a dual reading complicates Shakespeare's depiction of Joan.²⁷¹ Like Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, she holds within her the seeds of both farce and pathos. Puzel finds her closest scriptural parallels in two women known for bearing the sword for Israel: the deliverer/judge Deborah of the Book of Judges and the cunning widow Judith from the eponymous narrative in the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books. However, not only is Joan fighting on the "wrong" (i.e., French) side in this English play, but she is an identifiably Catholic character in a drama originally presented to the inhabitants of an officially Protestant country. By the time of the play's performance in 1592,²⁷² England had witnessed the Northern Rebellion of the Catholic earls in 1569; Pius V's excommunication of Queen Elizabeth in 1570; the Ridolfi Plot of 1571; the Babington Plot of 1586; the long-simmering problem of Mary, Queen of Scots that ended with her execution in 1587; and the Spanish threat that culminated in the Armada's defeat in 1588. Against this background of Catholic antagonism to the English throne and nation, Joan is a dark version of Deborah and Judith, and one who also recalls New

²⁷⁰ Dusinberre muses that with the exception of Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*, Elizabethan drama has "no plays about women vowed to great causes" (92). Why Joan does not count is unclear, unless it is because *1 Henry VI* is not "about" her—a not-unreasonable position, given the play's ensemble nature and Joan's role as antagonist. E. M. W. Tillyard, on the other hand, argues that the episodes featuring Joan "are the clue to the whole plot" (164). Interestingly, Irene G. Dash notes that artists illustrating the play have drawn principally on her (*"Henry VI"* 256), thus indicating her importance to the story—or at least the potential visual appeal of her scenes.

²⁷¹ For *1 Henry VI*, the authorship issue is "a recurrent and complex controversy," writes Edward Burns, who sees the play as the product of several authors, "among whom Shakespeare took a major part" ("Introduction" 4, 83). Michael Hattaway, by contrast, prefers to stick with the First Folio's crediting of Shakespeare ("Introduction" 43). As with *Henry VIII*, the question is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and I will use the traditional attribution.

²⁷² This assumes that Thomas Nashe's 1592 mention of a well-received play featuring Talbot refers to Shakespeare's drama.

Testament warnings about false prophets; like Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare's Maid of Orleans becomes an ominous figure for early modern playgoers for whom theological difference often was equated with political perfidy. Yet she also is a potential focus of nostalgia for the "old faith" in an England that is not entirely sold on the particulars of Reformed religion, and her vigor and tough-mindedness can make her a semi-tragic figure—an antiheroine whose virtues remain visible even amid her fall.

"A holy maid hither with me I bring": the parodic Joan

Throughout the play, Joan's stereotypically unfeminine martial persona and her preternatural aura make her a figure of deliverance (for the French) and disturbance (for the English).²⁷³ Her entrance comes as Charles, Alençon, and Reignier are licking their

²⁷³ Michele Osherow (*Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England*, 2009) examines the comparison of Joan to the biblical Deborah, with a focus on the two women's use of language (88–90). Kristin M. Smith ("Martial Maids and Murderous Mothers," 2007) sees Joan as part of a Shakespearean focus on "the (de)generative power of feminine discourse" (144). Nicholas Grene's *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (2002) examines Joan as a puzzle not merely for her English counterpart Talbot but also for modern theatrical directors who find the dramatist's depiction of her to be off-putting (69–75). For Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancellia Shea ("Shakespeare's Queen Margaret: Unruly or Unruled?," 2001), she is both "the archetypal Virgin" and a "shape-shifter" (80–81). Patrick Ryan writes in "Shakespeare's Joan and the Great Whore of Babylon" (2004) that Puzel is an embodiment of anti-Catholic polemic that draws from the Book of Revelation; Albert H. Tricomi ("Joan la Pucelle and the Inverted Saints Play in *1 Henry VI*," 2001) sees a parody of an old Catholic dramatic genre. James J. Paxson argues in an essay on "Shakespeare's Medieval Devils" (2001) that the standard depiction of demons as "nether-faced" and Joan's claim of pregnancy together "designate that she herself is a kind of embodied demon or devil" (148). In *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* (2006), Jean-Christophe Mayer writes that in the first two *Henry VI* plays, "witchcraft signal[s] the need for answers in the religious domain" (39). Frances K. Barasch's essay "Folk Magic in *Henry VI, Parts 1 and 2*" (2001) presents the Fiend episode as a "*mise en abyme*" scene that strengthens the play's structure rather than merely playing to the superstitious crowd. In *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (1992), Theodora A. Jankowski sees Joan's virginity as key to her threatening nature (79). Katherine Eggert (*Showing Like a Queen*, 2000) presents her as an avatar of the theater's seductions. M. L. Stapleton argues that one of Puzel's theatrical ancestors is Seneca's *Medea* via John Studley's 1566 translation (1994). A 1990 article by Nancy A. Gutierrez argues that Joan is used by both (sexist) sides in the war, becoming "a battleground on which the French and English enact their power struggle" (184). Phyllis Rackin's *Stages of History* (1990) positions Joan as the embodiment of "the disorderly objects of present fears, the forces that threatened the patriarchal order" (151); Leah S. Marcus's *Puzzling Shakespeare* (1988) argues that she resonates with tantalizing echoes of Elizabeth Tudor. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, in a 1988 essay, sees a Puzel whose various presentations spring from Shakespeare's "progressive exploitation . . . of the virago" (64–65). Robert B. Pierce's *Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State* (1971) characterizes Joan as "the epitome of disorder and rebellion," one who is "absolutely corrupt from beginning to end" (46–47). In *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (1972), Leslie A. Fiedler sees her as perhaps "the vilest of all Shakespeare's

wounds in the aftermath of a spectacularly failed effort to lift the English siege of Orleans. The Bastard of Orleans brings good tidings: “A holy maid hither with me I bring, / Which by a vision sent to her from heaven / Ordained is to raise this tedious siege / And drive the English forth the bounds of France” (1.2.51–54).²⁷⁴ When she arrives, Joan verbally backhands the men for testing her with an imposter Dolphin. “Fair maid, is’t thou wilt do these wondrous feats?” Reignier asks, to which Joan replies: “Reignier, is’t thou that thinkest to beguile me? . . . Be not amazed, there’s nothing hid from me” (1.2.64–65, 68).²⁷⁵ Switching to physical strength, she bests Charles in single combat, leaving him overcome in more than one sense: “Stay, stay thy hands. Thou art an Amazon / And fightest with the sword of Deborah Impatiently I burn with thy desire, / My heart and hands thou hast at once subdued” (1.2.104–05, 108–09). If Charles sees Joan as a warrior of the stature of Greek myth and Hebrew Scripture, Alençon seems impatient with Charles’s fawning over his new champion. “Leave off delays, and let us raise the siege,” the nobleman says (1.2.146)—but Joan proceeds to make good on her declaration. Talbot, shellshocked after the death-by-artillery of Salisbury and Sir Thomas Gargrave, is doubly appalled when he and his English troops are unable to withstand the French “witch” and “high-minded strumpet” (1.5.6, 12), who taunts the stalwart soldier into the

undutiful daughters” (79) but also as one of his “ironic strangers” who “can sometimes see the silliness of the games we play in deadly earnest” (57).

²⁷⁴ The introductory discussion reads like a satiric reversal of the Nativity: instead of Mary bringing the virgin-born Lord Jesus into the world so he can save his people from their sins, an illegitimate noble produces a “holy maid” whose divine mission is to deliver her people from the English. Furthering the parallel to the Gospels, the Bastard’s avowal of truthfulness—“Believe my words, / For they are certain and unfallible” (1.2.58–59)—recalls the account of the archangel Gabriel’s announcement of the impending birth of John the Baptist. The aged father, Zechariah, doubts the report of the angel, who strikes him with temporary muteness “because thou beleuedst not my words” (Luke 1:20). Garber points out that in Joan’s later disavowal of her shepherd father, she takes on the status of illegitimacy (*After All* 98). Dusinberre writes that Elizabethans saw the illegitimate offspring’s nature as “mirror[ing] the perfidy of his conception” (133); if so, one can imagine an early modern audience seeing Joan’s personality as a clue to her true status.

²⁷⁵ Joan’s assertion echoes the prophet Jeremiah’s declaration to God that “there is nothing hid from thee” (32:17), underlining her claim to divine aid. Shaheen does not note this parallel in his material on this scene (286).

bargain: "O'ertake me if thou canst—I scorn thy strength. / Go, go—cheer up thy hungry, starved men, / Help Salisbury to make his testament. / This day is ours, as many more shall be" (1.5.15–18). Celebrating the victory, Alençon proclaims that all the French will rejoice upon hearing "how we have played the men," but Charles corrects the noble: "'Tis Joan, not we, by whom the day is won . . ." (1.5.55–56).

Yet the course of true victory does not run smooth. The English take Orleans by night, leaving the surprised French leaders sniping at one another. "At all times will you have my power alike?" Joan snaps. "Sleeping or waking, must I still prevail, / Or will you blame and lay the fault on me?" (2.1.55–57). Rouen is captured via a ruse by Joan and then retaken almost immediately by Talbot—who in turn loses his ally Burgundy to the spell of Puzel's Gallic oratory: "Look on thy country, look on fertile France, / And see the cities and the towns defaced / By wasting ruin of the cruel foe, / As looks the mother on her lowly babe / When death doth close his tender-dying eyes" (3.3.44–48). However, Joan's rhetoric, already biting in her previous taunting of the English from the walls of Rouen, turns churlish in the wake of Talbot's death in the French victory at Bordeaux. "Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles / Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet," she sneers to Sir William Lucy (4.4.187–88). As her forces flee during the next engagement, she appeals in private to the supernatural forces that have aided her—"Now, ye familiar spirits, that are culled / Out of the powerful regions under earth, / Help me this once, that France may get the field" (5.2.31–33)—but, inexplicably, the Fiends refuse. Captured by York and condemned to burn, Joan rejects the Shepherd who claims her as his daughter, and she tells the English, "I never had to do with wicked spirits You judge it straight a thing impossible / To compass wonders but by help of devils" (5.3.42, 47–48). Disavowing the maiden status she has proclaimed, apparently in a desperate bid to stave off the stake, she claims to be pregnant—implicitly, perhaps, by

Charles, then by Alençon, then by Reignier—but when her captors merely mock her, she spits a final curse at them: “May never glorious sun reflex his beams / Upon the country where you make abode, / But darkness and the gloomy shade of death / Environ you, till mischief and despair / Drive you to break your necks, or hang yourselves” (5.3.87–91).²⁷⁶

In her acknowledged status of prophetess and her military leadership of a people rebelling against foreign overlords, Puzel is Shakespeare’s French edition of the Hebrew prophetess Deborah, the only woman listed among the traditional judge/deliverers of the Old Testament. “Deborah occupies a unique role in Israelite history,” Carol L. Meyers writes, as a “judge” in both the military and legal senses. “Of all the military leaders of the book [of Judges], only Deborah is called a ‘prophet’ ” (161). She appears in a time of conflict between her own people and alien forces; for two decades, the Canaanite king Jabin has “troubled the children of Israel very sore,” and “Debora a prophetisse, the wife of Lapidoth, iudged Israel the same time” (Judg. 4:3–4). Deborah has been acting as an Israelite arbiter/leader;²⁷⁷ she tells a man named Barak that he is to muster ten thousand troops to fight against Sisera, Jabin’s military commander, and the Lord “will deliuer him

²⁷⁶ Michele Osherow, with a nod to a 1640 text by Thomas Heywood, sees Joan’s invocation of the sun as a reversal of Deborah’s blessing that mentions the sun in Judges 5:31 (90). Joan’s cursing gains dramatic weight from the fact that it comes in response to the taunting of York, who in 3 *Henry VI* is similarly mocked by Margaret before she fatally stabs him—a fulfillment of Puzel’s curse in its result if not its method. In addition, 5.3 is bracketed by scenes involving Margaret, so that the fall of one French female pronouncer of doom is juxtaposed with the rise of another. Michael Hattaway notes that Margaret’s entrance follows the Fiends’ desertion of Puzel; “it is as though the female politician has inherited the power of the heroic Joan as a subtler and more dangerous kind of threat to the English cause” (“Introduction” 28). A 2006–2008 production of the history plays by Michael Boyd took advantage of this interpretive possibility by having Margaret (played by the same actress who portrayed Joan) enter in a dress “identical to those worn by the fiends” (Wilkinson “‘A Woman’s Hide’ ” 65). Hattaway’s observation recalls the story of Elijah’s ascension to heaven in 2 Kings 2. Shortly before the prophet vanishes in a whirlwind accompanied by a chariot and horses of fire, he asks his protégé Elisha for a parting request; Elisha replies, “I pray thee let thy spirite be double vpon me” (2 Kings 2:9).

²⁷⁷ “And the same Debora dwelt vnder a paulme tree, betweene Ramath & Bethel, in mount Ephraim: And the children of Israel came vp to her for iudgment” (Judg. 4:5). Similarly, Moses at one point tells his father-in-law that “the people come vnto me to seeke counsayle of God. When they haue a matter, they come vnto me, and I iudge betweene euery man & his neyghbour . . .” (Ex. 18:15–16). Deborah thus functions in the role established by the archetypal Hebrew prophet.

into thine hands" (Judg. 4:7). The narrative thus begins with a woman's declaration to a man that God plans to deliver his people militarily. Barak, however, refuses to go unless Deborah joins him—a request to which the prophetess acquiesces, but with a caveat: "I will surely go with thee, but this journey that thou takest, shall not be for thine honour: for the Lorde shall sell Sisara into the hande of a woman" (4:9). The gender-role implications of the conversation are mixed: Deborah's prediction that Sisera will be overcome by a woman (and not merely by "someone else") indicates that this in itself is considered a dishonor for Barak; on the other hand, Barak's insistence on the female judge's participation signals respect for her wisdom, her connection to God, or both.²⁷⁸ When the Israelites indeed defeat Sisera's troops, Jabin's general flees the rout and takes refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael, whose husband's clan is friendly with Jabin. But when the exhausted Sisera falls asleep, the narrative says, Jael "toke a nayle of the tent, & an hammer in her hande, and went softly vnto him, and smote ye nayle into the temples of his head, and fastened it into the ground . . . and so he died" (4:21), thus fulfilling Deborah's prophecy.

The Joan Puzel strand in *1 Henry VI* creates a "Lord of Misrule" version of the Deborah narrative, with the national foe of England becoming the new Israel and a demon-summoning roaring girl standing in for the Old Testament judge. Although the play actually opens with news of major English losses in the wake of Henry V's death, the first scene in which the Gallic characters appear (1.2) depicts a humiliating French setback at Orleans. For the French, then, the story begins with defeat by an alien power—a frequent experience of the Hebrews in the Old Testament. And like the prophet

²⁷⁸ The Geneva Bible's note on Judg. 4:8 asserts, "Fearing his own weakness and his enemy's power, he desireth the prophetess to go with him to assure him of God's will from time to time" (252). A different (and more cynical) reading might see Barak as determined that the person pushing him into battle by invoking God should share the risk.

Amos, who was occupied with agricultural pursuits before his divine calling (Amos 7:14–15), the female principals in both narratives have ordinary fish to fry: Deborah is arbitrating disputes, and Joan, “by birth a shepherd’s daughter,” is tending sheep (1.2.72, 76).²⁷⁹ Suddenly, however, succor for the nation is promised through a supernatural revelation—a revelation borne out by events, at least partially, in the subsequent de-Anglicization of France. For the play’s original audiences, Shakespeare thus presents France as an anti-Israel, a reverse image of the Chosen People. The likeness also acts as a warning to the English: if the Gauls are the elect nation, the English correspond to Sisera and the Canaanites—a similarity that is underscored by military humiliation at a woman’s hands.

Here the parallels tend to complicate themselves, and in such a way that the relatively simple gender issues in the biblical text—the agency and glory belonging to women rather than men—are joined by new ones. In the Book of Judges, a woman commissions a man as the military savior; in Shakespeare’s play, a man (the Bastard) proclaims that a woman will fill the role. Deborah is a married woman, as is Jael (Judg. 4:4, 17), and the biblical text shows relatively little interest in their sex aside from the counterintuitive martial factor. In contrast, Joan’s femininity (or, depending on the speaker, her lack of such) is a constant factor in *1 Henry VI*—the “question of manliness and unmanliness, together with a parallel question about the proper role of women,” has “a central role throughout the play,” Garber writes (*After All* 95). The issue literally enters with the female warrior herself—the name that the Arden Third Series text renders as “Joan Puzel” from the multiple possibilities in the First Folio (Burns “Appendix 1” 291). As Edward Burns notes, the historical Jeanne d’Arc styled herself “la Pucelle,” a French term

²⁷⁹ In 1 Sam. 16:1–13, the young David is tending sheep just before his divinely appointed anointing as the next king of Israel, after which he distinguishes himself as a warrior. Joan thus becomes an anti-David as well as an anti-Deborah.

that connotes “both virginity and incipient sexuality,” an ambiguity that in turn “coarsens in English into a sexual joke. In English, ‘pucelle’ means virgin, ‘puzel’ means whore” (“Introduction” 26).²⁸⁰ Precisely what Joan is about, supernaturally and sexually, hovers puzzlingly in the air of the play.

Puzel herself makes the first substantial reference to her femininity, declaring during her private conversation with Charles that “whereas I was black and swart before, / With those clear rays which she [the Virgin Mary] infused on me / That beauty am I blest with, which you may see” (1.2.84–86).²⁸¹ Joan thus cites an increase in her attractiveness as a miraculous substantiation of her claim to heavenly blessing and empowerment. The offer that she makes almost immediately thereafter—“My courage try by combat, if thou dar’st, / And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex” (1.2.89–90)²⁸²—therefore makes for a curious combination: she claims to be both more stereotypically feminine than she was before her calling, and more stereotypically masculine than Charles is at the moment. However, Puzel’s own broaching of the topic of her sexuality is only the beginning. “These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues,” Alençon remarks (1.2.123) as he and Reignier speculate about the prolonged conversation between Charles and Joan, hinting that the latter is offering more than military aid.²⁸³ Hereafter, however, the French do little in terms of sexualizing Joan. The irony is that whereas the English can be seen

²⁸⁰ The Pelican, Oxford/Norton, and New Cambridge editions prefer “la Pucelle.”

²⁸¹ Shaheen points to Song of Solomon 1:4–5, in which the female speaker remarks on the fact that she is “blacke” but attractive. In addition, Shaheen notes that whereas Edward Hall’s history portrays Joan as homely, Raphael Holinshed describes her as good-looking (287). Patrick Ryan also sees an allusion on Puzel’s part to the Song; connecting this to an allegorical reading of the book’s female speaker as the church, he argues that when Joan “expresses contempt for her former appearance as ‘black and swart’ . . . she associates herself not with Solomon’s shepherdess personifying the true church, but with the false church of Antichrist” (63).

²⁸² Joan also suggests that Charles put her knowledge to the test: “Ask me what question thou canst possible / And I will answer unpremeditated . . .” (1.2.87–88). If this and the trial by combat are seen as choices for the Dolphin, the situation recalls Isaiah’s offer to King Hezekiah to have a shadow either advance or recede in confirmation of a divine message (2 Kings 20:8–9).

²⁸³ On the other hand, Alençon also suggests that the Dolphin “shrives this woman to her smock” (1.2.119), hinting that Charles is the sexual aggressor.

as the party of chivalry (*Rackin Stages* 151), in this matter the French are perhaps more couth than their opposite numbers.

For the most part, the commentary about sexuality comes largely from the English. Talbot is initially dismissive of France's newly reported prophetess: "Puzel or pussel, Dolphin or dogfish, / Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels . . ." (1.4.106–07). To the English warrior, whether Joan is virgin or whore is immaterial—she is soon to be mire. However, he is confounded at Orleans when the tide of battle turns: "Our English troops retire, I cannot stay them; / A woman clad in armour chaseth them" (1.5.2–3).²⁸⁴ Joan's actions indicate both the cause of the rout and its humiliating completeness, and when she appears, Talbot leaps instantly to his conclusion: "Devil, or devil's dam, I'll conjure thee. / Blood will I draw on thee—thou art a witch . . ." (1.5.5–6).²⁸⁵ Positing one aspect of the play as an "English/Protestant/Rational/Male" worldview, Burns says that from this perspective, "anything unexpected has to be described as magic" ("Introduction" 36).²⁸⁶ The motif is repeated later, with Talbot attributing the Gallic success to "baleful sorcery" and Bedford condemning Charles for "join[ing] with witches

²⁸⁴ Paula S. Berggren writes that "the assumption of masculine garb creates no lady knights in Shakespeare's scheme of things" (19), an assertion that *1 Henry VI* certainly would seem to contradict. However, the context of Berggren's observation is disguise/impersonation rather than merely the use of masculine dress.

²⁸⁵ "Drawing a witch's blood was seen as a way of rendering her powerless," Burns writes (157 fn). Less plausibly, Kristin M. Smith sees Talbot "appropriating Joan's sorcerous language" and "assuming the position of conjured spirit, drawing her blood the way a familiar draws a witch's Talbot unknowingly (and unwillingly) corrupts himself by entering into Joan's linguistic space and, overcome by female language, is no longer able to perform the role of English hero" (147–48). Hattaway writes of the Joan-Talbot fight that "there is simply no way of telling from the text whether Shakespeare intended her to overcome her antagonist by magic or by sheer martial art"; in a footnote, he recalls a staging of the scene by Michael Bogdanov featuring "mysterious flute music coming from nowhere" ("Introduction" 23).

²⁸⁶ Writing about views of supernatural vs. natural occurrences, Keith Thomas observes that "any claim to have achieved some effect greater than that which could be shown to have arisen from known natural causes was immediately suspect" (303). A phenomenon that was not immediately explicable—for instance, a mere slip of a girl overcoming a veteran warrior—thus would evoke questions. The immediate context for Thomas's observation is official Catholicism, but the attitude presumably crossed denominational boundaries, especially given the standard Protestant view of Roman "superstition."

and the help of hell" (2.1.15, 18); at Rouen, Puzel is "that damned sorceress" (3.2.37), "vile fiend and shameless courtesan" (3.2.44), "hag of all despite" (3.2.51), and "railing Hecate" (3.2.63).²⁸⁷ The English representatives, then, accept unquestioningly that Joan is supernaturally empowered—or at least they speak as if they do. "In the epic discourse of the English," writes Jean-Christophe Mayer, "a woman's manly prowess can only be devilish, and if the French have gained the upper hand it has to be through the agency of the Devil, who . . . has naturally sided with the enemy" (31). The English are equally certain that Puzel is not properly, virtuously feminine. As Bedford says pithily, "A maid? And be so martial?" (2.1.21).²⁸⁸ The questioning of Joan's femininity and chastity, of course, culminates in York and Warwick's baiting of her before she is executed. "Why, here's a girl!" York snipes, as Joan claims pregnancy by Alençon and then by Reignier. "I think she knows not well— / There were so many—whom she may accuse" (5.3.80–81).²⁸⁹

The play thus clearly sets up a likeness between Joan and Deborah, complete with the motifs of victorious female warriors, supernatural aid, and gender expectations. Yet because Joan fights for England's enemy (thereby reversing the revered Henry V's

²⁸⁷ The reference to Hecate links Puzel to the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* and their role in a rebellion against a king.

²⁸⁸ Burgundy's rejoinder, "Pray God she prove not masculine ere long— / If underneath the standard of the French / She carry armour, as she hath begun" (2.1.22–24), can be read in two ways. Burgundy may be sneeringly jesting that Puzel will actually turn into a man—a reading that Leah Marcus suggests (68)—or he may be gloomily observing that given her military success as a woman, the English should hope that she does not become even more stereotypically masculine. Marcus argues that the similarities between Shakespeare's Joan and Elizabeth Tudor are too frequent and obvious "to be attributable to mere chance. Rather, we are dealing here with a deliberate strategy" (68)—yet even in Marcus's view, the pattern's purpose is not clear. The political dangers of associating a reigning English queen with a French heroine accused of witchcraft are all too obvious. "The easiest response," Marcus writes, is to see Joan as "blatant and unambiguous travesty, a debased caricature of Elizabeth," although this view would "close off interesting areas of possible signification" (76).

²⁸⁹ "At the end, she turns and turns again, from Charles, to Alençon, to Regnier," Marilyn L. Williamson writes ("When" 46), connecting Joan's change of story to her characterization of Burgundy's change of allegiance in 3.3.

gains for his country), she inevitably becomes, for Shakespeare's audience, a villainous twin of Deborah.²⁹⁰ Rackin describes her as one of the playwright's Machiavellian antecedents of Richard III: "Subverters of history, opponents of true royalty and the English state, characters like Joan, Margaret, and Jack Cade deceive their fellow characters and seduce the audience with a dangerous theatrical energy. They pursue a power to which they have no legitimate claim with . . . ruthless, amoral ambition . . ." (*Stages* 73). Perhaps the clearest sign of this dark status in *1 Henry VI* is the play's affirmation in 5.2 that Joan's supernatural connections run down rather than up. This can be seen not only (although most blatantly) in the stage directions' description of the beings she summons as "Fiends," but in Puzel's own references to "the lordly monarch of the north" (5.2.27)—a sobriquet for the devil (*1H6* 259 fn.)—and to "familiar spirits, that are culled / Out of the powerful regions under earth" (5.2.31–32).²⁹¹ Completing the picture are Joan's recollection of feeding such beings with her blood (5.2.35) and her offer of "body, soul, and all" (5.2.43) to prevent an English victory.²⁹² The text thus challenges Joan's claim to a Marian vision (1.2.78)—would someone with a genuine divine commission be summoning spirits?—as well as her flat assertion, "I never had to do with wicked spirits" (5.3.42).²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Michele Osherow writes that "Shakespeare assigns his Deborah-like character . . . a kind of linguistic authority but hers is an authority defiled" (88). For Osherow, however, Joan's defilement is not a matter of fighting for France but rather the early modern association of outspokenness with lack of chastity. Although Osherow discusses the portrayal of Elizabeth as a heroic Deborah figure, she does not deal with the idea that Shakespeare's use of the metaphor logically turns Joan into an anti-Deborah for English audiences. An epilogue to Osherow's book also considers the Book of Judith, but the author does not mention the parallels to Joan.

²⁹¹ Burns's footnote about "the lordly monarch of the north" connects the phrase to a biblical reference to Lucifer, but Keith Thomas records another (regional) sense in which spiritual darkness was linked to direction: "Sir Benjamin Rudyerd reminded the House of Commons in 1628 of 'the utmost skirts of the North, where the prayers of the common people are more like spells and charms than devotions'" (84).

²⁹² M. L. Stapleton sees in Joan's offer of a lopped-off body part an allusion to Medea's talk of castrating her brother in Seneca's play (" 'Shine It' " 235).

²⁹³ Of course, for some Protestants, a "Marian" vision might be perfectly compatible with dealing with spirits—both would ultimately be the deceptive work of the devil.

In fact, it becomes somewhat difficult to argue for a reading or a by-the-book staging of the character, and of the French in general, that is not comic or perhaps even savagely lampooning.²⁹⁴ Indications of such are the frequent sexual references and double entendres; Burns goes so far as to say, “The language used of her and by her always permits a reading of her activities other than the saintly or the heroic by hinting at sexual significance” (*1H6* 136 fn).²⁹⁵ The lampoon view is also supported by the fact that Joan describes herself to Charles as “a shepherd’s daughter” (1.2.72) yet later avows to the English that she was not “begotten of a shepherd swain, / But issued from the progeny of kings . . .” (5.3.37–38), thus undermining her integrity. Then there is Charles’s over-the-top rhetoric: “Bright star of Venus, fallen down on the earth, / How may I reverently worship thee enough?” he swoons after first encountering Joan (1.2.144–45).²⁹⁶ As Burns notes, the Dolphin’s “unthinking heroic rhetoric inevitably sets itself up for farcical undercutting by reversals in the action, and sceptical comment from other characters” (“Introduction” 46). Further, Talbot is hardly off the mark when he accuses the

²⁹⁴ Burns argues for the comic view in his notes for the Arden Third Series edition. A. D. Nuttall calls the play’s depiction of Joan a “gross cartoon” (34), and Jonathan Bate sees her as “an intriguing semicomical villain” (309). Maurice Charney strikes a negative but somber note, saying Joan is portrayed as “a clever, well-spoken imposter like Jack Cade” and is the object of “a kind of overkill” on the playwright’s part (*All* 120, 122). David Bevington’s verdict is “character assassination” and “satiric defamation” (“*1 Henry VI*” 312–13).

²⁹⁵ In a study of Shakespeare’s use of the term “whore,” Kay Stanton notes the curious fact that despite all of the “smirking speculation” about Joan, the play employs the word only once, and this as part of Gloucester’s slanging of Winchester as one who “giv’st whores indulgences to sin” (1.3.35) rather than as a sneer at Joan (84).

²⁹⁶ In the history plays, Rebecca Ann Bach argues, “proper masculinity is constituted in [hierarchical] subjection. . . . The most masculine men, in fact, desire nothing so much as being subjected to their *male* superiors” (228–29; emphasis added). If so, the Dolphin’s willing subjection to Puzel might have been all the more ludicrous to Shakespeare’s audiences. However, Leah S. Marcus points out that “the heroic language with which her [Joan’s] ‘subjects’ honor her is . . . markedly like that which surrounded the English queen” (67). Thus, expressions that might seem fulsome to the modern ear might have sounded far less so to an early modern listener; R. A. Foakes makes a similar point about the rhetoric of Lear’s daughters (38–39). Gabriele Bernhard Jackson points to the contemporary appeal of the Amazons (who aided the Trojans, the legendary ancestors of the British) as well as St. Helen (“by popular tradition British”) and suggests that Charles’s comparing Joan to such women in 1.2 would have “arouse[d] the most unsuitably positive and even possessive associations in an Elizabethan audience” (50).

Maid of Orleans of “railing” (3.2.63). “What will you do, good greybeard?” she calls to the ailing Bedford from the walls of Rouen. “Break a lance / And run a-tilt at death within a chair?” (3.2.49–50). Even worse, she disdainfully describes the slain Talbot to his countryman William Lucy as “[s]tinking and fly-blown,” saying that he and his dead son threaten to “putrefy the air” (4.4.188, 202). After her capture, she imperiously rejects the Shepherd, who claims her as his daughter—“Decrepit miser, base ignoble wretch, / I am descended of a gentler blood. / Thou art no father, nor no friend of mine” (5.3.7–9)—thus flagrantly violating the divine commandment that every early modern parishioner would have known from the Holy Communion service: “Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy daies may be long in the lande which the Lord thy God geveth thee” (*BCP* 125).²⁹⁷ And most memorably, Joan attempts to stave off her death by disavowing her virginal status, claiming pregnancy, and fruitlessly naming one French noble and then another when challenged about the father’s identity.²⁹⁸ Despite her “protean lack of principle” (Greene 69), Joan ultimately is unable to slip from her captors’ grip.²⁹⁹ Unfeminine, shrew-

²⁹⁷ “To an Elizabethan the stage picture of a daughter refusing to kneel for her father’s blessing . . . is a terrible picture of disorder,” Robert B. Pierce writes (48). Frances K. Barasch sees a legal aspect to the Shepherd’s presence: “As accused witches were commonly women of peasant stock who practiced low magic, Joan’s father is brought in to prove her base birth. Joan denies him and claims noble lineage in an attempt to prevent her execution under English law of her time but is mocked for her effort” (120). Jonathan Clark Smith connects Puzel’s statement to a larger motif in the *Henry VI* plays: “The thematic significance of the scene is that Joan’s act of denial symbolizes and foreshadows a universal tendency in these plays to set self-advancement ahead of all ethical considerations . . .” (329). If so, Joan becomes a forerunner not merely of Margaret, her fellow Frenchwoman (as repeatedly noted by critics), but also of the ambitious English as well. Rackin sees here a contrast with the play’s heroic depiction of the deaths of Talbot and his son: “In contrast, Shakespeare contrives Joan’s final interview with her father to show her placing life above patriarchal lineage and personal honor” (*Stages* 155).

²⁹⁸ “No one draws the conclusion that she is *pretending* to be pregnant,” Nuttall writes (35; emphasis in original). Although true in terms of the play’s characters, it might not be true of the audience, which may ask whether Joan is promiscuous or a liar or both.

²⁹⁹ Puzel’s short-shrift fate recalls Greenblatt’s comments about the official Anglican rejection of the theologically troublesome rite of exorcism: “The eruption of the demonic into the human world was not denied altogether, but the problem would be processed through the proper secular channels. In cases of witchcraft, the devil was defeated in the courts through the simple expedient of hanging his human agents, not, as in cases of possession, compelled by a spectacular spiritual counterforce to speak out and depart” (*Shakespearean* 98–99). In proper English fashion, Puzel is subjected to the stake by the Duke of York rather than an exorcism by the Archbishop of York.

tongued, irreligious French strumpet and witch—the Puzel of such a reading obviously possesses a simple, nationalistic appeal. Add to this the dimension of a parody of an Old Testament prophetic figure, and that appeal increases all the more.³⁰⁰

Of course, the play's irreligiously mocking eye is not turned so much to Christianity in the broad sense but rather to the Roman church. Katherine Duncan-Jones points out "Shakespeare's avoidance of crude anti-Catholic satire in his plays, in the form of the hostile stereotypes of prelates and friars to be found in many other plays of the period" (222–23), and Joan is certainly no greedy cleric.³⁰¹ Yet Joan's championing of the (Catholic) French and her claims of visions from the Virgin Mary, along with assertions of both maidenhood and promiscuity, turn her into a figure of sardonic confessional fun; indeed, the chastity/promiscuity angle evokes the Protestant stereotype of lewd-living priests and nuns. The Dolphin's veneration of his female champion contributes further to the picture. For Albert Tricomi, Charles's initial yielding to Puzel smacks less of "sexual submission and political emasculation" than of idolatry; the play's audience was likely to react with "apprehension" or "outright contempt" toward the "blasphemy," given the scene's invocation of the veneration of saints (14). After the breaking of the siege of Orleans, Charles describes his intent to "divide my crown with her, / And all the priests and friars in my realm / Shall in procession sing her endless praise" (1.5.57–59)—a remark suggesting Puzel's elevation to a questionable sainthood, or even the satiric

³⁰⁰ Patrick Ryan goes so far as to assert that "Shakespeare staged his chronicle play to advance a major ideological project of Queen Elizabeth's church and state: to steel her subjects for prolonged, uncertain struggle against Spain and its French allies in the Catholic League" (56). Albert H. Tricomi draws a similar conclusion, but more cautiously expressed and with an intra-national focus: the drama is "implicated in the project of building and fortifying the English Protestant nation" (25).

³⁰¹ "Shakespeare's work yields nothing to compare with the anti-Catholic farce in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* or the lurid picture of the Catholic hierarchy in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*: a striking omission, given that anti-popey went down well with audiences," Alison Shell remarks (82).

status of the French Queen of Heaven.³⁰² (One almost expects a sneering remark from York or Warwick about “Our Lady of the Sheep Pens.”) In addition, Michael Hattaway notes the contrast between Joan, who “squirms away from the stake that awaits her,” and “the Protestant martyrs graphically described in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*” (“Introduction” 27)—a comparison that would hold Puzel up for further mockery among early modern sympathizers with the victims of the Marian persecutions of the 1550’s.³⁰³ Here is a French “saint” with the cheap plaster showing through the Roman gilt.

Yet to complicate the theological picture further, Shakespeare’s auditors might see Joan as simultaneously demon-ridden *and* divinely directed. “Assigned am I to be the English scourge,” she tells the French leaders (1.2.129), and given Joan’s claims of a Marian commission, it is clear whence she thinks the assignment comes. “God ultimately was in control,” E. M. W. Tillyard writes, arguing that Puzel is thus “not a mere piece of fortuitous witchcraft, not a mere freakish emissary of Satan, but a tool of the Almighty” (164). The *Book of Homilies* supports such a concept of divine sovereignty, proclaiming that “*God giveth a prince in his anger, meaning an evil one, and taketh away a prince in his displeasure, meaning specially when he taketh away a good prince for the sins of the people: as in our memory he took away our good Josias, king Edward, in his young and good years, for our wickedness*” (521; italics in original).³⁰⁴ What the homilist does not spell out, from lack of necessity, is that Edward VI’s death led to the reign of Mary I, so that God’s punishment for England’s sins was national subjection to a Catholic queen

³⁰² Likewise Alençon: “We’ll set thy statue in some holy place / And have thee revered like a blessed saint. / Employ thee, sweet virgin, for our good” (3.3.14–16). The noble’s final sentence resembles a request for heavenly intercession by the Virgin Mary.

³⁰³ Nuttall sees the play’s attack on the “virgin” Joan as more anti-French than anti-Catholic, whereas the conflicts between Winchester and Gloucester “look more directly anti-papal” (35–36).

³⁰⁴ Likewise, in a preface for *The Mirror for Magistrates*, William Baldwin observes that “God (the ordeyner of Offices) . . . suffer[s] them for punishment of the people to be often occupied of such, as are rather spoilers and ludasses, than toylers or lustices . . .” (65).

who died with Protestant blood on her hands.³⁰⁵ The original patrons of *1 Henry VI* thus would have been quite familiar with the idea that God might use a female papist to chastise Albion. “What were the sins God sought to punish?” Tillyard asks, explicating his view of the Tudor myth. “There had been a number, but the pre-eminent one was the murder of Richard II . . .” (165).³⁰⁶ Commenting on Joan’s “scourge” remark, Kristin M. Smith sees Joan as unwittingly “invoking and prematurely speaking from Richard [III]’s position as the Scourge of God” (149)—another human means of national discipline used by the Almighty.³⁰⁷ Calvinist-minded theater patrons thus could see Puzel as a confirmation of their Reformed emphasis on divine sovereignty—even false Deborahs are kept on the leash of the Lord.

³⁰⁵ The characterization of Edward as “Josias” underlines the theological point. In 2 Kings 22–23, Josiah becomes king of Judah at age eight and instigates religious reforms that stress Scripture and oppose idolatry. A note on 2 Kings 22:17 in the Geneva Bible condemns “all [the works] that man inventeth beside the word of God, which are abominable in God’s service” (403)—an implicit criticism of Catholicism. Protestant writer John Ponet states in his 1556 work *A Short Treatise of Politic Power* that ministers in the time of “the godly Josias” predicted that irreligion would lead to divine judgment—“the food of God’s word to be clean taken away from you” and “a strange king and strange people . . . should reign and rule by force over you” (quoted in Robin Wells 144)—phrases whose meaning could hardly be mistaken during the Marian regime. A model prayer included in the Geneva Bible asks that God “confound Satan, Antichrist, with all hirelings, . . . that they may not by sects, schisms, heresies, and errors, disquiet thy little flock.” The prayer then requests divine favor by invoking the example of Israel: “For thy people Israel many times by their sin provoked thine anger . . . yet . . . thou receivedst them to mercy” (1341).

³⁰⁶ In a production note for a revival of the *Henry VI* plays in the early 1900s, actor-manager F. R. Benson presents his own take on the divine chastisement idea, arguing that “the wanton aggression against France, was inevitably followed by civil disruption at home”; the Wars of the Roses were “practically a punishment, for a War of greed and spoilation, which reached its climax in the murder of Joan of Arc” (quoted in Grene 37). Thus, while Tillyard’s 1944 *Shakespeare’s History Plays* asserts that “Henry V, for his piety, had been allowed a brilliant reign” despite his father’s sins, (165), Benson’s earlier view implies that the former Prince Hal and his excursion to the “vast fields of France” (*H5* Prologue 12) were actually part of the problem. For Nicholas Grene, “Tillyard’s concept of the curse on England is ideologically oversimplified in [the] face of the multiple competing historiographical constructions reflected in his [Shakespeare’s] work” (150). Henry Ansgar Kelly pooh-poohs both the divine-discipline idea and the notion that Joan is meant to be seen as anything but a demonic tool: “This was the opinion of the chronicles, and it is quite obviously the opinion of the playwright. There is not the slightest indication that England is considered by anyone in the play as deserving of God’s punishment . . .” (248). Kelly specifically dismisses any connection to the deposing of Richard II.

³⁰⁷ Robert B. Pierce also likens Joan to Richard, writing that both have “a real zest for evil” (47).

Commenting on the sexual aspects of Joan's portrayal, Burns quips, "The woman in man's clothes wielding a sword is a pucelle with a pizzel [penis], and therefore a puzzle" ("Introduction" 26). Yet gender is not the only enigma present; theology, too, is on the table. Joan can be a Faustian Catholic dupe of the devil, a blatantly false Deborah whose acceptance by the French points to the danger of false religion; or she can be a strange sign from a Calvinist God—the corruptly human signifier whose signified is the right of the Lord to deal with people and nations as he sees fit. And yet if the finger of God is at work in the play, it is thoroughly gloved; rather than emphasizing the possibility of English sinners in the hands of an angry God, the play points to "want of men and money" and the fact that the nobles "maintain several factions, / And whilst a field should be dispatched and fought / You are disputing of your generals" (1.1.69, 71–73). The "fraud of England, not the force of France" (4.3.89)—or the sorcery of France—is the problem; the designs of God are obscured, but the perfidy of some of Albion's representatives is all too clear.

Balaam and Samson: the tragic Joan

Jean E. Howard enumerates the possible views of Joan as three: "a holy maid sent by God to aid her country, a servant of the devil, or a deceitful whore" ("First Part" 439). But if the picture of the French-English conflict in *1 Henry VI* played well in the 1590s, its portrait of Joan "proved a profound embarrassment for later generations," Nicholas Grene recalls, contributing to a long-standing verdict on the play as "unShakespearean" and leading to against-the-lines performances as far back as 1906 (70). And another reading/staging of this unstable and oddly drawn character is indeed possible, even while remaining in a prophetic context. This is the tragic Joan, the Puzel who remains a prophet figure but of a different kind—not a parody of Deborah but a more straightforward re-creation of two Old Testament figures who combine lighter and darker

elements on their way to grim endings. For an audience familiar with the biblical narratives involved, such a likeness opens the possibility of a more sympathetic view of the Other as embodied by Joan—a recognition, in a society in which religious tensions and international conflict made suspicion, antagonism, and violence all too easy, that individuals (and, by extrapolation, nations and faiths) defy easy categorization.

The first biblical forebear is the prophet Balaam, whose story is recorded in Numbers 22–24. Balaam is a Gentile seer who is asked by King Balak of Moab to curse the migrating Israelites, whom the monarch fears. After Balaam sets out for Balak's territory, he is intercepted by an angel with a drawn sword, invisible to him but visible to his donkey. The animal repeatedly balks, leading to beatings by Balaam. At last the donkey actually lies down under the prophet, leading to another beating. “And the Lorde opened the mouth of the asse, and she sayde vnto Balaam: What haue I done vnto thee, that thou hast smytten me nowe three tymes? And Balaam sayd vnto the asse, Because thou hast mocked me: I would also there were a sworde in myne hande, for euen nowe woulde I kyll thee” (Num. 22:28–29). Bizarrely, the prophet apparently is so angry that the strangeness of conversing with a plaintive donkey does not even register with him. The angel warns Balaam to say only what God gives him to say, which leads to the prophet's pronouncing multiple blessings over the Israelites instead of cursing them. The frustrated Balak declares that Balaam can depart without his promised reward, but the prophet apparently recommends that Moab undermine the Israelites by luring them into pagan sexual rites—a successful strategy that leads to a divine plague on Israel and the eventual killing of Balaam in a holy war (Num. 31:8).³⁰⁸ A view of Joan through the lens of Balaam highlights her combination of (in a broad sense) heterodoxy and orthodoxy, as

³⁰⁸ “He gave also wicked counsel to cause the Israelites to sin, that thereby God might forsake them,” the Geneva Bible comments on Num. 24:14 (169).

well as the element of humor in her portrayal. Many of Joan's facets as a questionable, destructive, or doomed figure parallel those of Balaam: a foreigner in alliance with the narrative's antagonists and in personal touch with their king; a link to illicit sex; a supernatural connection that fails to yield the results desired by the antagonist forces; and violent death. Yet just as Balaam initially takes instructions from the God of Israel and blesses the Hebrews, so Joan embarks on her mission in the name of the Virgin Mary; although the ending for both characters is dark, the beginning is not entirely so. Further, even in this reading of Joan that is not primarily parodic, there remains an element of humor. In both texts, the foreigners find themselves in situations that make them ridiculous for the audience: Balaam berates a donkey that, unbeknownst to him, has saved him from an angel with a sword; Puzel is reduced to making high-flown claims about her heritage and trying to fast-talk her way out of immediate execution by disavowing her "Maid of Orleans" status.

The second of Joan's biblical forebears in this reading is Samson, the most famous of the Old Testament's deliverer/judges, a man known for both guerrilla-style victories and ignominious reverses. As Burns notes, Talbot is the play's obvious counterpart of Samson, "the exemplar of a man who defends his country and suffers for it through individual faith and effort" ("Introduction" 47), but much the same language could be used of Joan. Although not a prophet in the classic sense, Samson is depicted in the Book of Judges as the divinely appointed rescuer of Israel from Philistine domination, empowered by God with extraordinary strength. Samson repeatedly bests his enemies, several times in episodes in which it is declared that "the spirit of the Lord came upon him" (13:6, 14:19, 15:14). In one such instance, he kills a lion bare-handed (14:6); in another, he slays a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone (15:15). However, he also has a weakness for women, which proves his undoing when his treacherous lover

Delilah has his long hair cut—the hair that embodies a dedicatory vow to God. Bereft of his miraculous strength, he is blinded and enslaved by the Philistines until, at a religious festival where he is “made the laughing-stock of his enemies” (*Homilies* 486), his power returns and he collapses a pagan temple on himself and his foes. Joan’s immediate echoes of Samson are those of the supernaturally empowered deliverer, physically overpowering, unexpectedly successful against the alien foe but (through a fatal mistake) abruptly bereft of power and cruelly mocked just before death. Even more than Joan-as-Balaam, Joan-as-Samson ultimately arouses admiration even amid regretful judgment.

Viewing Joan through these lenses enables a reading/staging of her that is not broadly satiric but rather serious, ambiguous, and even tragic. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, noting early modern society’s simultaneous fascination with and skittishness toward Amazonian figures, writes about the difficulty of seeing a coherent Joan: “It seems likely . . . that Joan in armor is as fair and foul as the traditional double-potentialed Amazon She is a powerful warrior and a powerful enemy, but also an inverted image of both” (56). The tragic prophet paradigm offers a way of uniting Puzel’s splintered aspects. A. D. Nuttall, while noting that Joan eventually becomes the butt of “the coarsest comedy” (35), says nevertheless that Shakespeare “makes her interesting: intelligent, sexy, and a formidable fighter” (34). Henry Ansgar Kelly likewise sees her as “the most attractive character in these scenes [opposite the English]. Her wit and feigned piety remind us somewhat of Richard III, but she hardly strikes us as exemplifying the same kind of essential evil . . .” (247 fn). Compared to Joan, Kelly writes zestfully, “Talbot is a blundering oaf, a railing *miles gloriosus* who furiously attributes her success to sorcery, whereas the audience . . . knows that she has simply outfoxed him by superior military strategy” (247 fn). In this sense, her place somewhat resembles that of Margaret,

Hotspur, or Katherine of Aragon—a redoubtable personality who is (to borrow Amy Appleford’s description of Katherine) “on the wrong or losing side of history” (150).

Such a presentation privileges Joan’s military prowess, so that her statement to Charles that “while I live I’ll ne’er fly from a man” (1.2.103) becomes a point-blank refusal to be cowed by masculine puissance rather than a snigger-provoking allusion to promiscuity. This reading also creates a Joan who to a certain degree stands in opposition to her compatriots rather than one who is merely the female member—indeed, almost the mascot—of the Gallic team, thereby establishing a kind of emotional buffer zone in which sympathy for her might sprout even in nationalistic English hearts. Thus, in the frantic conversation in 2.1 during the nighttime English attack on Orleans, Joan becomes the voice of reason rather than yet another comically incompetent, finger-pointing French leader. This approach also recasts her raillery into the kind of war-by-other-means rhetoric that one might expect from any veteran soldier, especially one speaking from a position of advantage. In this, Joan becomes a cool-eyed reality check to her opponents. At Rouen, when Talbot challenges the French to come out and fight like (English)men, Puzel commonsensically replies: “Belike your lordship takes us then for fools, / To try if that our own be ours or no” (3.2.61–62). What, after all, does the side that holds the town have to prove?³⁰⁹ Likewise, after Talbot’s death at Bordeaux, William Lucy reels off a litany of the English champion’s titles—“Great Earl of Washford, Waterford and Valence, / Lord Talbot of Goodrig and Urchinfield, / Lord Strange of Blackmere, Lord Verdun of Alton . . .” (4.4.175–77)—of which Joan bluntly observes: “Here’s a silly stately style indeed: / The Turk, that two and fifty kingdoms hath, / Writes not so tedious a style as this. / Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles / Stinking and fly-blown lies here at

³⁰⁹ The exchange encapsulates what Rackin sees as Shakespeare’s portrayal of the conflict as a whole, as one “between [English/masculine] chivalric virtue and [French/feminine] pragmatic craft” (*Stages* 151).

our feet" (4.4.184–88). Although the rejoinder remains cutting in its contempt, it can also be seen as a sardonically realistic corrective to Lucy's speechifying: high-flown titles do not exempt one from the ugly effects of death in war.³¹⁰ Joan also employs her rhetorical talents to persuade Burgundy to desert the English forces and join their cause. "Look on thy country, look on fertile France, / And see the cities and the towns defaced / By wasting ruin of the cruel foe," she says, and asks: "Who joint'st thou with but with a lordly nation / That will not trust thee but for profit's sake?" (3.3.44–46, 62–63). Why, Joan asks Burgundy, is he participating in the destruction of his own land and aiding those who have no real affection for him? Seconds after the success of her emotional appeal to Gallic nationalism and Burgundy's self-interest, however, Joan's biting realism returns. "Done like a Frenchman: turn and turn again," she remarks (3.3.85).³¹¹

Yet in Balaam-esque fashion, the foreign prophetess goes over the edge in helping her side of the war, trafficking with dark spirits for advantage and then watching the weapon break in her hand when the Fiends decline to help.³¹² The Joan who appears

³¹⁰ Leslie A. Fiedler remarks on this passage, "After this grandiloquence, the Pucelle answers so quietly and with such good sense that for one instant Shakespeare's sympathy (along with ours) tilts in her direction" (57). Robert B. Pierce likewise remarks that Joan's "practical directness counterpoints the artificiality of the previous scenes," but the lesson he draws is that "in this degenerate world the ideal embodied by the Talbots is dead" (46). Rackin asserts that "at the rhetorical level, they [the French] attack both the English version of history and the values it expresses with an earthy iconoclasm that subverts the inherited notions of chivalric glory invoked by the English heroes. . . . His [Talbot's] language reifies glory, while hers [Joan's] is the language of physical objects" (*Stages* 150–51). The exchange here is between Lucy and Joan rather than Talbot and Joan, but the assessment fits tidily.

³¹¹ Pointing to this statement and to Joan's blunt description of the dead Talbot, Jean E. Howard writes, "She can speak home truths to friends and foes alike" ("First Part" 440).

³¹² Deborah Willis writes that in early modern plays, "magical practitioners and those who consulted them typically sought shortcuts to *power*, status, wealth, and/or sexual conquest," and such characters were likely to be male (141; emphasis added). In her conjuring to the benefit of France, Joan thus acts in a manner that is typical of contemporary theatrical treatments and of male characters. Addressing the issue of Puzel's characterization as a witch, Hattaway argues that the Fiend scene "cannot be taken as an unequivocal manifestation of the diabolic power of Joan. She turns to witchcraft only in despair, and there is no evidence earlier in the text to support the English view that her victories were won through supernatural agency" ("Introduction" 24). Howard also asserts that the play is ambivalent about the source of Joan's martial success ("First Part" 440). Frances K. Barasch suggests that Joan's denial of consorting with evil spirits and her mission to do "exceeding miracles on earth" and "wonders" (5.3.41,48) are meant as a claim to practice hermetic

for the final time in 5.3 is the Samson-in-defeat Joan: betrayed by her impulses, mocked by her foes, perhaps (depending on the staging) bruised and bloodied offstage by her captors, but still standing.³¹³ Rather than the parodic Puzel who egomaniacally denies her father and refuses the name of maiden in a farcically futile effort to save herself, this Joan cunningly disavows her parent to ensure his safety—after all, who is more likely to become the next English victim than the French witch’s father?—and bitterly plays with her captors in a “last great act of defiance” manner.³¹⁴ Is she a woman who does not know her place, or a commoner seeking to sup with monarchs? Very well, then—she will lay claim to noble blood as well as a heavenly anointing: “First let me tell you whom you have condemned: / Not me begotten of a shepherd swain, / But issued from the progeny of kings; / Virtuous and holy, chosen from above . . .” (5.3.36–39).³¹⁵ Has she been a “shameless courtesan” surrounded by “lustful paramours”? (3.2.44, 52). Very well, she will play along: “It was Alençon that enjoyed my love,” she declares, but soon: “O give me

rather than “low” magic (120); similarly, G. Wilson Knight calls Puzel’s speech here a “powerful . . . defence of Spiritualism” (291). My own reading is that Joan is re-asserting her claim to be an emissary of the Virgin Mary.

³¹³ Howard and Rackin write of Joan and Margaret that “although their behavior is marked as sexually transgressive, neither of these women warriors is ever subjected to the danger—or even the threat—of rape” (“Gender” 99). Although true of the play texts, this statement is subject to the whims of staging. Kate Wilkinson notes that in Michael Boyd’s production of *1 Henry VI* during a 2006–2008 presentation of the history plays, Richard Plantagenet “spent his time hunting down Joan to sexually brutalize her before burning her at the stake” (“‘A Woman’s Hide’” 60). The character used his dagger in an implicit rape of Joan in “one of the most horrific moments of the eight productions” (65).

³¹⁴ David Pryce-Jones describes Janet Suzman’s Joan in a 1963 British production as “a hell-cat used for political purposes and not the slutish witch that Shakespeare characteristically invented” (quoted in Hattaway “Introduction” 47). Nicholas Grene, writing about stagings of Joan’s capture in which York’s forces do not take her in a “fair fight,” states: “What modern directors have done is exactly to reverse the associations in the original text of France with fraud, England with honourable force” (73–74).

³¹⁵ Fiedler rather bizarrely sees this assertion as “a ritual affirmation of her faith in the Great Goddess, whose avatar she feels herself to be at the point of sacrifice” (78). Lisa Jardine notes that the historical Joan’s garb was notorious not merely for its masculinity but also for its violation of sumptuary rules: “By adopting male dress of a lavishness which signalled superior class and authority, Joan took upon herself a kind of visual authority which overrode her womanhood and her inferior class origins” (157). Shakespeare does not take up this practice of the historical figure; ironically, however, it is by disguising herself as “the peasant she really is” that Joan retakes Rouen (Rackin *Stages* 151).

leave, I have deluded you. / 'Twas neither Charles, nor yet the Duke I named, / But Reignier, King of Naples, that prevailed" (5.3.73, 76–78).³¹⁶ M. L. Stapleton sees a certain dignity in her final lines: "If she deigns to submit, she does so in her usual imperative mood," leaving her foes with a Margaret-esque curse. "Far from the simple rant and frustration of a 'little woman,' " Stapleton declares, "Joan presides magnificently over the end of her play, accurately foretelling that the Wars of the Roses will environ England in darkness and the gloomy shade of death" (" 'Shine It' " 238). Or perhaps Puzel is not toying with the English after all; perhaps, after exposure to dangerous preternatural forces and the stress of war, she has gone mad. Burns notes that her final two scenes have been read "as stages in a progressive psychological deterioration" ("Introduction" 33). Puzel's cursing of the Dolphin as well as York—"A plaguing mischief light on Charles and thee, / And may ye both be suddenly surprised / By bloody hands, in sleeping on your beds" (5.2.60–62)—as well as her treatment of the Shepherd, her sudden claims of pregnancy and royal descent, and her multiplied allegations of paternity would support such an interpretation. "Joan may, in fact, be the tragic figure in this play," Michael Hattaway writes ("Introduction" 27).

If the parodic Joan serves as a poster girl for anti-Roman ire—Leslie A. Fiedler sees in Shakespeare's treatment "a Protestant, Puritan, Hebraic, finally patriarchal distrust of Mariolatry in all its forms" (60)—the young woman of this reading evokes the possibility of a Joan of Catholic nostalgia, an ambiguous icon of the old ways. Mulling the curious hints of purgatory in *Hamlet*, Greenblatt theorizes "what we might call a fifty-year

³¹⁶ Nancy A. Gutierrez asserts that Shakespeare's characterization of Joan via "the perspective of other characters . . . forces the audience into collusion with the patriarchal point of view" (184). However, the greater the degree to which the characterization depends *merely* on the perspective of other characters, the freer the audience is to reject those characters' assessments—precisely what happens, for instance, with Leontes and Hermione. Thus, I would argue that the word "forces" overstates the case.

effect, a time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying out and the survivors . . . look back with longing at the world they have lost” (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 248). If the play about the Danish prince involves a fifty-year effect, perhaps the earlier play about the French warrior-maiden involves a forty-year effect. Writing about Shakespeare’s Roman-rite playgoers, Jean-Christophe Meyer theorizes: “There is reason to believe that the tensions at the heart of his history plays had a particular ring for that audience and that . . . he may have had that audience in mind *at times*” (12; emphasis in original). Looking at Queen Elizabeth’s early days, Peter Lake argues that strongly Catholic sensibilities in the populace are hardly surprising: “Given the brevity of the Protestant Reformation under Edward and the paucity of the proselytizing resources available to both the Edwardian and Elizabethan churches, this was almost inevitably the case, since great chunks of the population had never really been exposed to Protestantism” (69). Of course, upon Elizabeth’s death, “the nation had finally enjoyed nearly fifty years of confessional stability,” Lori Anne Ferrell writes, concluding that at this point, the “Catholic past was a cloudy memory: now generations were born, not converted, into Protestantism” (45). But apparently the memory, like a summer sky, was only partly cloudy. “Nearly a thousand years of religious tradition, with all the culture and outlook that went with it, could not disappear overnight,” Malcolm Hebron observes (19). In Shell’s concise formulation, “Catholic England ceased at the accession of Elizabeth I, but many English people continued Catholic . . .” (116); further, “the Church of England was structured in countless ways by its Catholic past, not least architecturally Even in absence or partial obliteration, Catholic matter was eloquent” (5–6).³¹⁷ The Tudor-era

³¹⁷ Shakespeare himself famously evokes “Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang” (*Shakespeare’s Sonnets* 257).

Reformation did not “generate widespread attachment to Protestant doctrines of justification,” Christopher Haigh asserts; the church might have been Protestant, “but its people—most of its people—were not. . . . They wanted to stand and sing, to bow and kneel, to have rings and crosses . . .” (289–90). David N. Beauregard also argues for a strong taste of the Tiber in the Thames. In “many respects [Shakespeare’s] English audiences were still Catholic or well disposed toward Catholicism,” Beauregard writes, noting Spanish diplomatic reports that claimed sympathies among many highly placed Englishmen and that calculated a third of the nation was Catholic. One should not think, he writes, that the plays were “always and everywhere presented before a predominantly Protestant audience under the eye of rigorous Protestant censorship” (19–20).

Assuming such Catholic or quasi-Catholic sentiments, some early modern theater patrons might not see a Puzel who is properly the target of sneering abuse but rather a Joan who is a tragically beleaguered and fallible reminder of the ecclesiastical past. Citing Joan’s besting of the Dolphin and her crediting of the Virgin Mary for her prowess, Albert Tricomi writes: “To audience members longing for the ‘Old Faith’ where marvelous revelations need not undergo skeptical interrogation, this scene may have aroused nostalgia” (13); the Dolphin’s talk of Joan’s eventual postmortem honors might have functioned similarly, even for some outwardly conforming parishioners (19). Such an interpretation of Shakespeare’s Joan, although admittedly not obvious, would fit the playwright whose personal religious convictions have remained so elusive, as well as parts of his audience.

Joan as Judith

However, the comparison with Deborah, whether satiric or semi-tragic, does not exhaust the possibilities of Joan’s echoing of figures in sacred writ, and one of the more obvious candidates is Judith. Originating as she does in the apocryphal/deuterocanonical

books affirmed by Roman Catholics as part of the Old Testament but rejected as non-canonical by Protestants, Judith might have been seen in Elizabethan and Jacobean England as having not quite the scriptural *bona fides* of Deborah, who is ensconced in the universally accepted Book of Judges. Yet even though Anglicanism refused to use the Apocrypha “to establish any Doctrine,” the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion declared that these “other books (as *Hierom* saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners” (*BCP* 675; italics in original). John Calvin refers several times to the Apocrypha (and not always in a negative context) in his *Institutes*.³¹⁸ The Book of Judith was read at Morning and Evening Prayer services during October (*BCP* 231). Official homilies approvingly cite her as an example of mourning for sin (*Homilies* 10), of benefiting from God’s mercy (267), and of using extravagant clothing for good rather than self-centered purposes (290–91). Shakespeare’s own life and work reflect his society’s familiarity with Judith; his younger daughter bore her name,³¹⁹ and the schoolmaster in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* shares the name of the book’s chief antagonist. The Book of Judith is one that airs questions about the elusive presence and action of the supernatural as well as the perception and role of physical attractiveness. In *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare paints a world, like that of Judith, in which the supernatural is present but only tantalizingly so; and one in which, in contrast to that of Judith, the presence of beauty is curiously ambiguous.

In the Book of Judith, the Assyrian general Holofernes invades Judea and lays siege to the town of Bethulia until the populace rebels against its leaders, crying: “God be iudge betwixt vs and thee, for thou hast dealt euyl with vs: thou wouldest not speake

³¹⁸ King James, in comments on the edifying material to be found in the Bible’s various sections, dismisses the Apocrypha’s books: “. . . I omit them because I am no Papist, as I said before, and indeed some of them are no ways like the ditement of the spirit of God” (*True Law* 107).

³¹⁹ The playwright’s older daughter, Susanna, shared the name of another woman from the Apocrypha.

peaceably with the king of the Assyrians Therefore gather now together all the people that be in the citie, that we may all yeelde our selues wyllyngly vnto the people of Holophernes" (*Holie Bible* 7:13, 15).³²⁰ When the devout widow Judith hears that the elders have decided to surrender, she rebukes them and indicates that she will deliver the town: "Ye shall stande this night before the porte, and I wyll go foorth with Abra my mayden: and pray ye therefore vnto God, that he wyll graciously remember his people of Is|rael within fiue dayes, as ye haue saide" (8:32). After praying that "the hande of a woman ouerthrowe" the enemy (9:15), Judith adorns herself so attractively that the elders "were astonied, and marueyled greatly at her beautie" (10:7). Going out to the Assyrian army, she presents herself as a pious refugee from the siege. Telling Holofernes that "the Lord hath sent me to shewe thee these thinges" (11:13), she asserts that the desperate Jews are about to alienate God by devouring consecrated food. When this occurs, she says, the city will thenceforth be doomed (11:12). A few days later, the lustful Holofernes orders his attendant to invite Judith to a banquet, planning to make her the dessert: "For it were a shame vnto all the Assyrians, that a woman shoulde so laugh a man to scorne, that she were come from him vnmedled withall" (12:11). After he has drunk himself into a stupor, however, Judith decapitates him with his own sword and escapes to Bethulia with the head. After she reveals her success to the people, they defeat the stunned Assyrians, and Judith is praised for her valor: "Thou worship of the citie of Hierusalem, thou ioy of Israel, thou honour of our people. Because thou hast done manly . . ." (15:10–11).

As with Samson, Judith is not a prophet in the classic sense, but she is clearly cut from the same cloth as Deborah, who is described as a prophetess (Judg. 4:4). Although the Dolphin tells Joan upon first meeting her, "Thou art an Amazon / And

³²⁰ The text of Judith in this chapter is from Early English Books Online.

fightest with the sword of Deborah" (1.2.104–05), the better comparison is arguably with Judith, given that Judges 4 does not actually depict Deborah as fighting.³²¹ Too, the parallels between the play and the Apocrypha's narrative are more marked than those involving the Book of Judges: a town besieged by foreigners, a force losing the will to resist, the sudden appearance of a woman with a plan to save her people and a reputation for special insight. The Bastard says of Joan, "The spirit of deep prophecy she hath, / Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome: / What's past and what's to come she can descry" (1.2.55–57)—a description that Puzel corroborates by descrying the Dolphin's temporary substitution of Reignier for himself. In similar fashion, the town elders tell Judith: "All that thou speakest is true, and no man can reprove thy words. Pray thou for vs now therefore [vnto God,] for thou art an holy woman, and fearest God" (8:28–29; interpolation in original).

Yet as mentioned previously, and now even more obviously, the question emerges of the nature of God's involvement in human affairs. Joan predicts salvation for the French through divine aid: "God's mother deigned to appear to me / And, in a vision full of majesty, / Willed me to leave my base vocation / And free my country from calamity: / Her aid she promised and assured success" (1.2.78–82). Judith cryptically indicates to the elders that she has a plan for Bethulia's deliverance and likewise invokes heavenly help: "Seing ye know that my wordes are of God . . . beseche God that he wyll bryng my counsell to good ende" (8:30–31). In neither narrative, however, does the supernatural aid manifest itself in clearly miraculous ways. Joan cites a Marian vision to Charles and, as the English take Orleans, asks the Dolphin, "At all times will you have my power alike?" (2.1.55), perhaps implying that something out of the ordinary is discernible

³²¹ Jeanne d'Arc "claimed at her trial that she had never killed anyone . . . ; her force, both to her supporters and to her opponents, was largely as a symbol," Burns writes ("Introduction" 32).

around her. Yet until the Fiends scene in 5.2., there is little in the play to suggest the blatantly preternatural; nothing in the text, for instance, indicates that Charles or Talbot square off against anything other than a young woman with martial ability. In Judith's story, before she ventures to the Assyrian camp, she asks God that Holofernes "may be taken with the snare of his eyes in me, and that thou mayest smyte him with the lypes of my loue" (9:13)—the general is to be undone by one woman's body, not by fire from heaven. When the moment of unruth comes, Judith prays, "Strengthen me O Lorde God of Israel, and haue respect vnto the workes of myne handes in this houre, . . . And graunt that I may perfourme the thing, which in hope that it may be done by thee, I haue deuised," before she decapitates the commander (13:7). Far from petitioning for blatantly miraculous intervention, Judith instead seeks the enabling of a pedestrian human deed.

The echoing of Judith by *1 Henry VI* thus underlines the fact that Shakespeare's play operates out of a working theology in which, for the most part, supernatural activity is providential, implied, or unseen rather than miraculous and visible. The "divine nature is [not] constantly being forced upon our attention in the Histories," Robert G. Hunter observes. "God's existence is easy to forget, so completely does the action of these plays appear at times to be entirely the outcome of the characters' lust for power" (69).³²² Theologically perceptive early-modern playgoers might have noticed that unlike the Pentateuch, which frequently describes God as speaking and doing, the Book of Judith is narrated strictly from the human viewpoint; the Lord is appealed to and credited with

³²² Henry Asgar Kelly concurs, asserting that *1 Henry VI* ends "without implicating to any discernible extent the operation of divine providence" (252). Yet in a discussion of divine judgment in the two tetralogies, Robert Rentoul Reed Jr. indicates that one need not point to God to believe he is at work: "The not infrequent neglect of a direct mention of God in Tudor (and pre-Tudor) statements about inherited guilt probably reflects in fact that His function in the punishments of such guilt was widely acknowledged" (18–19).

acting, but he does not “appear.”³²³ In the same way, Joan and other characters refer to supernatural activity, but until Puzel’s “familiar spirits, that are culled / Out of the powerful regions under earth” (5.2.31–32), manifest themselves in the play’s final act, the audience sees things only on the mortal plane. Burns points out that the stage direction “it thunders and lightens” after 1.4.96 can be understood as “gunfire, a natural storm or a presage of witchcraft” (*1H6* 155 fn.), but as he himself notes, ultimately this is an ambiguity rather than something clearly supernatural. No French Horatio or Banquo sees Joan’s Virgin Mary (or her Fiends); there is no Gallic Lady Macbeth to whom Puzel relates the specific admonishments and “signs of future accidents” that she receives from her “speedy helpers” (5.2.24–26). Even when the Fiends appear, it is to refuse aid rather than grant it, so that in terms of audience perception, the play remains marked more by the absence of the supernatural than by its presence.³²⁴

Joan, like Judith, seems to accomplish her aims principally by stealth, speech, and strength of arm.³²⁵ For Judith, the first two are essentially one, as she portrays herself to the Assyrians as a devout woman who is saving herself from the inevitable destruction of a backsliding people. Ultimately, of course, her plan depends on her use of the sword, although the fact that she prays, “Strengthen me O Lorde God in this houre”

³²³ In this aspect, the story strongly resembles the Old Testament Book of Esther, in which the eponymous heroine saves her people from extermination by exposing a Persian official’s plot. The Jewish/Protestant version of the book (unlike that of Roman Catholicism/Eastern Orthodoxy, which derives from a Greek text rather than a Hebrew one) is notable for the absence of any direct reference to God or prayer, although fasting is mentioned.

³²⁴ “That she has no witnesses but the audience keeps open the possibility of staging the scene as psychological allegory,” Burns writes, citing a BBC version in which the camera zooms in on Joan’s eyes “while a white-clad female ‘demon’ (who may equally well be Joan’s inner, more vulnerable, or at least more identifiably feminine, self) dances in identical images in both her pupils” (“Introduction” 34). Writing about *Henry VIII*, Kim H. Noling writes that the staging of a dream “gives the audience an unmediated perception of that character’s mind. Therefore, the audience need not use the caution necessary in evaluating a reported incident . . .” (295). Whether the dreamer/visionary is sane is another question, however.

³²⁵ In contrast to a view of Joan as one of the “agents of divine retribution for the sins of this world,” Hattaway argues, “as we watch her political astuteness and ruses on the battlefield it is difficult not to believe that she is simply endowed with the faculties for worldly success” (“Introduction” 16).

and must strike two blows to accomplish her task (13:9–10) suggests (unsurprisingly) that she is not a trained swordswoman. Joan, on the other hand, unquestionably relies on her military prowess—besting Charles to prove herself to him, personally routing English soldiers at Orleans, and then proving herself a match for the stalwart Talbot, although the English champion refuses to credit her with true martial ability: “A witch by fear, not force, like Hannibal, / Drives back our troops and conquers as she lists . . . ,” he declares (1.5.21–22). Yet Joan also employs what would now be called guerrilla tactics, disguising herself and her squad as “the vulgar sort of market men / That come to gather money for their corn” (3.24–5) in order to infiltrate Rouen—a stealthy maneuver that “emphasizes her trickster-like quality, and her distance from chivalric codes of behaviour, upheld consistently by the English throughout the play” (1*H6* 205 fn.) And as Alençon suggests at 1.2.123, she proves to be a shrewd tempter with her tongue, persuading Burgundy to alter his political allegiance; as Michele Osherow says, her “potent words turn committed servants into traitors” (90).³²⁶ Osherow indeed asserts, “Throughout the drama, Joan’s power is rooted in speech” (89). One can argue that this is somewhat of an exaggeration; contrary to what one might expect from such an assessment, Puzel never makes a rousing military speech in the vein of the St. Crispin’s Day oration in *Henry V*, and she never provides, say, a mesmerizing description of her supernatural experiences or of the liberated France that she hopes to help birth.³²⁷ However, Osherow’s statement still reflects the fact that one of Joan’s most dramatic achievements, the “turning” of Burgundy, is accomplished with words rather than weaponry. Overall, the similarities of

³²⁶ Comparing the Dolphin’s smitten reaction to Joan’s appearance to Burgundy’s reaction to her speech, Tricomi writes that “the play moves from an idolatry of the bodily *image* to an idolatry of the beguiling *word*” (16; emphasis in original).

³²⁷ M. L. Stapleton agrees with Osherow—“Rhetoric serves as Joan’s most potent witchcraft”—but she also says that Joan’s rhetorical “adornments are minimal” (“‘Shine It’ ” 240–41). Noting that Joan employs both “imprecation and exhortation,” she writes that the namesake of *Henry V* uses these modes to greater effect in the “Once more unto the breach” speech (242).

Joan's and Judith's narratives posit a theological theater in which the supernatural is less of a clearly-onstage character and more of a backstage presence whose nature and action can be deduced and debated (or perhaps denied). Ironically, given the sacred status of the books of Judith and Esther, Shakespeare's contemporaries need not have seen his use of this technique as betraying a skeptical mind-set—the philosophical-literary ground had been plowed in Holy Writ.

In terms of sexuality and gender, it is perhaps ironic that Puzel is not, in certain senses, more like Judith than she is. Judith is described as “a very faire and beautiful person” (8:7) who dressed in a “smocke of here” (8:6) and the “garmentes of her widowhood” (10:2), but she sets out to accentuate her attractiveness before she goes to the Assyrian camp. After washing, she “annoynted her selfe with precious thinges of sweete sauour, broyded and platted her heere, set a coyffe vpon her head, and put on such apparell as belongeth vnto gladnesse, slippers vpon her feete, bracelettes, spanges, earynges, fynger rynges, and decked her selfe with all her best aray” (10:3). Transforming herself physically, she plays up the bodily appeal that she has chosen to de-emphasize since her husband's death. However, the transformation occurs on the surface level; the person beneath the clothes remains the same despite her donning of “such apparell as belongeth vnto gladnesse.” Joan, too, speaks of a metamorphosis: “In complete glory she [the Virgin Mary] revealed herself. / And, whereas I was black and swart before, / With those clear rays which she infused on me, / That beauty am I blessed with, which you may see” (1.2.83–86). Puzel describes her transformation (which, unlike Judith's, actually changes her body rather than merely adorning it differently) as the work of heaven. The change in Joan's appearance serves as a supernatural affirmation of her femininity, although ironically she will employ her body (successfully if only temporarily) in the traditionally masculine pursuit of war rather than in stereotypically feminine fashion.

However, whereas Judith's narrator affirms her post-makeover appeal—"when they [the town elders] sawe her, they were astonied, and marueyled greatly at her beautie" (10:7)—Shakespeare leaves open to interpretation exactly how comely Joan is.³²⁸ If the audience perceives her as homely, her assertion of a miraculous makeover becomes a joke, increasing the degree to which she is a parodic figure. (The likelihood of this possibility is increased by the fact that all of Shakespeare's female characters originally were played by boys, with male disguise often becoming a comic device.) If Joan is staged as pleasant-looking or beautiful, her integrity is supported, and her lines contribute to her believability as a divinely commissioned deliverer. Alençon's speculation during the conversation between Joan and Charles that the latter "shrives this woman to her smock" (1.2.119) may indicate a certain level of attractiveness (presumably the nobleman would not joke that his liege was dallying with a drab girl), and Reigner addresses her as "Fair maid" (1.2.64). Charles's immediate reaction to Joan's assertion of transformation, and to her suggestion that he would be blessed to have her as his "warlike mate," is: "Thou hast astonished me with thy high terms" (1.2.92–93)—a statement that (perhaps deliberately) does not address the issue directly. Both Talbot and York address Puzel as "hag" (3.2.51, 5.2.63), which is certainly negative but may be aimed more at her personality than her appearance.³²⁹ On the whole, then, the play's text

³²⁸ Given Joan's contradictory statements about her parentage (1.2.72, 5.3.37) and her denial of trafficking with "wicked spirits" (5.3.42) despite her summoning of the Fiends, the claim of physical change may not be truthful even from her viewpoint. In contrast to the play's overall ambiguity about Joan's appearance, there is no real question about the attractiveness of her fellow Frenchwoman, at least from Suffolk's viewpoint; he refers to Margaret as "fairest beauty," "Nature's miracle," and "gorgeous" (5.2.67, 75, 85) and tells Henry that her "chief perfections" could "make a volume of enticing lines / Able to ravish any dull conceit" (5.4.12, 14–15). In *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Suffolk describes her as a "lovely lady, beautifull and tall, / Fayre spoken, pleasaunt, a very princely piece . . ." (165).

³²⁹ "For the poor woman, beauty was one more threat to a vulnerable social position," Véronique Nahoum-Grappe writes. "Ugliness, on the other hand, offered protection from vile seducers. . . . A 'true woman' was one who was both feminine and beautiful. . . . By contrast, ugliness and femininity were incompatible. The ugly woman belonged to a more neutral, less sexually identifiable category . . ." (90–91).

is ambiguous about Joan's physical attractiveness. On a textual level, the uncertainty tends to undermine the English accusation of promiscuity, but simultaneously it can strengthen the allegation of a lack of (surface) femininity.

The comparison to Judith also underscores the importance of Joan's physical transformation—in reality, its lack of importance. Puzel describes herself to Charles as having been a shepherdess of “contemptible estate” and “black and swart” appearance (1.2.75, 84) before the vision that left her altered. Unlike Judith, she thus goes from homeliness to beauty rather than from beauty to greater beauty. Yet the alteration of Joan's countenance is mentioned only among the French; the English (perhaps not surprisingly) seem to have no knowledge of it. It plays a relatively insignificant, almost negligible, role in the play—it is mentioned only to the Dolphin, and once Joan has convinced him, it never crops up again.³³⁰ In contrast, Judith is introduced as a physically appealing woman who then works to increase this quality. Her beautification is, so to speak, aimed against her enemies; the widow deliberately plays up those aspects of herself that will allow her to penetrate her foe's defenses. Finally, the change is an integral part of her scheme and thus of the narrative as a whole—the defeat of Holofernes's army turns on his being sufficiently distracted by Judith's charms to fall into her hands.³³¹ Why the lack of interest in Joan's physical transformation? The situation

³³⁰ Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancellia Shea argue that Joan's physical appeal to Charles is deliberate—she “uses the Dauphin's interest in her as a means of securing her position within his army; by making herself unavailable sexually, she hopes to ensure his continued interest” (80). Rackin sees Joan's sexual promiscuity as dramatically gratuitous, asserting that this quality and Margaret's unfaithfulness seemingly were written into the *Henry VI* plays “to underscore the women's characterization as threats to masculine honor” (*Stages* 158).

³³¹ One could argue that Judith buys into a reductive view of women in which she becomes merely a luxuriously (and potentially temporarily) clothed body. Yet two things counter this. First, Judith exercises full agency in her plan; she not only concocts the scheme herself but also tells Bethulia's elders, “As for the thing that I go in hande withall, aske ye no questions of it . . .” (8:33). Judith's plot is a feminist one in the most basic sense, in that no men are involved in its accomplishment or devising. Further, her actions essentially subvert the woman-as-mere-body viewpoint, in that it is precisely this attitude that brings about Holofernes's demise. One can argue that the Book of Judith actually treats Holofernes in a more sexist fashion than Judith. Despite the emphasis on Judith's

can perhaps be explained via a distinction made in the New Testament between certain types of miracles: “Wherefore, tongues are for a signe, not to them that beleue, but to them that beleue not: But prophesying [serueth] not for them that beleue not, but for them which beleue” (1 Cor. 14:22; interpolation in original). The divinely enabled use of another language has special significance for unbelievers, the apostle Paul argues, whereas prophecy has special significance for believers. Similarly, the change in Joan’s body apparently is meant to serve as an authenticating sign of her visions, and thus is “aimed” at the French rather than her foes; after serving its purpose, it exits the stage. In the end, the play’s treatment of the physical appearance of a supposedly masculine young woman actually acts as a subtle sermon against the stereotypically female vice of vanity. Joan is most notable for her deeds rather than her appearance—a message that some Anglican clergy might have endorsed despite its disreputable French and theatrical connections.

Like the Book of Judith, the Joan Puzel plot line in *1 Henry VI* concerns a woman who emerges from ordinary life and invokes supernatural aid in a quest to deliver her nation from a foreign military threat. With her “keen-edged sword” (1.2.98), Joan bests Charles, Talbot, and the latter’s troops; with “fair persuasions mixed with sugared words” (3.3.18), she eliminates Burgundy from the list of France’s enemies. The Maid of Orleans is thus a Shakespearean echo of the female stalwart of the Apocrypha. Yet because she is the captain of the wrong host—and one who “practise[s] and converse[s] with spirits” (2.1.25) at that—she becomes for early modern audiences a devilish double of the Jewish heroine. Yet the supernatural element in both narratives is not as obvious as one might expect, imitating an offstage world in which early modern Protestants and Catholics, as well as the odd skeptic, could find themselves at loggerheads about the

physical appearance, she never actively attempts to seduce Holofernes. In contrast, a key assumption of the story is that the general can be undone via an implicit appeal to stereotypical masculine lust, and this is precisely what occurs.

existence and activity of the divine and the demonic. In addition, despite Joan's similarities to Judith, the image has its inverse aspects; in contrast to a beautiful woman whose physical appeal becomes a weapon in its own right, Shakespeare's sword-bearing deliverer is a woman whose appearance cannot be nailed down and whose looks are almost inconsequential to the narrative. Joan thus calls into question the importance of the physical even as her foes question her use of her body.

"For there shall arise false Christes, and false prophetes"

Joan's echoes, however, range even beyond the traditional Old Testament and the Apocrypha and into the New Testament, creating parallels with eschatological passages in the Gospels. Hannibal Hamlin notes the existence of "an English cultural obsession in the early seventeenth century: Christianity had been preoccupied with the End of Days since its earliest years . . . but interest intensified after the Reformation and especially so in England toward the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century" (272). Shakespeare's audiences thus would have been particularly aware of dramatic material with links to predictive, end-of-the-world biblical texts such as Matthew 24–25 whose language about false prophets and deceptive miracles might have had them pricking up their ears while watching the "prophetess" of *1 Henry VI*.³³² In comparison to the echoes of the Old Testament and Apocrypha that Joan sets off, the New Testament similarities are less obvious, partially because no individual, distinctive personalities such as Deborah, Samson, or Judith are involved. However, Joan can be

³³² This section of Matthew, which was read in late May in Morning Prayer services (*BCP* 226), is sometimes referred to today as the Mount Olivet discourse, for the site of its delivery, or as the "Little Apocalypse," because of its similarity to the Book of Revelation. The latter text lies beyond the purview of this dissertation; however, Patrick Ryan's 2004 article "Shakespeare's Joan and the Great Whore of Babylon" examines the likeness between Puzel and the symbolic female figure of Revelation 17–18, which Protestant polemic often sees as the (false) Church of Rome.

seen as fitting the general type of false prophet/messiah about whom Jesus warns.

Before the Bastard presents Joan to Charles and his nobles, he declares:

Be not dismayed, for succor is at hand:
A holy maid hither with me I bring,
Which by a vision sent to her from heaven
Ordained is to raise this tedious siege
And drive the English forth the bounds of France.
The spirit of deep prophecy she hath,
Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome:
What's past and what's to come she can descry.
Speak, shall I call her in? Believe my words,
For they are certain and unfallible. (1.2.50–59)

The Bastard immediately strikes a biblical note with his exhortation “Be not dismayed . . .”

The Bishops' Bible, read in church services during Shakespeare's lifetime, does not use “dismay” in certain passages where the later King James Version employs it, such as Moses's urging the Hebrews to “feare not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. 31:8); near-identical commands in Josh. 8:1 and 10:25, 1 Chron. 28:20, 2 Chron. 20:17, and Ezek. 3:9; and slightly different but still similar admonitions in Jer. 1:17 and 10:2. Instead, the older translation prefers renderings such as “nor be discomfyted” (Deut. 31:8), “neither be thou faint hearted” (Josh. 8:1), “nor be abashed” (Ezek. 3:9), or “ye shall not be afraide” (Jer. 10:2). The Geneva Bible's phrasing is similar. However, the Bishops' Bible does use the aurally similar “be not afraid” in several passages, particularly in the Book of Isaiah: “Be not afraide, for I am with thee . . .” (41:10); “Be not afraide O Iacob my seruaut . . .” (44:2); “be not afraide for the king of the Assirians . . .” (10:24); “Be not afraide of the wordes that thou hast hearde . . .” (37:6). The original audiences of these various texts hear that God will support his people in their military ventures (offensive or defensive) or that they should not be daunted by their difficult prophetic missions. In his verbal introduction of Joan, then, the Bastard uses a phrase with powerful religious overtones, both in its basic content and in its frequent association with heavenly intervention and human beings with divinely ordained tasks. The Bastard goes on to describe Puzel as

having received a heavenly vision and possessing a “spirit of deep prophecy,” thus clarifying her proclaimed identity. Yet because Joan seeks to “drive the English forth the bounds of France,” her claim to prophetic status (which is already debatable on common-sense grounds, since messages from heaven are hardly an everyday thing) becomes a signal to the play’s English audience that she is a false prophet, laboring in the martial vineyard of the wrong side. Kristin M. Smith points to the phrase as a red flag, writing that “Joan’s introduction is problematized by her link with prophecy,” given the Church of England’s cessationist views on miracles: “Prophecy was understood to be primarily propagandist . . .” (145–46).

The problem of false prophecy is a key one in Matt. 22–23. The episode in question begins with Jesus’ prediction of the razing of the Jerusalem temple—“See ye not all these thynges? Ueryly I say vnto you there shall not be here left [one] stone vpon another, that shall not be destroyed” (24:2; interpolation in original)—for which the disciples seek a private explanation: “Tell vs, when shall these thynges be? & what shall be the token of thy commyng, & of the ende of the worlde?” (24:3). The discussion opens with a warning: “take heede, that no man deceaue you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christe: and shall deceaue many. Ye shal heare of warres, & rumours of warres Nation shall ryse agaynst nation, and realme agaynst realme . . .” (24:4–7). Jesus later continues: “Then yf any man saye vnto you: lo, here is Christe, or there: beleue it not. For there shall aryse false Christes, and false prophetes, and shall shewe great signes, and wonders: In so much, that yf it were possible, the very elect, shoulde be deceaued” (24:23–24). The full discourse is lengthy and wide-ranging and seemingly refers to events in both the relatively near and distant future; the Geneva Bible’s note on 24:22 declares: “Those things which befell the people of the Jews, in the 34 years, when as the whole land was wasted, and at length the city of Jerusalem taken, and both it and

their Temple destroyed, are mixed with those which shall come to pass before the last coming of our Lord" (983). In the first section, however, the disciples are warned about times to come that will be marked by (1) false messianic and prophetic claims, accompanied by deceptive miracles, that will persuade many, and (2) news and rumors of conflicts between nations. The shorter parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21 contain similar warnings.³³³ Yet whereas Matthew speaks of "warres, & rumours of warres" and Mark of "warres, and tidynges of warres" (13:7), Luke warns that believers will "heare of warres, and seditios" (21:9)—with the latter word, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, potentially carrying the meaning of "rioting and disorder" or "revolt, rebellion, mutiny" (defs. 1, 2a). An early modern parishioner thus might have been alert to the possibility of internal rebellions as well as international conflicts.

The danger signal set off in regard to Joan is potentially amplified by the Bastard's statement that she is a "holy maid" whose discerning power transcends that of "the nine sibyls of old Rome."³³⁴ Both descriptions are rhetorical double-edged swords. The first phrase inevitably evokes the Virgin Mary, "the handmayden of the Lorde" (Luke 1:38), the mother of Jesus and one of the most positive images in Christian thought: "holy," "blessed," and "highly in God's favour" (*Homilies* 109), an example "worthy for us to follow" (*Homilies* 150). However, in the shadow of the Reformation, and in a nation formally committed to Protestant theology, a Marian figure can also raise the specter of Catholicism's veneration and invocation of the saints—"a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God," according to the Thirty-nine Articles (*BCP* 679), a doctrine that makes "of the true servants of God, false gods, by attributing to them the power and honour which is God's,

³³³ These texts are read during Morning Prayer during mid-June and early July (*BCP* 227–28).

³³⁴ Tricomi argues that "the assertion that Joan's gift of prophecy *exceeds* those of the sibyls" is a particular problem (11; emphasis in original).

and due to him only" (*Homilies* 208). The second phrase, "the nine sibyls of old Rome," recalls the classical world and the virtues and learning of Western antiquity. Yet it also carries the smell of paganism³³⁵ and, simultaneously, Catholicism in its invocation of Rome—the wellspring of false religion to the early modern Protestant mind:

Now if ye will compare this [genuine Christianity] with the Church of Rome . . . you shall well perceive the state thereof to be so far wide from the nature of the true church, that nothing can be more. . . . To be short, look what our Saviour Christ pronounced of the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel; the same may be, boldly and with safe conscience, pronounced of the bishops of Rome, namely that they have forsaken, and daily do forsake, the commandments of God . . . (*Homilies* 433–34)

For the homilist, the Roman Church is the polar opposite of true religion, a theological *ultima Thule* historically led by men who have been guilty of the same disregard for Scripture that Jesus condemned in his opponents and who are "worthily accounted among the number of false prophets, and false Christs, which deceived the world a long while" (*Homilies* 438). The connection of Joan with Catholicism is underscored even further by the Bastard's assertion that his words "are certain and infallible," the latter word linking his testimony about Puzel with the Roman Church's historical assertion of the impossibility of its falling into heresy. Tricomi notes that although the formal dogma of infallibility would not be declared until 1877, Boniface VIII had asserted in the bull *Unam Sanctam* that salvation depends on submission to the pope, and also that Thomas More pointed to the "infallible authoritie of the church" (12). For Protestants, the assertion was blasphemous. "Where now is *the Spirit of truth*," the *Book of Homilies* asks sarcastically, "that will not suffer them in any wise to err?" (434; italics in original). The Bastard, of course, intends to establish Joan's credibility by thus vouching for her; for Shakespeare's audience, ironically, his words threaten to do the opposite.

³³⁵ Charles's talk of building a pyramid for Puzel, "like his hyperbolic invocations of Rhodope of Memphis and Darius's coffer, also suggests pagan idolatry," Tricomi writes (19).

The subtle invocation of the Gospels' warnings against false prophets and Christs by the character of Puzel is amplified by the historical/dramatic context of her appearance in the play. *1 Henry VI* opens with a royal funeral that is interrupted by a messenger who says: "Sad tidings bring I to you out of France, / Of loss, of slaughter and discomfiture. / Guyenne, Champagne, Reims, Rouen, Orleans, / Paris, Gisors, Poitiers are all quite lost" (1.1.58–61).³³⁶ This messenger is soon followed by a second who states, "France is revolted from the English quite, / Except some petty towns of no import" (1.1.90–91), and a third who reports a battle resulting in the capture of Talbot "[a]nd Lord Scales with him, and Lord Hungerford: / Most of the rest slaughtered, or took likewise" (1.1.146–47).³³⁷ The play, like Jesus's discourse, thus begins with "warres, & rumours of warres," a motif that continues in the next scene with the debut of Joan, who appears immediately after the English defeat a French attempt to raise the siege at Orleans. In addition, the dramatic situation echoes not only the prediction of international conflict in Matthew and Mark, but also that of Luke's slightly different "warres, and seditios," if the latter term is understood as referring to civil war or uprising. The first messenger, rebuking the English nobles, says, "Cropped are the flower-de-luces in your arms; / Of England's coat one half is cut away" (1.1.80–81); the second says the French have "revolted." Both reports imply not merely a war but a rebellion against a licit ruler, with the first messenger using the metaphor of an English coat of arms whose symbols for sovereignty over Gallic territory have been sliced off (*1H6* 121 fn.). Just as Jesus mentions false prophets and wars in the same breath, Shakespeare writes of a young

³³⁶ Garber points out that both this play and *Richard III* feature funeral processions early in the action, with the "weak" and "ineffectual" Henry in the latter play "offering the greatest possible contrast to his father and predecessor, the mythic martial hero Henry V" (*After All* 94).

³³⁷ W. H. Auden compares the scene's three messengers to the four in Job 1:13–19 who bring tidings of disaster to the biblical book's namesake, although Auden erroneously states that the numbers are the same (5).

woman hailed as a prophetess who historically and dramatically appears in a time of military conflict. The narrative's circumstances thus subtly imply that Joan is one of the foes of true righteousness against whom Christ warned.

Yet another factor that reinforces the link between Jesus's discourse and Shakespeare's drama is cosmological language. Bedford says in the first lines of the play: "Hung be the heavens with black. Yield day to night. / Comets, importing change of times and states, / Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky / And with them scourge the bad revolting stars / That have consented unto Henry's death . . ." (1.1.1–5). So great is England's loss, the duke declares, that the sky, comets, and stars should reflect it.³³⁸ Although Bedford's speech is imperative rather than predictive—the heavenly bodies *should* behave thus, rather than they *will*—his words project a picture of astronomical upheaval. Likewise, Christ declares in Matthew's account, "Immediately after the tribulation of those dayes, shal the sunne be darkened, and the moone shall not geue her lyght, and the starres shall fall from heauen, and the powers of heauen shalbe shaken" (24:29). Mark records similar words, with Luke asserting, "And there shalbe signes in the sunne and in the moone, & in the stares . . . the powers of heauen shalbe shaken" (21:25–26). The eschatological crisis on earth will be reflected by chaos among the heavenly bodies. Joan's entrance in 1.2 thus follows language describing the same kind of disastrous phenomena that Jesus predicts will be seen in an era marked by false prophets.

A final parallel between Matthew's "Little Apocalypse" and the Joan of *1 Henry VI* is that of miracles. Jesus speaks of "great signes, and wonders" that might deceive "the very elect." Shakespeare presents his Joan as in touch with supernatural beings, although she does not wield her claimed powers in the showier style of the Weird Sisters

³³⁸ Burns sees "heavens" as referring to an Elizabethan stage canopy (115 fn), but the references to comets and stars at least allow, if they do not require, an interpretation of darkened skies rather than drapery. Shaheen makes no note of biblical allusions in these lines.

in *Macbeth*, vanishing into the air and conjuring predictive visions. However, her very first acts are wondrous (at least as interpreted by the French): She sees through the Dolphin's substitution of Reignier for himself—"I know thee well, though never seen before" (1.2.67)—and she bests Charles in single combat. As with her claim of beautification by the Virgin Mary, these deeds serve as authenticating evidence of her mission; the French leadership is convinced by them. To the Protestant English mind, however, they are the kind of deceptive signs of which Jesus spoke, even if the Catholic French are not the "very elect" but heretical papists. "For the Scriptures have for a warning hereof foreshewed, that the kingdom of antichrist shall be *mighty in miracles and wonders, to the strong illusion of all the reprobate . . .*" (*Homilies* 215; emphasis in original).³³⁹ Keith Thomas writes of the Elizabethan era that "a Puritan manifesto described the Church of Rome as the source of 'all wicked sorcery'. . . . Catholic miracles were confidently ascribed to witchcraft" (78). Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* of 1584 in fact declares that although Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles worked miracles, "now to seeke for them, is a point of infidelitie. Which the papists (if you note it) are greatlie touched withal, as in their lieing legends appeareth. But in truth, our miracles are knaveries most commonlie, and speciallie of priests, whereof I could cite a thousand" (quoted in Mayer 22).³⁴⁰ Thus, the Fiends' appearance in 5.2 is not necessarily a surprise to the audience; Puzel is precisely the sort of person who might deal with such beings.

³³⁹ Asserting a sort of neo-paganism on Joan's part, Fiedler writes that in her claim of royal birth and heavenly election, "she sounds like the female Antichrist: a daughter of the Heavenly Mother, even as Jesus was Son to the Heavenly Father" (78–79).

³⁴⁰ Tricomi credits playwrights with cultivating a questioning attitude, writing that "the Reformation features of Tudor drama had long conditioned audiences to treat with skepticism extravagant claims of supra-natural powers" (21). In Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, Glendower declares, "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," and Hotspur cheekily replies: "Why, so can I, or so can any man, / But will they come when you do call for them?" (3.1.52–54).

As with the Deborah and Judith narratives, Jesus's Mount Olivet discourse provides a window through which one can glimpse the possible reaction of early modern audiences to Joan Puzel. In this case, the high-stakes, decades-long strife between Catholicism and Protestantism in England makes it particularly likely that the Bastard's introductory speech, Joan's preternatural knowledge, her unexpected victories over Albion, and her summoning of the Fiends would have painted her in some eyes as precisely the kind of false prophet that Christ predicted, and one with a Roman accent to boot. In the classic Hebraic sense, of course, Joan is not the standard-issue prophet—her principal task is neither to predict nor to proclaim. Yet when judged by the rule of Deborah and Judith, whose stories present them as supernaturally enabled women seeking to deliver their people, the mantle fits more closely. In Joan's case, as with Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters, the mantle is implicitly dark-hued—she is a fighter for the wrong side, a figure whose story evokes some of Christ's most ominously apocalyptic language. But Joan is a more complex character than her villainous sisters. Although the most natural reading is that of the parodic Puzel, the anti-Deborah who lampoons the French militarily, sexually, and spiritually, Joan also can be viewed from another vantage point—that of the Balaam/Samson-esque, tragic prophet-deliverer, the wrong-leaning personality who fatally goes too far and yet remains memorable. The same ambiguity emerges when examining Joan through the lens of her fellow warrior Judith—a comparison that foregrounds the cloudiness of the supernatural and the slipperiness of physical appearance. If the false prophetesses of *Macbeth* serve as a warning about the perils of idolatry in its various forms, perhaps the prophetess of *1 Henry VI* is an icon of the need—in the early modern world and beyond—to perceive and understand nuance. “The woman in man's clothes wielding a sword is . . . a puzzle,” Burns declares (“Introduction” 26); the audience's job is to work with the pieces.

Chapter 7

Afterword: "So long as men can breathe"

A single moment in *The Winter's Tale* captures the essence of the female prophet in Shakespeare's plays. At Leontes's demand that Paulina be ejected from his presence, the Sicilian noblewoman threatens to scratch out the eyes of anyone who dares attempt it, and then declares: "On mine own accord, I'll off. / But first I'll do my errand" (2.3.62–63). Paulina, Katherine, Margaret, Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters, Joan Puzel—all have missions that they are determined to accomplish: to advocate for the oppressed and challenge tyranny, to defend a marriage, to call down and witness judgment on ruthless political leaders, to change the loyalty and status of another person (and, perhaps, to test his mettle), or to lead a national revolution. In the depiction of these "errands," the plays re-create the acts, thoughts, and concerns of numerous biblical figures: Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, and others. Yet there is a particular self-assertiveness—"On *mine own* accord, I'll off"—integral to the actions of these Shakespearean characters; they challenge a belief of Elizabethan and Jacobean society that the office that becomes a woman best does not involve outspokenness and the critique of (male) authority.

The plays' echoing of the Old Testament prophets raises the possibility of expanded agency for early modern women. To the extent that Shakespeare's female characters re-embody the scriptural hero(in)es of the nation's official faith, they establish a precedent and theological imprimatur for similar deeds in real life. The re-enacting of Nathan's confrontation of the adulterous David in Paulina's rebuke of the metaphorically faithless Leontes reminds playgoers that the crossing of certain lines renders even monarchs subject to critique. Katherine's pointing to her status as foreigner, woman, and (wronged) wife recalls the Old Testament proclamations that such people are the objects

of divine concern and must not be abused. Yet at the same time, the biblical parallels also caution that all exercises of agency are not created equal. The actions of the female prophets in *Macbeth* lead to murderous rebellion and tyranny (both of which are particular *bêtes noires* in certain strands of early-modern English thought). In *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare creates a young woman who “fightest with the sword of Deborah” (1.2.105) and speaks with the cunning of Judith—but her championing of the French and her trafficking with Fiends turn her into a dark twin of the two heroines of Jewish antiquity. However, in the context of the English Reformation, the prophetic material in these dramas also complicates what might be called the Catholic Question. Lady Macbeth and the Three Witches, featured as they are in a play involving supernaturalism, rebellion, and talk of “equivocation,” become icons of Protestant English fears about papist villainy and superstition. Yet the (perhaps unexpectedly) positive depiction of Katherine, the rejected Catholic wife of the first secular head of the Church of England, interrogates the popular Roman image, suggesting that the stained confessional glass is not as black as it seems to some.

The possibilities of Shakespearean-women-as-prophets are not exhausted in this study. One of the more obvious candidates is Portia, who in *The Merchant of Venice* famously discourses on justice and its companion virtue: “The quality of mercy is not strained . . . / It is an attribute to God himself . . .” (4.1.180, 191). Shylock’s adherence to the jots and tittles of Venice’s legal code, she points out, falls short of true imitation of the ultimate Source of all law. Portia’s trick of disguising herself as the legal expert Balthazar and her linguistic impaling of the moneylender on the precise definition of “flesh” bear a certain similarity to Nathan’s entrapment of the adulterous David with his story about a rich man who steals a poor man’s lamb, perhaps allowing for consideration of prophetic rhetorical devices. The trial scene is also notable for Shylock’s and Gratiano’s

comparison of “Balthazar” to Daniel—a reference to the Apocrypha’s tale of Susanna, in which the prophet uses logic to prevent the wrongful execution of a woman whose “honesty” is impugned. On a broader level, given the play’s subtexts of Jewish-Christian relations and law, *Merchant* offers material for the exploration of the interactions of religion, justice, authority, and power.

Measure for Measure also holds out possibilities for the study of women speaking truth to power. Isabella seeks clemency for her condemned brother by telling the ducal deputy Angelo:

No ceremony that to great ones longs,
Not the king’s crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal’s truncheon, nor the judge’s robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does. (2.2.59–63)

Like Portia, who describes mercy as a great attribute of the divine, Isabella praises forbearance as a quality that graces the powerful more than any symbol of authority. Similarly to *Merchant*, *Measure for Measure* features a woman employing rhetoric against injustice. The motif of advocacy for others is prominent, but like Katherine in *Henry VIII*, Isabella also finds herself pleading her own case, as the lustful Angelo attempts to blackmail her into his bed. The issue of deception/equivocation in the pursuit of justice also reappears, as Duke Vincentio disguises himself as a friar and watches the scenes unfold; in addition, the presence of Catholic characters once more raises confessional issues. *Measure* thus stands as another potential field to be worked in terms of its treatment of the prophetic office.

The investigation, however, can be broadened beyond this dissertation’s focus on female characters. Another counterpart to the biblical prophet in Shakespeare is the jester or fool, the comic character whose job is to prick the conceits of the more serious men and women onstage. In *King Lear*, the Fool offers his cap to both Kent and Lear,

indicating that they are at least as foolish as he is (1.4.96–107), and he later tells the king, “Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav’st thy golden one away” (1.4.155–56), pointing out the monarch’s lack of wisdom in parceling out his kingdom. In *As You Like It*, after Le Beau regales Rosalind and Celia with grim details of Charles’s wrestling victories, Touchstone remarks, “It is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies” (1.2.130–33), calling into question the courtier’s opinion of what constitutes proper entertainment. And in *Twelfth Night*, when Malvolio sourly suggests that Feste will grow more foolish the longer he lives—“Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool”—Feste shoots back: “God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly” (1.5.71–75). The jester turns the steward’s judgment back on himself. Such mocking characters serve as comic versions of the more earnest weighers of deeds and words in Shakespeare’s plays. Juliet Dusinberre, in fact, notes a “peculiar sympathy” between Shakespearean heroines and fools in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *King Lear*: “Both stand on the periphery of the serious world of men . . . their function is to entertain, not to censure; but as critics they are not dangerous, because they have no power” (114). The exploration of the male fool as prophet may thus continue to touch on the gender issues involved in the study of the female prophet.

“The Bible needs to be included alongside—though actually ahead of—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, and Plutarch’s *Lives* as one of the works essential to understanding Shakespeare’s plays,” Hannibal Hamlin declares. This dissertation participates in the elaboration of that understanding—an effort that is likely to continue “[s]o long as men can breathe or eyes can see” (*Shakespeare’s Sonnets* 147).

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