

Fearful Simile: Stealing the Breech in Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays

KATHRYN SCHWARZ

The quene perswaded and encoraged by these meanes, toke upon her and her husbände, the high power and auctoritie ouer the people and subiectes. And although she ioyned her husbände with hir in name, for a countenance, yet she did all, she saied all, and she bare the whole swynge, as the strong oxo doth, when he is yoked in the plough with a pore silly asse.

A domestick fury makes ill harmony in any family.¹

CRITICALLY SPEAKING, SHAKESPEARE'S HENRY VI PLAYS ARE ALWAYS going to pieces. If the project of carving up these plays and giving only the best parts to Shakespeare has passed out of fashion, it has been replaced by various discussions of the plays as *self-fragmenting*—artifacts mirroring the disrupted state they describe. In this sense the logic of the plays might best be described in terms of repetition rather than linear progress: heroic flourishes, treacherous acts, the crowning, capturing, and killing of kings recur as patterns that all but eclipse the individuals concerned.² And the female characters of these plays, like the men and the battles and the vicissitudes of kingship, might be less distinct than they are variations on a theme:³ Margaret is led onstage as Joan is dragged off; Joan's witchcraft anticipates that of the Countess; sexual excess is suspected about the virgin, suggested about the Countess, known about the queen; the woman warrior is reduced to ashes at the end of *Part I* only to reappear as the "Captain Margaret" of *Part 3*. Yet the progress in the second Henriad toward a centralized image of power is not absent from these earlier plays, although it is differently gendered and certainly far different in its effects; images of female transgression come ever closer to home and, when they are inside, look rather different than they did when they were outside. As Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin observe in *Engendering a Nation*, "The French women who threaten to subvert the English historical project in *Part I* are unmarried; in *Part II*, the dangers they embody quite literally come home to

¹ Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke beeyng long in continual discension for the crowne of this noble realme* (London, 1548), fol. Clj; and Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman, drawne out to the full Body: Expressing, What Habilliments doe best attire her, What Ornaments doe best adorne her, What Complements doe best accomplish her* (London, 1631), 40.

² Joseph Candido offers a useful overview of such structural readings in his essay "Getting Loose in the *Henry VI* Plays," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984): 392–406, esp. 392n; see also Phyllis Rackin's description of the tetralogy in *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990), 62.

³ For readings of the tetralogy's women as similar to one another, see David Bevington, "The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 51–58, esp. 51; Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 89–90; and Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 329–44, esp. 332.

England in the form of ambitious wives, married to the men who govern the land."⁴ In the first, second, and third parts of *Henry VI*, the consolidation of power is marked by a movement of monstrous female agency from margin to center, a movement that begins with the claim that the enemy is an Amazon and ends in the recognition of something distinctly amazonian about the woman who is queen, mother, and wife.

Conventions of female excess distinguish between the domestic and the imported, between transgressions that radically oppose socialized femininity and those out of which it is formed. In *Still Harping on Daughters* Lisa Jardine draws such a distinction between viragoes and shrews: "The threat of the scold is local and domestic; that of the Amazon/virago is generalised 'rejection of her sex', a strangeness which travesties nature."⁵ The amazonian references of Shakespeare's first tetralogy reflect early modern fascination with the possibility that the distinction might break down, that the two categories of transgression might, through the image of the amazonian wife, become one and the same. The result, I suggest, is an excursion into the uncanny, what Freud defines as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."⁶ Images of Amazons in socially conventionalized roles locate the strange—and, indeed, the terrifying—within the familiar, resulting in the anxieties of conflation, displacement, and loss which Freud theorizes as the uncanny's effect; this is the effect of bringing Margaret home, of locating female power at the intersection of the alien and the domestic. That intersection, Freud argues, is an effect of rhetoric, a collapse of opposition into conflation at the level of language itself. In his reading, the term *heimlich* identifies not only the home, with its structures of familiarity, but the ways in which those structures produce the conditions of their own disruption: "Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*."⁷ With respect to Joan la Pucelle, rhetorically held at arm's length, the threat that the familiar might converge with the strange remains remote; but Queen Margaret, appropriating the *heimlich*, uncannily performs its conventions from within the terms of domesticity itself.

The shift inward is bracketed by the two kings' bodies: Henry V, who is mourned in his fallen presence and celebrated for his glorious past at the beginning of *1 Henry VI*; and Henry VI, whose corpse appears onstage in the far more muted procession that begins *Richard III*. These spectacular royal corpses anticipate and summarize the progressive threat to sovereign male authority, a threat played out in the actions of the tetralogy's women. Readers have always recognized that the women of these plays have an enervating effect on the men: they are "domineering females," "typically defined as opponents and subverters of the historical and historiographic enterprise,"

⁴ Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A feminist account of Shakespeare's English histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 65.

⁵ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Sussex, UK: Harvester Press, 1983), 105.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 17:220.

⁷ Freud, 226. Freud reaches this claim by tracing the contradictory definitions of *heimlich*; for his extended analysis, see 220–26.

“associated with bloody rites of violence and ‘misrule,’ ” “known to be from hell because of the confusion of gender,” representative of “illegitimate and therefore unnatural power,” possessing “all the coded and recognizable ambiguities of the castrating woman.”⁸ Such vigorous consensus threatens to obscure the fact that its explanation is curiously doubled, conflating feminizing and effeminating processes that do not, upon consideration, add up to quite the same thing. Women, these readings suggest, destabilize male privilege through their appropriation of masculinity; at the same time, women sap male potency through their association with the feminized French. We might get around this rhetorical paradox by asserting that, in the Renaissance imagination, female masculinity is a sign of heterosexual excess, which is itself a conventionally feminine trait: “In life as on the stage,” Rackin has argued, “masculine women were regarded as whores.”⁹ But I want to take seriously for a moment the sense in which explanations of Joan and, to a still greater extent, of Margaret call on notions of femininity and masculinity in the same breath. It is this simultaneity, I will argue, that constructs the specifically disruptive effect of female agency; by invoking a doubled set of conventions, the *Henry VI* plays complicate the hierarchical relationship not only of men to women but also of homosocial systems of power to heterosexual conventions and roles. In both their iconographic and their sexual functions, Joan and Margaret challenge rather than consolidate the naturalized referential assumptions of masculinity, and this tetralogy chronicles an increasingly acute failure to use women in order to negotiate the bonds among men.¹⁰

Judith Butler has described gender as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.”¹¹ For the female characters of the first tetralogy, gendered convention is not only highly and self-consciously stylized but doubled, presenting femininity and masculinity not as oppositional or mutually displacing terms but as simultaneous performative effects. It is a doubleness efficiently figured in the term *Amazon*, applied both to Joan and to Margaret; Amazon myth, with its paradoxical reference of masculine acts to female bodies, conflates the chivalric violence of encounters between men with the different violence of heterosexual conquest, with predictably disruptive effects. As objects of desire or items of exchange, Amazons do not consolidate male bonding; and if, as when

⁸ Bevington, 51–58; Rackin, “Anti-Historians,” 329; Marcus, 75; Nancy Gutierrez, “Gender and Value in *1 Henry VI*: The Role of Joan de Pucelle,” *Theatre Journal* 42 (1990): 183–93, esp. 190; Patricia-Ann Lee, “Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 183–217, esp. 214; and Christopher Pye, “The Theater, the Market, and the Subject of History,” *English Literary History* 61 (1994): 501–22, esp. 511.

⁹ Phyllis Rackin, “Historical Difference/Sexual Difference” in *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England*, Jean R. Brink, ed. (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1993), 37–64, esp. 43.

¹⁰ For an anthropological account of the processes through which women mediate and materialize connections among men, see Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Rayna R. Reiter, ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). For further theorization of women’s roles in the construction of male homosocial bonds, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), esp. 1–20; and David M. Halperin, “Why is Dionea a Woman?” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

Hercules "gives" the Amazon queen Hippolyta to Theseus, the attempt is made, the result is not comedy or confirmed masculine identity but parodic domestic roles and an inexorable progress toward tragic conclusions.¹² In the course of the *Henry VI* plays, the disruption defined through reference to Amazons changes; although readers have tended to equate Joan and Margaret as figures of the French, the feminine, or the theatrical, these plays stage a significant shift in the terms of gendered performance. That shift is articulated in the difference between *Amazon* and *amazonian*, a difference that mirrors as it theorizes the movement inward that structures the tetralogy.

In *1 Henry VI*, Joan is called an "Amazon" (1.2.104)¹³ as an articulation of doubled identity; constantly forced on the awareness of spectators both on-stage and off, her position as a manly woman generates a peculiarly essentializing rhetoric that traces her disruptive effect to the fact that she "is" a collection of contradictory things. Margaret, by contrast, is termed "amazonian" and subjunctively described as "play[ing] the Amazon" (1.4.114; 4.1.106); doubled identity here gives way to doubled performance, to a rhetoric of identity as relentlessly contingent. Joan functions only problematically within an economy governed by men because her value, as a gendered commodity and as an iconographic figure, does not remain constant; described through extremes of masculinity and femininity, catalogued as a virgin and as a whore, she figures these structures of categorization themselves as constructing not a continuum but an unsocializable collection of opposites. Margaret, by contrast, manipulates the terms of the socialized continuum itself. The moments at which she is identified as a virgin or a whore—as Henry's bride, as Suffolk's mistress—serve not to identify her through unassimilable contradictions but precisely to assimilate her into the middle ground of domestic convention. And it is Margaret's revision of the roles of mother, wife, and queen that brings masculinity and femininity into their most acutely performative conflation.

The rhetorical strategy that distinguishes Joan from Margaret participates in a larger distinction among monitory texts. Joan is described in the language of exemplary catalogues, which impose gendered conventions through the reification of polarities; extravagances of good and bad, restrained and excessive, familiar and alien, are categorized against one another in order to suggest a socialized space between, and it is Joan's embodiment of extremes at the expense of this socialized space that makes her a threat. Margaret, by contrast, recalls the language of conduct manuals, in which conventions are rhetorically performed rather than iconographically framed: as she plays a series of self-consciously domestic roles, Margaret at once echoes and suggests the transgressive potential of the terms through which wives, mothers, and even queens are defined. Both systems rely heavily on the relationship of the body to sexual acts; but if the first reifies that relationship as a self-evidently referential structure, the second implies, often against its own declared ideological ends, that the body may be less accessibly material than the processes through which convention is performed. The shift between ways of theorizing, and thus controlling, identity recalls another theory of the rela-

¹² Theseus's marriage to Hippolyta produces tragedy in a literal sense, resulting in the illicit desire of Phaedra for Hippolytus, staged by Seneca in *Hippolytus*.

¹³ Quotations from the *Henry VI* plays follow *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 4th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

tionship between the embodied and the performed. In "The Signification of the Phallus" Lacan describes "the intervention of a 'to seem' that replaces the 'to have,' in order to protect it on the one side, and to mask its lack on the other."¹⁴ In negotiating the various implications of being, having, and seeming, Lacan suggests a transition from the rhetoric of identity as difference to the rhetoric of seeming as masking or appropriating the place of difference. By invoking this structure in order to articulate the roles played by Joan and by Margaret, I do not wish to argue that the play's variously amazonian women occupy the place of the phallus—although, considering the fantastic materiality and infinite metonymic retreat of early modern Amazons, the association possesses a certain imaginative power. I suggest instead that the tetralogy's representational strategy mirrors Lacan's in representing the conventional signs of discrete sexual identity, first as embodied paradox and, more powerfully, as constructed through a performance that is also a veil.

The three parts of *Henry VI* complicate the naturalized connection between masculinity and men through the changing relationships not only between "masculine" and "female" but also between "amazonian" and "Amazon," relationships that range from equation and causality to paradox. Such complications of identity and referentiality are in a sense the inevitable result of theatricality itself, which, Barbara Freedman argues, is constituted through a strategy of misreading analogous to the events of the Lacanian mirror stage: "Both tragic and comic narratives stage misrecognition in the quest for recognition. Whereas Shakespeare's tragedies address the need and failure to find a place in another's eyes, the comedies are more concerned with dislocating perspective; they suggest that only a limited perspectival space defined by error constitutes identity."¹⁵ In the *Henry VI* plays the theatrical effect itself is doubled, for, through its peculiar representation of women's place, Shakespeare's first tetralogy conflates the generic effects that Freedman describes. If Margaret's appearance as Henry's prospective bride at the end of *1 Henry VI* shifts that play's register from tragic to comic conclusions, and if the results of that marriage turn comedy back toward tragedy, the plays mix up the conventions of recognition and misrecognition as well. "A woman's general. What should we fear?" Richard asks in *3 Henry VI* (1.2.68), the false causality between statement and question marking the intersection of understanding and its failure. The attempt to relegate women to their place within masculinist hierarchies through the simple fact of recognizing them *as women* ignores another of the play's simple facts: that women may be masculine as well. "*Henry VI, Part III*, then, is spectacularly marked by the dissolution of every kind of male bond," write Howard and Rackin;¹⁶ I want to argue here that the tetralogy's spectacles of female agency are less that dissolution's symptom than its cause.

TO BE

Henry VI, Part I defines Joan with relentless thoroughness as an outsider. Opposed to an English male aristocratic ideal, she is a woman, a peasant, a

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus" in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 281–91, esp. 289.

¹⁵ Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991), 3.

¹⁶ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 93.

virgin, a whore, a saint, a witch, an Amazon, and French. Her threatened invasion, while it challenges English idealizations of heroic significance and physical space, could consolidate those ideals; if the English, at the end of *1 Henry VI*, return to a smaller England, they bring with them a clarified sense of what Englishness means. Such a process appears to reiterate a convention of subjectivity, a negotiation of the relationship between familiar and strange that produces identity through difference; the multiplication of Joan's alien identities not only reflects that which is not English but comes, through that opposition, to define Englishness itself. Recognition of Joan, and violent disassociation from her, construct the male heroic subject, or, in Rackin's historiographic terms, male heroic abstractions are opposed to the insistence of female bodies: "[T]he whole issue of physical presence vs. historical record, dramatized in *1 Henry VI* as a conflict between English men and French women, is central, not only to this particular play, but to the history play genre itself."¹⁷ Joan's "femaleness," however theatrically contingent, is an ideologically absolute condition against which the play constructs its privileged terms. *Henry VI, Part 1* stages the processes of deliberately oppositional self-construction, what Butler, in her theory of "sex" as a function of sociality and power, describes as "a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge." Butler goes on to argue, "This is a repudiation which creates the valence of 'abjection' and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre."¹⁸ But if Joan is abject and her threatening otherness useful, I would argue that her utility is complicated by the relationship it sets up between who she is and what she does. The play most effectively equates identity to performance in a figure who is neither English nor male nor conventionally heroic; the essentializing rhetoric that surrounds Joan both mirrors and parodies the play's various representations of essential connections between maleness and masculinity, between kingship or heroism and authority. If the play's resolution, defined in terms of nationalism, gender, or individual subjectivity, depends on a return to naturalized causalities, that return is proleptically disrupted in the characterization of Joan herself. The threat posed by Joan is not simply her evident otherness—which might, after all, only tell the hero what he wants to know—but is also the sense in which that otherness produces a more efficient claim to embodied referentiality than that posed by English male heroic authority itself.

The representation of Joan is thus ideologically useful in that it clarifies categorical and hierarchical structures by defining her against them; at the same time, because her role draws together gendered conventions identifying both the powerful and the abject, it might call into question the discretion and the privileged position of defining structures themselves. *Henry VI, Part 1* insists on the verb of equation that links Joan to terms of description: Joan "is" a range of things, contradictory but always extreme, and in the spaces between them domesticity, as a nationalist and ultimately a familial ideology, is constituted. In her first encounter with the Dauphin, Joan offers a challenge and a warning: "My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st, / And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex" (1.2.89–90). That trial prompts the Dauphin's own statement of definition, the implications of which will follow Joan throughout the play. "Stay, stay thy hands! Thou art an Amazon, / And fightest with the

¹⁷ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 334. For an earlier version of this opposition of material to spiritual, see Bevington's claim that "Talbot triumphantly demonstrates the ascendancy of the truest sort of masculinity—not man's body but his mind and soul—over the trammels of the flesh" ("The Domineering Female," 55).

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

sword of Deborah" (ll. 104–5). The Dauphin here conflates what Joan is, what she has, and what she does, suggesting an economy within which signification does not float but remains firmly anchored to the conditions of its production. Joan's body may not display the monastic utility invoked by "Amazon," but it has been nonetheless modified for her purpose, transformed by her encounter with divine grace. She says, "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" (ll. 84–86). And her sword, if not actually the sword of Deborah, has been chosen by supernatural intervention, placed in her hands by a force that is not her own. The curious literalism of what should be metaphor gives Joan a singularity of function even as she is doubly read; throughout *1 Henry VI* her identity will be defined by equation, by the rhetoric of "I am" and "you are." "Assigned am I to be the English scourge" (l. 129), she says. For the admirers and the objects of this scourging, its outcome may be differently valued but its processes look much the same.

It is this gap—between the recognized efficiency of Joan's acts and the dispute over their value—that complicates negotiations of relationships among men. True to theatrical form, *1 Henry VI* privileges an almost exclusively homosocial universe; Howard and Rackin characterize the history play as "a specifically masculine genre" and argue that "its masculinity was identified with its function as an ideological apparatus for the construction of an emergent national consciousness."¹⁹ Women in such a context are defined most logically as the matter from which homosocial bonds are built, and this function is as important in the consolidation of hostility as it is in the making of friendship. Figured as individual chivalric conflicts or as wars between nations, battles between men (like alliances) display women as prize, as motive, and as cause. More than anything else, such displays require that the task of defining women in terms of sexual value must rest with men; that value may shift—Helen of Troy may look different to the Trojans than she does to the Greeks—but women themselves are always excluded from its determination. Fighting for or through or because of women gives logic to a male homosocial universe only as long as the place of women themselves remains constant, and in *1 Henry VI* such constancy is an impossible fiction. Rather than being fought for, Joan la Pucelle is fought against, entering into the play's privileged masculine terms through the condition of masculinity itself. The resulting clash of conventions creates a kind of exemplary chaos, in which Joan is defined in terms that variously respond to evidence of her own agency rather than demonstrating the determinative power of men. When the French argue among themselves or with the English over her value, the terms of disagreement suggest that the relationship between her sexual and martial roles upsets the conditions through which the place of women is defined: is she given to the Dauphin as a gift or brought to him as an ally? Is she like the French in fighting for their cause, or are the French and the English, alike in being men, united against her? Are her grounds of battle those of nationalism, chivalric heroism, or some odd, early version of what we might now term women's rights? Responses to the play have suggested that Joan's presence onstage unites the English against the French, the men against the woman, the audience against the French, the audience and the English and arguably

¹⁹ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 47.

the French against Joan;²⁰ the multiple gestures toward some consolidation of alliances suggest that Joan la Pucelle has anything but a consolidating effect.

The shifting values attached to her produce a constellation of names that trace the failure of consensus: in his introduction to *Saint Joan* George Bernard Shaw writes, "She is the most notable Warrior Saint in the Christian calendar, and the queerest fish among the eccentric worthies of the Middle Ages."²¹ The oddity of her iconography inflects Shakespeare's representation as well as those that precede and follow from it. In *1 Henry VI* she is "a holy maid" (1.2.51), "an Amazon" (l. 104), "Pucelle or pussel" (1.4.107), "a witch" (1.5.6), a "high-minded strumpet" (l. 12), "Divinest creature, Astræa's daughter" (1.6.4), "France's saint" (l. 29)—and this is only in Act 1. In the multiplicity of epithets and encomia, Shakespeare echoes his sources; for Hall, in particular, Joan requires an agility of description which, even as it condemns her as "monster" and "orgayne of the deuill," gives rhetorical space to her own claims. Speaking of "[t]his wytych or manly woman, (called the maide of GOD)," Hall ascribes her virginity (if it exists) simultaneously to her "foule face" and to her own agency, making her at once a sign of the depravity that is Frenchness and a deceiver of noble rulers, "wise men," and "lerned clarkes." He writes, "O Lorde, what dispraise is this to the nobilitie of Fraunce: What blotte is this to the Frenche nacion?"²² The historical fact of Joan disrupts any rhetoric of analogy between Englishmen and Frenchmen; France may, in Hall's reading as in Shakespeare's, be outside whatever is English, but Joan la Pucelle represents a clear threat not only to Englishness but also to anything redeemably male in that which is French. Joan disrupts the rhetoric that connects men to men; and if the French seem willing to privilege her utility over her threat to their own masculinity, it is nonetheless true that even their praise marks her difference. The sense in which that difference both separates her from men and divides men from one another becomes explicit when she persuades Burgundy to abandon the English cause for that of the French. "Done like a Frenchman—[aside] turn and turn again!" (3.3.85), she says, and suddenly Burgundy's relationship to national identity, whether French or English, is not connection and self-definition but

treason.

"Amazon," perhaps the most imaginatively powerful of Joan's identities, might encompass all of her extremes: a mythological structure that accommodates Penthesilea, chaste hero of Troy, beside the sexually ravenous cannibals of the New World can surely find space for a saint who is also a high-minded strumpet. Indeed, martial chastity and sexual excess are often invoked simultaneously to define the Amazon, providing a logic for Joan's doubleness. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson reads such doubleness as the play's insistence on the shiftiness of iconographic value: "In my reading of *1 Henry VI*, the disjunctive presentation of Joan that shows her first as numinous, then as practically and subversively powerful, and finally as feminized and demonized is determined by Shakespeare's progressive exploitation of the varied

²⁰ See for example Gutierrez's argument concerning Joan's effect on the audience: "The French soldiers and the contemporary English audience, normally 'natural' enemies, become allies when threatened by a woman" (190).

²¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan* (1924; rpt. New York: Random House, 1956), 3.

²² Hall, fols. Cvii^r and Cxiii^r. On the relationship between Shakespeare's portrayal of Joan and the chronicles, see Richard F. Hardin, "Chronicles and Mythmaking in Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 25–35.

ideological potential inherent in the topically relevant figure of the virago. . . . At no stage is the allocation of value clearcut."²³ Virgin and whore, saint and witch, ideal and debased, masculine and feminine, Joan makes inevitable the punning paradox of Talbot's "Pucelle or pussel." Readings of her iconography point to anxieties concerning women which range from demonic possession to Catholicism to martial violence to sexual excess to the presence of a queen on the throne; behind each of these readings is the recognition that Joan's conflation of sexual and martial agency, like that represented in stories about Amazons, interrupts the privileged system of homosocial masculinity, rather than being defined by its terms. In the constellation of terms attached to female martiality, the strategies of definition locating women in a particular social place are still in play; but their efficacy comes into question when women can also take the place of men.

Definitions of Joan do not converge even in the name of patriotism; if for Hall and for Holinshed her monstrosity is demonstrably un-English, for other contemporary writers the nationalist distinction is less simple. Agrippa, in *Female Pre-eminence*, writes, "The English Nation were most ungratefull, should they ever forget their Obligations to this Sex," but oddly follows this with a brief history of Joan, describing what she has done for the French: "taking Arms like an Amazon, [she] arrested their fortune, put a stop to the torrent of their victories, and by degrees restor'd the *withering de Luces* to their former lustre."²⁴ Christopher Newstead's *Apology for Women* follows Agrippa both in praising Joan and in invoking her in a context that fails to privilege nationalist agendas. He offers an exemplary catalogue of warlike women that places her in the company of Artemesia, Semiramis, Boadicea, and the Amazons of classical mythology.²⁵ And Thomas Heywood, again like Agrippa, brings her analogically close to Englishness, offering a chapter in his *Gynaikeion* titled "Of English Viragoes. And of *Ioan de Pucil*."²⁶ Each of these accounts accepts the militant virginity that *I Henry VI* places radically in question; each recognizes militance itself as a mode of nationalism not incongruously embodied in women. Still, though, such accounts suggest a certain ambivalence of their own: not everyone would agree with Newstead that Amazons make good exempla; not everyone would wish to return to the female heroic past celebrated by Agrippa, who himself calls Joan a "strange ridling Prodigy";²⁷ and Heywood mediates his praise of Joan through her claims and those of her chroniclers, giving her history few of his own words and little of his authority. Joan "would report to diuerse" concerning her divine visitation; "The French Chronicles affirme" her acts of heroism; "she was proclaimed a Virago" in a declaration from the pope.²⁸ Such gestures of ambivalence and

²³ Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, "Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988): 40–65, esp. 64–65. See also Clayton G. MacKenzie, "Myth and Anti-Myth in the First Tetralogy," *Orbis Litterarum* 42 (1987): 1–26, esp. 2–3.

²⁴ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Female Pre-eminence: or the Dignity and Excellency of that Sex, above the Male* (1509), trans. H[enry] C[ase] (London, 1670), 66–67.

²⁵ See Christopher Newstead, *An Apology for Women: or, Womens Defence* (London, 1620), 17–18.

²⁶ See Thomas Heywood, *GYNAIKEION: or, Nine Bookes of Various History Concerninge Women* (London, 1624).

²⁷ Agrippa, 66.

²⁸ Heywood, 236. Christine de Pizan, whose *Le Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc* was the first poem praising Joan of Arc and the only one written during Joan's lifetime, celebrates her martial conquests without apparent ambivalence; for Christine de Pizan, of course, neither Joan's nationality nor

mediation show that, while Joan's power to signify goes unchallenged, the question of *what* she signifies remains unclear. Both the accounts that praise her and those that deplore her do so in ways that allow the spectacle of female masculinity to rhetorically displace the importance of national boundaries. In *I Henry VI*, whatever fighting against Joan does or does not prove about being masculine, it at least demonstrates the fact of being English; but her exemplary function in early modern texts suggests that even this process of consolidation may be obscured by the shifting terms in which she is read.

Rather than continuing to focus on the ways in which accounts of Joan differ, I would like to turn to the sense in which they seem always to produce the same effect. Whether we imagine the grammatical condition of *and* or *or*—whether Joan exists simultaneously through contradictory identities or moves through a range of registers or “is” one thing but is erroneously read as another—the extremes of characterization preclude what is in between. No matter what we accept or reject about her claims of virginity and pregnancy, Joan cannot function conventionally as chaste daughter, generative mother, or nurturing wife; she is dislocated throughout this play from the domestic universe in which the roles played by women materialize the connections among men.²⁹ Though her virginity is, according to her, absolute, it has no iconographic power to save her; Vives writes, “We haue redde of wome[n], that haue ben taken & let go agayne of the moste vnruely soudyours [soldiers], only for the reuerence of the name of virginitie, bicause they sayde that they were virgins,”³⁰ but such logic does not work for the soldiers who capture Joan. She has no recognized value on which men can agree; the representational force of her virginity is opposed to, without being mediated by, her own claims to sexuality and the English definition of her as a whore. The categories are less confused than insisted upon as separate but equal. The rhetoric that condemns her, recalling Talbot's pun on her name, reiterates the paradox rather than demanding a single “truth”: “Now heaven forfend! The holy maid with child?” (5.4.65); “And yet, forsooth, she is a virgin pure! / Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee” (ll. 83–84). Joan's death, like her martial success and her iconographic effect, is a result of being at once neither and both. The space between virgin and whore, the complicated negotiation that produces the terms of the domestic, is precluded both by what others say about Joan and by what Joan says about herself; her ability to remain so relentlessly outside, however broadly the inside is defined, emerges from this sense in which she is never imaginably at home.

This becomes explicit when Joan tries to find some space within the *heimlich*; her final claim to be pregnant is an attempt to become recognizable as a commodity, a woman defined in terms of specific social value. Having witnessed the failure of her insistence on virginity and nobility, Joan performs

her sex gave cause for concern. For one reading of this poem in the context of Christine's life and other writings, see Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), 204–7. For a discussion of the poem in the context of other early literary representations of Joan of Arc, see Deborah Fraioli, “The Literary Image of Joan of Arc: Prior Influences,” *Speculum* 56 (1981): 811–30.

²⁹ On the confusion of categories, see Jeanne Addison Roberts, “Birth Traumas in Shakespeare,” *Renaissance Papers* (1990): 55–66, esp. 62.

³⁰ Johannes Ludovicus Vives, *A very Frutefull and pleasant booke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*, trans. Richard Hyrde (London, 1541), G2^r.

what readers have always found to be a startling reversal, not only claiming pregnancy but revealing a disconcerting flexibility about the question of pater-
ternity. This, I would suggest, is a belated and doomed attempt to enter into
the system of male bonds in conventionally feminine terms, to literally em-
body the condition that connects men to one another; and if her captors do
not value the Dauphin's child, Joan is willing to change her story through the
invention of a series of fathers until her body performs an acceptable role. But
as the play makes clear, the attempt to rewrite this particular body as doing
socially conventional work cannot succeed. What is perhaps most interesting
here is that the men of the play do not care whether Joan's claims are true or
false, whether she is indeed the mother of a child and, if so, whose child; in
an ideological sense the question is not worth asking, for the literal fact of
pregnancy could not, for Joan, be equated with the social value of maternity.
Joan is defined by and as the frustration of the bonds that her final narrative
attempts to form, and hers is not an identity that can be revised. Like the
stories of amazonian maternity narrated by early modern authors, in which
Amazons kill, cripple, or enslave their male children or return them to anony-
mous fathers, Joan's version of maternity cannot be translated into patriarchal
terms. Her last desperate claim, and the death that follows, have been read as
feminization, putting her body back into a recognizable social place; yet I
think that this ending demonstrates more explicitly than any other element of
Joan's story that for her such a place does not exist.³¹

Joan's threat to the male homosocial systems of the play rests on this dis-
location; her identity as a woman is not socializable, and her martial perfor-
mance threatens to make conventions of masculinity inscrutable as well. Bat-
tling each other, men affirm what masculinity is; battling Joan, whose double-
ness is relentlessly legible, they have difficulty knowing what it means. When
Bedford asks, "A maid? And be so martial?" he points to the fact that Joan's
martial acts do not constitute a transvestite disguise plot; there is no moment
of redeeming revelation and refeminization, for the female body is always
visibly the referent of masculine acts.³² "Where is my strength, my valor, and
my force?" asks Talbot; "Our English troops retire; I cannot stay them. / A
woman clad in armor chaseth them" (1.5.1-3). If Talbot conventionally
marks the center of English male chivalric valor, he finds in Joan's female
masculinity the potential unwriting of the referential structure that defines
him; his statement "I know not where I am nor what I do" (1.20) suggests that
Joan's presence unravels the naturalized connection between masculinity and
men. It is not Joan who kills him; indeed, they are not even opposites in the
representational logic of *1 Henry VI* but are rather two objects that cannot
occupy the same space at the same time. Rackin writes that "Talbot, the
English champion, and Joan, his French antagonist, speak alternative lan-
guages."³³ When the English scourge speaks her deflating words over the
English champion, she proves that he has come too far into her field of
discourse.

³¹ For a reading of Joan's feminization as a trope of woman-taming, see Jackson, 60.

³² Shaw calls Joan "the pioneer of rational dressing for women" (3). On the visual doubleness of female body and masculine armor, see Marcus, 100; Gutierrez, 185; and Jackson, 54.

³³ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 331. Catherine Belsey reads Joan in the context of such "extra-human" figures as Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth; see *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and difference in Renaissance drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 185.

Readers have theorized Joan's difference in many ways, from the mythological to the sexual to the economic to the theological, but her opposition to the play's martial, male, English center seems clear.³⁴ Indeed, in recalling her abortive battle with young Talbot, Joan herself sees it as a convention, a set of oppositions always already in quotation marks.

Once I encountered him, and thus I said:
 "Thou maiden youth, be vanquished by a maid."
 But with a proud, majestic high scorn
 He answered thus: "Young Talbot was not born
 To be the pillage of a giglot wench."
 (4.7.37-41)

The maid is opposed to the "giglot wench," the French to the English, the Amazon to the would-be conqueror, the woman to the man. And yet such lines might be obscured by the image of Joan, and the distinction between outside and in threatens at times to disappear entirely; England itself is not safe from the effects of Joan's iconography. Bedford articulates this vulnerability in one of the play's earliest speeches, while the body of Henry V still lies onstage: "Posterity, await for wretched years, / When at their mothers' moistened eyes babes shall suck, / Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears, / And none but women left to wail the dead" (1.1.48-51). England in this image becomes a place of women, a space defined by the loss of men; the land of Amazons is always, such rhetoric implies, closer than you think.

Or perhaps the *heimlich* is simply farther away. The moments at which the terms of the center are threatened suggest less an invasion than a dispersal; Joan la Pucelle, with all the strangeness she signifies, never comes close, but the various elements that converge to produce familiarity can always move apart. Leah Marcus takes this possibility to its logical extreme when she finds in Joan an image of Queen Elizabeth I:

? In *Henry VI, Part 1*, Joan La Pucelle functions in many ways as a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth I. She, like Elizabeth, is a woman who "acts like a man." She collects about her a markedly similar set of idealized symbolic identities. Yet she belongs to the enemy camp. The figure of Joan brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties about the Virgin Queen, her identity, and her capacity to provide continuing stability for the nation.³⁵

If Joan looks like Elizabeth, if Elizabeth looks like Joan, this is not a domestication of the strange but an estrangement of the domestic; the metonymies that lead from queen to biblical heroine to classical goddess should never be pursued to the borders occupied by devils and witches and whores. Understood in the terms that define Joan la Pucelle, Queen Elizabeth I would figure a revision of royal iconography in which the sovereign, rather than embodying the bond that draws men together, makes monstrous the hierarchical connection of monarch to male subject and thus disrupts the lateral connections that define unified male subjectivity itself. Such disruption, *1 Henry VI*

³⁴ See, for example, Hardin, 35; Pye, 511; and John D. Cox, "Devils and Power in Marlowe and Shakespeare," *The Yearbook of English Studies: Early Shakespeare Special Number 23* (1993): 46-64, esp. 61.

³⁵ Marcus, 53.

suggests, is the danger posed by female martiality; in the set of associations traced by Marcus, that danger is unimaginably escalated in the figure of a martial female queen.

Henry VI, Part 1 ultimately resists the identification of Queen Elizabeth with Joan, or at least distorts the mirror image to the point of unrecognizability: there remains a powerful impulse to keep the figure of Joan la Pucelle outside the terms of the familiar. It is an impulse that has driven readings not only of dramatic structure but of canon: if Joan is definitively not English and in some sense not French, she is also sometimes not Shakespeare's. Tillyard, in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, describes this argument as he dismisses it:

Apart from the queer reluctance to allow Shakespeare to have written ill or like other dramatists when he was immature, the chief reason why people have been hostile to Shakespeare's authorship [of *1 Henry VI*] is the way he treats Joan of Arc. That the gentle Shakespeare could have been so ungentlemanly as to make his Joan other than a saint was intolerable. This is precisely like arguing that Shakespeare could not have written *King John* because he does not mention Magna Carta.³⁶

Not, perhaps, precisely. The gesture that defines Joan la Pucelle as "not Shakespeare's" is not merely a defense of chivalry or good historicism but a symptomatic reproduction of the play's own logic, logic that identifies the familiar through the power of the contrary example: if idealized Englishness is constructed against France's Joan, then the idealized Shakespeare, in controversies over the authorship of this play, has been constructed against a Joan who belongs to someone else entirely. By this logic, to allow Joan into the canon is to endanger the most important bond of all—that which links Shakespeare to his readers and thus to the "Shakespearean." In metatextual negotiations, as with those that take place onstage, the terms in which Joan is defined suggest the fragility of privileged systems of connection.

TO HAVE

Possession may, as Lacan asserts, always be an illusion; it is also, however, a way of articulating the relationship between agency and desire that structures the representation of women in *Henry VI, Part 2*. As York speaks his last line to Joan—"Curse, miscreant, when thou com'st to the stake" (*IHV1*, 5.3.44)—the statement of finality, punctuated by the stage direction "*Exeunt*," is immediately undermined by another stage direction: "*Enter Suffolk, with Margaret in his hand*." For Joan, being a Frenchwoman in the hands of the English is an experience of violence that demonizes sex; for Margaret, literally in the hand of Suffolk and metonymically in the hands of the king, the position is more conventionally eroticized, her body defined as a commodity well worth the effort expended to acquire it. "She's beautiful, and therefore

³⁶ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), 162. Shaw suggests that even if the play is Shakespeare's, the intention is not, a possibility that displaces guilt while maintaining authority: "The impression left by it is that the playwright, having begun by an attempt to make Joan a beautiful and romantic figure, was told by his scandalized company that English patriotism would never stand a sympathetic representation of a French conqueror of English troops, and that unless he at once introduced all the old charges against Joan of being a sorceress and harlot, and assumed her to be guilty of all of them, his play could not be produced. As likely as not, this is what actually happened" (24).