

Is There a Woman in this Text? Female Domination in Shakespeare's Henry VI

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a feminist, or at least gender-oriented, reading of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1590-1591). These early history plays, depicting the Wars of the Roses, have always been interpreted as pseudo-historical pageant-like creations in which war clamour dominates the whole action. Consequently, they have been regarded as the poor debut of a young and inexperienced playwright. Using the insights offered by feminist literary criticism, I want to come to an artistic re-evaluation of these plays. As a «resisting reader», I draw attention to those aspects that have always been marginalized: pain and sorrow and the protagonists' personal response to these feelings.

Key words: Shakespeare-history plays, Feminist literary criticism.

The purpose of this paper is to present a feminist, or at least gender-oriented, reading of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1590-1591). As the three plays constituting the trilogy belong to the oldest and least-known section of the Shakespeare canon, it may seem presumptuous on my part to use feminist literary criticism—a fairly modern and certainly controversial approach—for a reappraisal of Shakespeare's earliest history-plays. If, in spite of this consideration, I have decided to venture upon this risky enterprise, it is because I believe I can adduce new insights, which lead towards a re-interpretation and a re-evaluation of these plays.

Let me begin by clearly stating my position towards what is so deceptively simply labelled feminist literary criticism. I propose to do this by means of six statements, inspired by the writings of a male critic, K.K. Ruthven, professor at the University of Adelaide, Australia (see Ruthven 1984):

1. The moment feminism enters literary studies as critical discourse, it is just one more way of talking about texts.
2. Feminist literary criticism is not a doctrine, it is a form of literary criticism.

3. Feminist literary criticism is strongly influenced by deconstructionist literary theory. It must therefore be an oppositional practice based on resistance to the dominant hegemony and its «ideal reader» is what Judith Fetterley (1978: XI-XVI) has called 'the resisting reader'. This means that the yielding and seduced reader has to be reshaped and turned into a reader who opposes the text.
4. This will necessarily lead to ripping the text apart in order to draw attention to those aspects that have always been marginalized. Criticism then turns into an accusatory activity, based on what Paul Ricoeur (1970: 32-36) calls a «hermeneutics of suspicion».
5. Feminist literary criticism is also influenced by marxist literary criticism, which claims that no reading is innocent. In a patriarchy, so-called innocent readings are in most cases androcentric and they are guiltily so, precisely because they claim to be innocent. Feminist readings, on the other hand, can be gynocentric, but they are never guiltily so, because they never hide the fact that they are gynocentric. Men need to be convinced that their criticism as a rule is not gender-free and universal.
6. «It is taken to be axiomatic that the absence of the feminine from discourses which are subsequently masculine by default has come about not fortuitously but as a result of acts of exclusion. The Other, that is to say, has not been accidentally "lost" but deliberately "erased", and the business of a feminist criticism is to reinscribe the feminine Other in a discourse still dominated by a masculine Self which, scandalously, has claimed to speak for women as well as men while in fact speaking solely for men» (Ruthven, 1984).

What I want to engage in in this paper is what Elaine Showalter (1979; 1981), one of the pioneers of feminist literary criticism, calls «feminist critique», i.e. feminist criticism of male authors, «the concern with woman-as-reader», as opposed to «gynocritics», i.e. the construction of a feminist framework for analysing texts produced by women themselves, «the concern with woman-as-writer».

Adrienne Munich (1985: 238-529), also a feminist critic, posits that women should avail themselves of every opportunity to re-interpret the traditional canon. She points out that the female view is not necessarily excluded because the author is anatomically male. She posits that the traditional canon is not always as masculinist as feminist criticism assumes and that critical discourse has a stronger tendency towards misogyny than the texts it investigates.

What I propose to do, following Adrienne Munich's advice, is to show that in the *text* of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*¹, no overt nor hidden male chauvinism

1. As it has been established beyond any reasonable doubt that Shakespeare is the sole author of the *Henry VI*-trilogy, we are not only dealing with a canonical text, but one that belongs to the Shakespeare canon, the most canonical of all canons.

is demonstrable, that it is only present in the writings of the commentators. In other words, the male chauvinism does not reside in the Bard—at least not in his writings—but in his interpreters.

That male chauvinism has always had a sweet deal with *Henry VI* should not surprise anyone. As these early history-plays depict the cruel Wars of the Roses in England—the bloody civil strife between Lancaster and York which ravaged the country from about 1459 to 1485—they have always been interpreted as pseudo-historical pageant-like creations in which war-clamour dominates the whole action, in my opinion, a distinctly male chauvinistic view. Consequently, Shakespeare's *Henry VI* has always been regarded as a not very successful attempt by an inexperienced young playwright learning his trade, to convert the chronical material dealing with the Wars of the Roses into history-plays. Using the insights offered by feminist literary criticism, I propose to correct both views.

Instead of looking at the plays from the aggressively jingoistic angle of chauvinist hero-worship—the viewpoint, it must be conceded, that was responsible for the enormous popularity the plays enjoyed in Elizabethan times—the «resisting reader» in me will concentrate her attention on an aspect that has always been considered as marginal by former, mainly but not exclusively male, literary criticism, and that as a result of this marginalization has been ignored, viz. the theme of pain and sorrow, and the attitude of the characters towards these feelings. Precisely by transferring the focus of attention from the war-clamour to the more intimate, feminine if not feminist, level of human suffering, new insights can be gained that help to show that these early history-plays are of a much better quality—dramatically, poetically and artistically—than we have always been led to believe. In this respect, I wish to stress that my reading is feminist or at least gender-oriented on two levels: 1. it focuses attention on what has always been marginalized; 2. human suffering is a more feminine theme than jingoistic war-clamour. Why more feminine? Because, after all, it is men who go to war and die on the battlefield.

As I want to discuss the discrepancy between Shakespeare's text and its interpretation by literary criticism, I am obliged to work with the primary text². For a discussion of two extracts from *1 Henry VI*, Talbot's lament for Salisbury's death and his own dying-speech—the few purple patches in the play—I refer the reader to a former publication (Rowan, 1985). In this paper I opt for a discussion of one extract from *2 Henry VI*: the parting-scene between Queen Margaret and Suffolk, and for two passages from *3 Henry VI*: Margaret's diatribe against York and his retort, and her lament when her only son is killed in her presence.

If for *1 Henry VI* the choice of passages in which personal feelings of grief are rendered was very limited, this is certainly not the case in its sequel, where

2. The extracts from *2* and *3 Henry VI* are given in the appendix. I use Cairncross, S. Andrew (ed.) 1957-1964. *Arden Shakespeare*. 1957-1964. London & Cambridge, Mass: Methuen.

such passages indeed abound. When, eventually, I have opted for the parting-scene between Queen Margaret and her lover Suffolk (2 *Henry VI*, III, ii, ll. 338-365 and 387-412), it is because of the undeniable similarities with other plays by Shakespeare and by Marlowe. In 2 *Henry VI* Queen Margaret, King Henry's wife, and the duke of Suffolk have become —unhistorically— lovers. Rivalry amongst the highest nobility reaches its peak. King Henry's uncle, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester and also Lord Protector of the realm, has from the beginning strongly opposed Henry's marriage to Margaret. Not only was she a dowerless French princess, but Suffolk had to agree even to rendering Anjou and Maine to her father in order to obtain his permission for the marriage. Margaret's and Suffolk's party secures the support of Humphrey's uncle and arch-enemy, cardinal Beaufort, bishop of Winchester and Henry's great-uncle. Together they succeed in bringing about Gloucester's downfall and murder. Following the advice of Gloucester's supporters, Henry denounces the conspirators and banishes Suffolk on pain of death, in spite of Margaret's passionate plea to reverse the sentence³. Henry strongly rebukes her for this. Then follows the parting-scene (see appendix).

It is worth mentioning that this scene is interrupted by a messenger on his way to the King to inform him about the mad ravings of the dying cardinal betraying his part in Gloucester's murder. I shall come back to this interruption.

The parting-scene between Margaret and Suffolk, though conventional in setting —two lovers who cannot envisage life without each other's company— and exhibiting a certain preciousness in style, reminiscent of Ovid's *Tristia*, is undoubtedly one of the purple patches in the play and the most important passage in connection with the rendering of personal feelings of grief. Echoes of other plays spring to mind: the parting of Richard and his queen in *Richard II*, of Romeo and Juliet in the eponymous play, of Edward and his male lover Gaveston in Marlowe's *Edward II*. Two short quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* will prove my point: «There is no world without Verona walls» (III, iii, l.17) and «'Tis torture and not mercy: heaven is here / Where Juliet lives» (ibid. ll. 29-30).

From the moment that Humphrey's death has been discovered and Suffolk's guilt in this murder exposed, Margaret has played his advocate. The King himself had chided her on that account. When Henry has left, after having banished Suffolk, the two lovers utter the fiercest execrations. In the passage selected for discussion, the tone has become more lyrical. Margaret wishes that her tears may never be washed off from her lover's hands and that her lips might make an everlasting impression on them. As separation from the beloved pains the lover most cruelly, she wants to impress as it were her presence on his hands. She promises to repeal him or to join him in banishment. She assures him that to be away from him is to be banished. She bids him go and

3. The scene brings to mind the Othello-Desdemona-Cassio triangle, with the important distinction that Desdemona and Cassio are not lovers.

prays him to stay. The similarity with *Romeo and Juliet* (III, v) is striking. In both cases, the lovers try to put off the moment of separation as long as possible. Indeed, Suffolk, like Romeo, is willing to stay, in spite of the death threat: «Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death» (III, v, l. 17). And Margaret, like Juliet, wants to hear from him constantly: «I must hear from thee every day in the hour, / For in a minute, there are many days» (III, v, ll. 44-45). The passage has all the characteristics of the love lament: life is not worth living if one is bereft of the beloved and to die together is better than to be parted. What lends the lament a tragic dimension is the fact that, as in the parallels to this scene mentioned above, the lovers will never meet again: one of them, or both, will die in the course of the play. Suffolk will be beheaded at sea by pirates, and Margaret appears on scene to mourn his death, pressing his head against her breast (IV, iv), an unmistakably Senecan trait in the young Shakespeare.

Conventional as the scene may be, it nevertheless bears a Shakespearean stamp: it is endowed with an extra tragic dimension. Unlike Romeo and Juliet, Margaret and Suffolk are not star-crossed lovers, but have themselves inadvertently worked their own wretchedness. The carefully planned crime—the murder of Gloucester—which had been devised as the finishing touch to crown their ambition, triggered off a series of events, resulting in Suffolk's banishment and the bitter separation of the lovers. That Shakespeare wanted his audience to be aware of this causal link is clearly indicated by the interruption of the parting-scene: a messenger passes by on his way to the King to tell him about Winchester's death-bed delirium. By introducing this incident, Shakespeare has brilliantly combined two things: he has reminded the audience of the fact that the two lovers have only themselves to blame for their misfortune, and he has succeeded in putting this idea across without the faintest trace of moralization. This is, so early in his career, a proof of his superior craftsmanship as a dramatist and of his characteristic unconcern with didactic and moralistic issues. The interruption is certainly not a clumsy shortcoming on the part of an inexperienced young playwright.

I wish to stress the fact that the Margaret-Suffolk love affair is unhistorical and is mentioned neither by Hall nor by Holinshed, the chroniclers Shakespeare used as his sources. He elaborated on a hint given by Hall that Margaret «entirely loved the Duke» and that he was «the Queenes dearlynge». So, the Margaret-Suffolk liaison is entirely Shakespeare's creation.

In *3 Henry VI* the personal tragedies of the protagonists reach a poignant intensity not found in the previous plays. The first extract I want to discuss is the most celebrated but also the most cruel passage of the whole trilogy. It occurs at a climactic moment in the Wars of the Roses, when Queen Margaret and her party, the Lancastrians, have captured Richard of York (see appendix).

When the play starts, the Yorkists have succeeded in persuading King Henry to name Richard, duke of York, as his successor, on condition that Henry be allowed to reign until his death. By agreeing to this, the King has disinherited his own son, prince Edward, to the utter dismay of the Lancastrians, led by

Queen Margaret, who has sworn to preserve her son's birthright. At the instigation of his sons, York decides to break his oath and claim the crown outright. Shortly afterwards, he is taken prisoner by the Lancastrians. Margaret prevents her ally Clifford from killing York instantly, not to spare him but to lengthen his torment.

Clifford is revenge personified. Because York has killed his father, and because young Rutland is the son of the murderer of his father, Clifford kills Rutland, and by doing this, commits one of the most heinous crimes, the slaughter of an innocent child. Rutland's tutor, who is present at the killing, warns him that this atrocious deed calls for man's and God's punishment. Rutland proclaims his innocence. He asks for pity for the sake of Clifford's son whom God may punish for this. Nothing can move the avenger, for his father's murder at York's hands has turned his heart to stone:

... and while tis mine
It shall be stony, York not our old men spares;
No more will I their babes.

(2 *Henry VI*, V, ii, ll. 50-52)

Rutland is a prefiguration of Arthur in Shakespeare's later history play *King John* - Arthur, whose only crime it was to be the son of John's brother, Geoffrey. Clifford is here the Herod-like tyrant who, like a future Macbeth, cools his wrath on an innocent child, as an indirect means of striking the father, who for the moment is out of his reach⁴.

What Rutland does not realize when he pleads with his murderer to seek revenge on his father is that Clifford is precisely doing this, for, as we see in York's dying-scene, the murder of his young son affects him more than his own death.

Though Clifford's obsession with the need to revenge his father's death turns him into a butcher, he is not a sadist. It is Margaret who withholds Clifford from killing York outright to lengthen his mental torment. She does so very skilfully and proves a master in the cruel art of making people suffer. She strikes where she is sure to hit. She offers York a molehill for the kingdom he wanted to attain. She uses deprecating imagery to picture his ambition: «that raught at mountains with outstretched arms». Then she attacks him in what is nearest and dearest to his heart, his four sons. The terms she uses to characterize them — «wanton Edward», «lusty George», «valiant crook-back prodigy» — and the familiar tone she adopts in referring to Richard as «Dicky» and to York as «dad» are grossly insulting, because she trespasses on his intimacy, his family privacy. Her next stroke is the deadliest of all: she offers him a handkerchief dipped in the blood of his «darling Rutland» to wipe his eyes when he is weeping for the death of his young son. The cruelty of this can only be surpassed by such Senecan horrors as feeding one's enemy with the

4. See *Macbeth* IV, ii and iii for the murder of Macduff's wife and children.

flesh of his own children as in Seneca's *Thyestes* or in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. But while such unnatural deeds only provoke horror and disgust, Margaret's behaviour is dramatically much more effective as it remains within the bounds of what is still psychologically acceptable, though morally reprehensible. Only deadly hate can account for it and Margaret testifies of this to York. His grief makes her happy and the outward manifestation of it — «stamp, rave and fret» — would make her sing and dance for joy. Margaret's mock crowning of York takes us back to her motive for revenge: York's breaking of his oath of allegiance to King Henry. A second time the queen stops Clifford from beheading York: she wants to hear his death-speech. Again, it is she who postpones the moment of York's death to prolong his suffering.

York's dying speech is dramatically very important as it is the companion piece to Margaret's diatribe. Though he cannot hurt her as cruelly as she hit him, he too aims his blows with care. Her French origin, her unwomanly behaviour, her mask-like face, her haughty but poor parentage, her lack of physical beauty, her want of virtue — he flings it all into her face; he brands her as the «she-wolf of France», the «tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide» and bids her be content, for he rages and weeps as she wished him to do. He finally curses her and hopes that like sorrow will befall her.

After this passionate speech, the stern warrior Northumberland expresses his compassion. By bringing in this humane touch, Shakespeare underlines Margaret's unnatural cruelty. Her final command to put York's head on the gate of York and her sarcastic remark «So York may overlook the town of York» constitute the finishing touch to a most bloody picture.

It is interesting to note that, according to the chronicles, Margaret was not present at the killing of York; consequently, the «tiger's heart» is Shakespeare's creation. It shows that he not only gave life to such noble women as Portia in *Julius Caesar*, Cordelia in *King Lear*, Desdemona in *Othello*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, but that, already early on in his career as a playwright, he created such a she-devil as Margaret, the worthy companion of Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* and the forerunner of Lady Macbeth and Lear's unnatural daughters Goneril and Regan.

Margaret's retribution comes towards the end of the play, when her son, Prince Edward, is stabbed to death before her eyes (see appendix). Her pathetic request to be killed too is not granted; her enemies refuse her this comfort. Her extreme grief results in *taedium vitae*, tiredness of life: to die were less painful than to be forced to go on living.

According to the revenge ethic, Prince Edward had to be victimized to atone for the slaying of young Rutland. Butchers are to be found in both camps and both sexes are guilty of ruthless killings.

Margaret's words (ll. 61-65) parallel Rutland's to Clifford:

Thou hast one son; for his sake pity me
Lest in revenge thereof, sith God is just,
He be as miserably slain as I.

(I, iii, ll. 40-42)

But Margaret's cruelty to York in I,iv disproves her own words. Her curse addressed to Edward, the first Yorkist king, when she is forcibly led away «So come to you and yours as to this prince», will be fulfilled in the next play. In *Richard III*, IV,v, we hear that Edward's young sons have been smothered in the Tower on their uncle Richard's orders.

Shakespeare has succeeded in making the chief characters' response to grief a means for individual portrayal. Margaret and York are much more affected by the death of a beloved son than by the loss of a kingdom. The latter leads to hateful revenge, the former to devastating grief. Both characters belong to a special category of sufferers: a parent lamenting a lost child.

The parent's lament over a lost child had become a stock situation in Elizabethan dramatic literature since the character of Hieronymo in Thomas Kyd's successful *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), a play that launched the vogue for revenge tragedies. Hieronymo carries with him a handkerchief bathed in his murdered son's blood to sharpen his revenge. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare remembered this circumstance when he devised the Margaret-York episode. So, he started from a conventional dramatic situation, but turned it into an impressive poetical, theatrical and psychological creation.

But Shakespeare also performed a tour de force. It is in the passage with York that Margaret appears in her full stature of she-wolf of France. She who in part 2, through her complicity in Gloucester's murder, had already shown her ruthless nature, here pushes her mental cruelty to the verge of psychological acceptability. That Shakespeare succeeds in rousing our compassion for this same Margaret when *she* is the bereaved parent—a prefiguration of Constance in the later history play *King John*—, is another proof of his superior art. She, who used to be the haughty and bloodthirsty queen, is now most impressive in her utter sorrow.

The whole passage shows that Shakespeare was, very early in his career, manifestly superior to his fellow-playwrights. Nowhere in their works is a single scene to be found that can compete with the dramatic intensity of this passage.

What has been said about the bereaved Margaret applies, to a lesser extent, also to York. When we witness his utter mental agony as grief-stricken father, we sympathize with him to a degree that makes us quite willing to forget that he is the ambition-ridden York whose only aim was to attain the crown by whatever means, fair or foul.

Margaret is not simply a wicked queen. She is portrayed both as a public and as a private person, and her character is diversified in both roles. As a queen, she is not only a plotting and scheming intriguer but also a brave, undaunted military leader. As a mother, the determination with which she fights to keep the kingdom for her son matches her despair when he is killed before her eyes. But although, to a certain extent, we can admire and pity her, the dominant feeling Margaret conveys to the reader or spectator is horror and dismay at so much relentless cruelty. With the character of Margaret—and of Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*—we perceive that Shakespeare, already early

in his career, was interested in the personage of the wicked, cruel queen. He was to come back to this motif in *King Lear* with Goneril and Regan, and achieve a proper climax with Lady Macbeth.

Hopefully, I have succeeded in proving that the *Henry VI* trilogy is devoid of overt or hidden male chauvinism and that it is not an immature attempt at playwriting. Margaret is without any doubt the real protagonist. A modern reader or spectator has difficulties realizing that, in Shakespeare's day, all female parts, including Margaret's, were played by men. Margaret is Shakespeare's first major, but misjudged and underestimated, female character. She is more than a wicked queen. When parting from Suffolk, she is a Juliet; as York's opponent, a Lady Macbeth or a Tamora; when her son is killed, a Constance; so many prefigurations of female characters in Shakespeare's other plays. Yet, Margaret's appeal to the modern reader or spectator is much less strong than Lady Macbeth's, who is also not merely a wicked queen. The reason is that Margaret suffers no pangs of conscience. Lady Macbeth's delirium as a consequence of her guilt, turns this evil woman into a creature that is not absolutely bad. This earns her a form of sympathy from the audience who recognize in her crime and sense of guilt an affinity with their own human frailty. It took Shakespeare some time to become aware of this psychological attitude and to exploit it to the full.

But it is worth mentioning that Shakespeare, contrary to the other writers of history plays — Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge and a host of anonymous dramatists — nowhere in the trilogy makes use of the fickle fortune theme to account for the suffering of his protagonists. This again proves his superiority over the other playwrights; to explain certain happenings and vicissitudes these playwrights choose the easy way — Fate — while Shakespeare concentrates on the human agent. His superior psychological insight in the characters of his plays, so early in his career, enables him to discard the fickle fortune theme as a worthless *Deus ex machina*.

To conclude: I hope that this feminist, or at least gender-oriented, or feminine reading of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* — in the sense I attributed to it in my introduction, i.e. by concentrating on the marginalized and neglected aspect of human suffering —, has proved valuable for a re-evaluation of these early history plays. Like all approaches, the feminist one has its excesses and aberrations of which I have attempted to steer clear. As stated above, feminist literary criticism should not be regarded as a new doctrine or creed, but merely as a specific form of literary criticism. It is my firm conviction that it can and should only serve one purpose: to widen our view on literature, never to narrow it down. On the other hand, I fully agree with Ann Thompson (1988: 84), when she writes: «It is important for feminist critics to continue to intervene in every way in the reading and interpretation of Shakespeare and to establish, even more securely than they have already done, that their approach is not just another choice amongst a plurality of modes of reading, not something that can be relegated to an all-woman ghetto, but a major new perspective that must eventually inform *all* readings.»

3 Henry VI

Act I sc. iv

- Q. Mar.*— Brave warriors, Clifford and Norumberland,
 Come make him stand upon this molehill here,
 That raught at mountains with outstretched arms,
 Yet parted but the shadow with his hand.
 What, was it you that would be England's king? 70
 Was't you that revell'd in our parliament
 And made a preachment of your high descent?
 Where are your mess of sons to back you now—
 The wanton Edward and the lusty George?
 And where's that valiant crook-back prodigy, 75
 Dicky your boy, that with his grumbling voice
 Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies?
 Or, with the rest, where is your darling Rutland?
 Look, York: I stain'd this napkin with the blood
 That valiant Clifford with his rapier's point 80
 Made issue from the bosom of the boy;
 And if thine eyes can water for his death,
 I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal.
 Alas, poor York! but that I hate thee deadly,
 I should lament thy miserable state. 85
 I prithee grieve, to make me merry, York.
 What, hath thy fiery heart so parch'd thine entrails
 That not a tear can fall for Rutland's death?
 Why art thou patient, man? thou should'st be mad;
 And I to make thee mad do mock thee thus. 90
 Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.
 Thou would'st be fee'd, I see, to make me sport;
 York cannot speak unless he wear a crown.
 A crown for York! and, lords, bow low to him:
 Hold you his hands whilst I do set it on. 95
[Putting a paper crown on his head.]
 Ay, marry, sir, now looks he like a king!
 Ay, this is he that took King Henry's chair,
 And this is he was his adopted heir.
 But how is it that great Plantagenet
 Is crown'd so soon and broke his solemn oath? 100
 As I bethink me, you should not be king
 Till our King Henry had shook hands with Death.
 And will you pale your head in Henry's glory,
 And rob his temples of the diadem,

- Now in his life, against your holy oath? 105
O, 'tis a fault too too unpardonable!
Off with the crown, and, with the crown, his head;
And, whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead.
- Clif.*— That is my office, for my father's sake.
- Q. Mar.*— Nay, stay; let's hear the orisons he makes. 110
- York.*— She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,
Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!
How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex
To triumph like an Amazonian trull
Upon their woes whom Fortune captivates! 115
But that thy face is vizard-like, unchanging,
Made impudent with use of evil deeds,
I would assay, proud queen, to make thee blush.
To tell thee whence thou cam'st, of whom deriv'd,
Were shame enough to shame thee, wert not shameless. 120
Thy father bears the type of King of Naples,
Of both the Sicils, and Jerusalem,
Yet not so wealthy as an English yeoman.
Hath that poor monarch taught thee to insult?
It needs not, nor it boots thee not, proud queen; 125
Unless the adage must be verified,
That beggars mounted run their horse to death.
'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;
But God he knows thy share thereof is small.
'Tis virtue that doth make them most admir'd; 130
The contrary doth make thee wonder'd at.
'Tis government that makes them seem divine;
The want thereof makes thee abominable.
Thou art as opposite to every good
As the Antipodes are unto us, 135
Or as the south to the Septentrion.
O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide!
How could'st thou drain the life-blood of the child,
To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,
And yet be seen to bear a woman's face? 140
Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;
Thou stern, indurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.
Bid'st thou me rage? Why, now thou hast thy wish.
Would'st have me weep? Why, now thou hast thy will.
For raging wind blows up incessant showers, 145
And when the rage allays, the rain begins.
These tears are my sweet Rutland's obsequies,
And every drop cries vengeance for his death
'Gainst thee, fell Clifford, and thee, false French-woman.

- North.*— Beshrew me, but his passion moves me so 150
 As hardly can I check my eyes from tears.
- York.*— That face of his the hungry cannibals
 Would not have touch'd, would not have stain'd with blood;
 But you are more inhuman, more inexorable—
 O, ten times more —than tigers of Hyrcania. 155
 See, ruthless queen, a hapless father's tears.
 This cloth thou dipp'd'st in blood of my sweet boy,
 And I with tears do wash the blood away.
 Keep thou the napkin, and go boast of this;
 And if thou tell the heavy story right, 160
 Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears;
 Yea, even my foes will shed fast-falling tears,
 And say «Alas! it was a piteous deed.»
 There, take the crown, and with the crown my curse;
 And in thy need such comfort come to thee 165
 As now I reap at thy too cruel hand!
 Hard-hearted Clifford, take me from the world:
 My soul to heaven, my blood upon your heads!
- North.*— Had he been slaughter-man to all my kin
 I should not for my life but weep with him, 170
 To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul.
- Q. Mar.*— What, weeping-ripe, my lord Northumberland?
 Think but upon the wrong he did us all,
 And that will quickly dry thy melting tears.
- Clif.*— Here's for my oath, here's for my father's death. 175
 [Stabbing him.]
- Q. Mar.*— And here's to right our gentle-hearted king.
 [Stabbing him.]
- York.*— Open thy gate of mercy, gracious God!
 My soul flies through these wounds to seek out Thee. [Dies.]
- Q. Mar.*— Off with his head, and set it on York gates;
 So York may overlook the town of York. 180

Flourish. Exeunt.

Act I sc. v

- Q. Mar.*— O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy!
 Canst thou not speak? O traitors! murderers! 50
 They that stabb'd Caesar shed no blood at all,
 Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame,
 If this foul deed were by to equal it.
 He was a man; this, in respect, a child;

- And men ne'er spend their fury on a child. 55
 What's worse than murderer, that I may name it?
 No, no, my heart will burst and if I speak;
 And I will speak, that so my heart may burst.
 Butchers and villains! bloody cannibals!
 How sweet a plant have you untimely cropp'd! 60
 You have no children, butchers; if you had,
 The thought of them would have stirr'd up remorse:
 But if you ever chance to have a child,
 Look in his youth to have him so cut off
 As, deathsmen, you have rid this sweet young prince! 65
K. Edw. Away with her; go bear her hence perforce.
Q. Mar. Nay, never bear me hence; dispatch me here:
 Here sheath thy sword; I'll pardon thee my death.
 What, wilt thou not? Then, Clarence, do it thou.
Geo.— By heaven, I will not do thee so much ease. 70
Q. Mar.— Good Clarence, do; sweet Clarence, do thou do it.
Geo.— Didst thou not hear me swear I would not do it?
Q. Mar.— Ay, but thou usest to forswear thyself.
 'Twas sin before, but now 'tis charity.
 What! wilt thou not? Where is that devil's butcher? 75
 Richard, hard-favour'd Richard, where art thou,
 Thou art not here: murder is thy alms-deed;
 Petitioners for blood thou ne'er put'st back.
K. Edw.— Away, I say; I charge ye bear her hence.
Q. Mar.— So come to you and yours as to this prince! 80

2 Henry VI

Act III sc. ii, ll. 338-365

- Queen.*— O! let me entreat thee cease. Give me thy hand,
 That I may dew it with my mournful tears;
 Nor let the rain of heaven wet this place, 340
 To wash away my woeful monuments.
 O! could this kiss be printed in thy hand,
 That thou might'st think upon these by the seal,
 Through whom a thousand sighs are breath'd for thee.
 So, get thee gone, that I may know my grief; 345
 'Tis but surmis'd whiles thou art standing by,
 As one that surfeits thinking on a want.
 I will repeal thee, or, be well assur'd,
 Adventure to be banished myself;
 And banished I am, if but from thee. 350

Go; speak not to me; even now be gone.
 O! go not yet. Even thus two friends condemn'd
 Embrace and kiss and take ten thousand leaves,
 Loather a hundred times to part than die.
 Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee. 355

Suf.— Thus is poor Suffolk ten times banished,
 Once by the King, and three times thrice by thee.
 'Tis not the land I care for, wert thou thence;
 A wilderness is populous enough,
 So Suffolk had thy heavenly company: 360
 For where thou art, there is the world itself,
 With every several pleasure in the world,
 And where thou art not, desolation.
 I can no more. Live thou to joy thy life;
 Myself to joy in nought but that thou liv'st. 365

Act III sc. ii, ll. 387-412

Suf.— If I depart from thee I cannot live;
 And in thy sight to die, what were it else
 But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap?
 Here could I breathe my soul into the air, 390
 As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe
 Dying with mother's dug between his lips;
 Where, from thy sight, I should be raging mad,
 And cry out for thee to close up mine eyes,
 To have thee with thy lips to stop my mouth: 395
 So should'st thou either turn my flying soul,
 Or I should breathe it so into thy body,
 And then it liv'd in sweet Elysium.
 To die by thee were but to die in jest;
 From thee to die were torture more than death. 400
 O! let me stay, befall what may befall.

Queen.— Though parting be a fretful corrosive,
 It is applied to a deathful wound.
 To France, sweet Suffolk! Let me hear from thee;
 For wheresoe'er thou art in this world's globe, 405
 I'll have an Iris that shall find thee out.
 Away!

Suf.— I go.

Queen.— And take my heart with thee.

[*She kisses him.*]

Suf.— A jewel, lock'd into the woeful'st cask
 That ever did contain a thing of worth.
 Even as a splitted bark so sunder we: 410

This way fall I to death.
Queen.— This way for me.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

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