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# Virgins, Mystics, and Reformers: The Creation of Female Constructed Identites in the Medieval and Early Modern Period

Sarah Elizabeth Fairbanks-Loose

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**VIRGINS, MYSTICS, AND REFORMERS:  
THE CREATION OF FEMALE CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES IN THE MEDIEVAL  
AND EARLY MODERN PERIOD IN ENGLAND**

By

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THESIS

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**ABSTRACT**

During the medieval and early modern periods in England, women were not expected to enter into the realm of politics or to comment on religion, and yet many women did find ways of entering into discourse on these topics. For these women the creation of public identities that would protect them from attacks against their characters were necessary to their success in areas of politics and religious commentary. Aristocratic women who wished to enter into politics tended to construct their public identities around their religious piety, using their faith as justification for their actions and also to insulate them from the dangers of meddling in current events. Common women used visions to comment on religion, sometimes with success and sometimes with mixed results; however, when these women strayed into predicting political outcomes they found themselves in trouble. Similarly, women who were unable to create an identity to protect themselves and were problematic for society might be labeled as witches. Other women found themselves at the center of competing constructed identities, when the persona that they created of themselves was contradicted by

identities created by their enemies. This thesis will argue that the female identities constructed by women and men were created around certain concepts like virginity or witchcraft, but also had to be flexible to work in the realms of politics and religious commentary.

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## **Introduction**

Why was Catherine of Aragon loved and Anne Boleyn hated? When I asked this question, many possible answers presented themselves. Anne's story and her behavior made it difficult for people to sympathize with her, but there was something else about her that bothered me. Even today, people believe that she had 'witch's moles' and a sixth finger, a description of her that was not circulated until after her death. Why was it that these stories about her had become so widely circulated that people who had no interest in history could recount them? And why has Catherine of Aragon's reputation as an extremely pious Catholic and a devoted wife and mother remained unchallenged, even by the majority of historians?

To some degree, the characters of these women help to explain why they are viewed in the ways that they have been, but that is not a satisfactory explanation. When looking at other women from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a pattern begins to emerge of those whose reputations appear unassailable and those whose infamy has taken over the historical memory of their lives. Why then do some women appear protected from public scorn, while others become demonized? Similarly, why did some women achieve political and public popularity only to later be condemned by the very people that they used to carry favor with? The answer cannot simply be that some women were more likable than others and therefore were protected from public anger, since some women whose reputations have remained mostly positive took actions that were not considered appropriate for their gender at the time, and in other respects were not considered to be likable people. Likewise, women who were generally considered likable could find themselves in difficult situations which led to them being demonized.

The answer lies within how these women were able to present themselves to the public, or how they constructed their public identities, and in what ways other people created identities on their behalf or in attempts to discredit them. Women like Catherine of Aragon, who was a very public figure, constructed an image of herself as a devout woman, and it is this construction that has helped to keep her reputation intact. Similarly, other women used religion, or some other form of supernatural connection, to make themselves appealing to a public audience. Sometimes these constructions helped these women to protect themselves from assaults against their characters, while other times the destruction of their constructions led to new, derogatory identities being created.

Within my master's thesis, I intend to look at how women and men constructed female public identities, where these constructions succeeded and where they failed. For the first chapter, I will look at women who used religion to create a buffer for their more problematic activities. These women, often public figures, created an identity around religious devotion, using their piety to help insulate themselves from attacks from outside forces. Within this chapter I will explore how women succeeded in using a special relationship with God to protect themselves, and to gain access to areas of public discourse where they were usually discouraged from entering, such as politics. I will also examine where women attempted to construct identities around piety but failed to gain public support for their agendas.

Within this chapter, I do not intend to examine mystics, but to look at women, specifically aristocratic women who while living a secular life attempted to use faith as the foundation for their public persona. These women, although they were using a special relationship with God to create their public identities, did not experience visions or if they

did, they were very specific and rare. Instead they tended to use their connection with the almighty to legitimize their involvement in politics. Highborn women, like Margaret Beaufort, Catherine of Aragon and Mary Tudor all used this tactic to legitimize their power; however, a few common women also employed it to gain access to politics. However, in this chapter I will not discuss the common women who used this particular tactic, instead devoting time to them in chapter four.

In the second chapter, I intend to look at women who claimed to have some kind of supernatural ability—like experiencing visions—which led to them becoming public figures with some sway over the people around them. For this chapter I will specifically be looking at women who claimed to have some insight into the divine plan of God, or who believed that they had experienced visions that were meant to direct their lives. These women were more divided in their successes in the constructions of their public identities. Some were ignored or not taken seriously during their lives, but after their deaths found popularity, while others gained a great deal of popularity during their lives, but found themselves in trouble for predicting things that angered their monarch. The division in how these women were treated can be viewed as a linear progression, with people being more likely to believe in the visions of a woman like Julian of Norwich in the late 1300's and early 1400's, but becoming more skeptical of the visions presented by Elizabeth Barton in the 1500's.

With these two chapters, I hope to illustrate the safer track that women took to approaching their public identity, and the risks that came with more drastic constructions. Women who used a special relationship with God often found themselves in less trouble than women who claimed to experience visions. A special relationship with God without supernatural influence often was easier to accept over a prolonged period of time, whereas

long-term exposure with the expectation of continued insight into future happenings, could bring the visionaries into trouble. Similarly, relying on religious devotion, and claiming to know God's intentions presented two different outcomes. Religious devotion, if the woman's actions were not received favorably, could be seen as misguided zeal, whereas incorrect predictions of the future were seen as fraudulent and even treasonous in the case of Elizabeth Barton.

In the third chapter, I intend to look at the constructed identities that people (both men and women) placed onto others. Within this chapter, I will examine some accusations of witchcraft—which is a very powerful negative construction. In this examination, I intend to analyze the way in which political necessity could cause people to label a woman as a witch to discredit her. In some cases where women were so accused, they might not be executed, because the damage to their reputations was enough to nullify any power that they might have had. In this way, witchcraft accusations might have stemmed from a belief that there was something supernatural about these women, but the accusations also illustrate how women could be pushed out of positions of power by negative constructions of identity. This aspect of witchcraft accusations is most obvious in the “Titulus Regius” written by Richard III to disinherit his nephews. In the document, Richard relies on accusations of witchcraft against their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, to make the case that they were not legitimate and therefore could not inherit the throne from their father.

In the fourth chapter, I will examine the case of Anne Askew. Similar to the aristocratic women who used religion as the foundation of their public identities, Askew also relied on her faith, and never claimed any supernatural insight. When she was arrested by Henry VIII for preaching Protestant beliefs that were contrary to the ones held by the

Anglican Church, the men who interrogated her tried to construct an identity around her of a woman who was misguided and therefore dangerous to the public. However, Askew managed to smuggle her own account of her interrogation out of the Tower and it eventually found its way into the hands of Bishop John Bale. He edited the work and published it as *The Examinations*, trying to construct Askew as a Protestant Martyr. Within the work, how Bale attempts to construct the identity of Askew is often contradicted by what she wrote about her reactions to her interrogations. Therefore, three competing identities surround Askew—each with a specific agenda and intention for use within the public sphere. This chapter, therefore, will help to show how constructions can become confused, or even collapse in on themselves, when there are multiple identities of one person put forward. It will also help to illustrate how careful someone could be in the construction of their identity—since Askew knew that she was probably going to die and wanted to present the world with her own construction of her identity and was aware of how the people around her were going to try to manipulate her into a certain type of “misguided” woman.

Finally, in my last chapter I will examine the case of Elizabeth Tudor. Like other aristocratic women, she used a special relationship with God to legitimize her position, but also had to combat multiple identities created for her. This is most obvious in the apocalyptic rhetoric between England and Spain. Philip II also constructed an identity around his relationship with God, and saw himself as an apocalyptic figure with Elizabeth as his adversary. While he was creating this construction of her, England was also creating multiple constructions of Elizabeth. Some regarded her as an almost angelic figure who had come to save England from the Catholics, while others demonized her. In the end, however, English identity became intertwined with the constructed persona that Elizabeth created of herself. In

essence, Elizabeth managed to make herself the bedrock of English pride and nationhood, fusing herself with a metaphorical England, to create a sense of national hope and purpose in the world.

By ending with Elizabeth Tudor, I intend to finish with the most successful constructed identity created by a woman. While the creation of female public identity was not a new concept and she used the tactics that had been employed by her ancestors, she also employed other, newer ways of creating a public persona. She also had a sort of mystical connection with God that went somewhat deeper than a simple religious devotion, but stopped short of visions. In a way, Elizabeth embodies all of the different aspects of constructed female identity—she used religious devotion, had a mystical connection with God, and had to navigate through multiple negative and positive constructions of her persona by other people. In ending with her, I intend to link together the many different important threads of constructed identities into one person.

For all of the women that I will be examining, the identities that they construct of themselves were vital to their success within the public sphere. While some would struggle with maintaining a public identity that was acceptable to the public, and others would find themselves stuck with identities that were constructed by other people, they all understood that maintaining their public images was important. For some of them, maintaining their constructed identities was the only way to guarantee their continued survival in a realm of discourse where women were not supposed to be active agents.

## Chapter One

### **The Power of Prayer: Aristocratic Women in Relation with Power**

For many aristocratic women, political power and the decisions that would affect the course of their nation were close by, their husbands, fathers and sons being active in those fields; however, many women were unable to make direct contributions to the events around them. If they did attempt to move into politics the results did not always work in their favor, with some women being branded as witches.<sup>1</sup> For women who wanted to assert influence over political events, it was necessary to adopt a public image that would protect them from negative attacks against their characters. This constructed public identity was meant to help these women enter realms of action and thought that were usually denied to women, and usually was built around the concept of religious piety.

Many of these aristocratic women were married, which meant that they were not expected to show the same kind of religious devotion as a woman who had decided to dedicate her life to God. What could be described as excessive piety therefore became a way for these women to protect themselves from attacks against their characters. Women like Margaret Beaufort (1443- 1509) and Catherine of Aragon (1485- 1536) used their religious piety to construct a public identity that was both recognized and respected by everyone around them. These constructed identities allowed them to interact with politics in a way that would not have been possible for other women. Margaret Beaufort used her religious identity to help push her son, Henry VII (r. 1485-1509), into a position of power on the throne and

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three.

Catherine of Aragon used her identity in an attempt to protect herself from Henry VIII (r. 1509-47)<sup>2</sup> when he wished to divorce her.

Both of these women were very successful in their constructed identities. However, other women were not able to balance their religious devotion with their political ideals. Mary Tudor (b. 1516), who for a brief period ruled England in her own right (1553-58), did not find a balance between her devotions and her politics. In a reversal from her great-grandmother, Margaret, and her mother, Catherine, Mary's religion overshadowed her political actions, instead of supporting them, and while she did not experience any horrible backlash against her person, she has come to be known historically as "Bloody Mary."

The constructed identity of religious devotion as the base for a woman's public persona could help a woman to enable the overthrow of a king, protect her from political attacks that would harm both herself and her offspring, or could also damn a woman when she tried to place her own religious fervor onto other people. In all three cases, the constructed identities did at some point help women to a place of security, and in using the concept of religious devotion they were tapping into a pattern of behavior that was common for women throughout Europe; however, in the cases of these three women the different aspects of this shared construction are visible. Margaret embodies the political advantages of the identity, Catherine illustrates the protection that it could offer and Mary shows the possible dangers that could come from appearing to be "too religious," and female.

Within the late medieval and the early modern period, women were not considered the religious equals of men. They were excluded from the vast majority of religious

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<sup>2</sup> Henry VIII was Margaret Beaufort's grandson and therefore the son of Henry VII; though he was the second son and originally was not meant to ascend the throne.



discussion and tended to be thought of as second-class participants in the religious forum.<sup>3</sup>

Often women were portrayed as being more malleable when it came to religion, or the weak point within a man's faith. This construction of women turned them into beings that could be easily persuaded by malignant forces, with bribes or promises for trivial things to forsake their faith and endanger Christian principles as well as the men around them, even if that was not the case in reality.<sup>4</sup> The malleable nature of women and their status as subordinates within their religion meant that when a woman did show herself to be very religious and pious, not to mention steadfast in her beliefs, she was regarded with respect. Therefore, in an attempt to circumvent negative constructions of female identity, it became a common tactic for women to associate themselves with certain religious figures to help their public identities, the most common choice being the Virgin Mary.<sup>5</sup>

While many of these women were not virgins and did have to perform their duties within their marriage beds, they still constructed themselves as virgin-like figures, because the Virgin Mary was such a powerful figure within Christian theology. Isabel of Castile, Catherine of Aragon, and Elizabeth Tudor all used the image of the virgin as a part of their public identities, and Elizabeth was the only one to never marry.<sup>6</sup> The image of the virgin therefore allowed women a certain freedom of movement, as long as they were able to maintain the image, and the concept of a pious wife was highly favorable, especially within England.

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<sup>3</sup> Elisheva Baumgarten, "'A Separate People'?: Some Directions for Comparative Research on Medieval Women," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 212–28.

<sup>4</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara F. Weissberger, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1-27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

In the medieval period, it was common for a father to marry off his oldest daughters, but then to dedicate the younger ones to a convent, partially because he did not have the money to pay for their dowries. However, England was odd in that many men preferred to have their daughters married off rather than have them enter a convent. This is at least partially due to men in England being able to pay off dowry costs over a period of time from profits they received from their land holdings.<sup>7</sup> The financial ability these men had to choose between having their daughters enter convents or be married, shows a general cultural preference for marriage over religious confinement. The family connections that could be created through marriage were more important to these men than the concept of religious devotion from their daughters.<sup>8</sup>

However, women still chose to present themselves as extremely pious within marriage, displaying behaviors that would have been normal if they had entered a convent, which means that these women gained something from presenting themselves as devout. So while the family alliances that were created through marriage were prized over piety, having a wife who was dutiful and devout must have also been appealing to many men. Most women, when given the options by their fathers, chose to use money left to them in wills for dowries rather than for entrance into convents. This decision shows that while women might be extremely pious they shared their father's preference for marriage over convent life.<sup>9</sup> Choosing marriage would indicate that while these women lived a very austere, religious lifestyle, they still gained something from the secular life that they could not get from a convent.

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara J. Harris, "A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic Women and Nunneries, 1450-1540," *Journal of British Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 1993): 89-113.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 100-102.

Within a convent, women were expected to live a regimented lifestyle that did not allow them access to politics, or give them power in the public sphere.<sup>10</sup> In living a religious life, but also staying in the secular sphere, women were able to influence the world around them in ways that were difficult for nuns. Therefore, it was usually necessary for women to marry, creating strong family ties and helping the interests of their kin. While these women might have shared their father's inclination for creating strong family alliances, or might have simply preferred life outside of convents, they made active choices to remain in the marital sphere, even when other aspects of their lives hint at their suitability for more structured religious devotions.

#### Margaret Beaufort

In 1455, at the age of twelve, Lady Margaret Beaufort was married and even though her husband was soon dead, she still gave birth to a son, Henry Tudor, later Henry VII, king of England. In her life she would have three husbands, though in her last marriage she decided to remain celibate, and only had one child.<sup>11</sup> During her life, she would see England at war with itself over who should be king and she would work hard to put her son on the throne, creating an alliance with Elizabeth Woodville that created the Tudor dynasty.<sup>12</sup> However, while Margaret was a very active participant in politics, she also was remembered as exceptionally devout. John Fisher, bishop of Rochester (1504-35), who would later be executed by Henry VIII for opposing the split with the Catholic Church, remembered her as:

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<sup>10</sup>This was not always the case, as will be examined in Chapter Two, but on the whole the chances for nuns to assert influence on their surroundings outside of a convent were not great.

<sup>11</sup> Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

To god & to the chirche full obedyent & tractable serchyng his honoure & pleasure full besyly. A wares of herself she had alwaye to eschewe euery thyng that myght dysshonest ony noble woman, or dystayne her honour in ony condycyon.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Fisher constructed Margaret Beaufort as the perfect Christian woman. He described her as obedient in her relationship with the church, and aware of how she must present herself as a woman. As her confessor and close associate, Bishop Fisher would have known Margaret well.<sup>14</sup> His construction of her person, therefore, is probably based not only on his interactions with her, but also on her public reputation. In his writing he places together her religious devotion with her identity as a woman, thereby linking the two when it comes to her character, and reinforcing the public image of Margaret.

Margaret was astute and powerful on the political landscape and a highly devout woman. She managed to run her own estates, something most women of the time were not allowed to do, and helped to orchestrate her son's takeover of the English throne, while at the same time presenting a highly pious exterior.<sup>15</sup> Throughout her life she made many donations to the church and aided in the development of certain religious organizations. She helped to found two colleges at Cambridge, where they were required to pray for her, and endowed chantries at Westminster Abbey.<sup>16</sup> Her outpouring of religious charity and her reputation of being a devout woman aided in her political ambitions, and at one point, helped to keep her from being executed.

During the reign of Richard III (1483-85), Margaret got into trouble for helping her son to launch a failed invasion of England. Under normal circumstances, she would have

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<sup>13</sup> John E. B. Mayor, ed., *The English Works of John Fisher: Bishop of Rochester*, Early English Text Society, Extra Scenes 26 (London: N. Trubner, 1876), 291.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Clark Bartlett, "Translation, Self-Representation, and Statecraft: Lady Margaret Beaufort and Caxton's Blanchardyn and Eglantine (1489)," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22, no. 1 (2005): 55, doi:10.1353/ems.2006.0001.

<sup>15</sup> Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 26-28.

<sup>16</sup> Harris, "A New Look at the Reformation," 107.

been arrested, tried for treason, and probably executed. However, Richard chose not to have any of those things happen, and in his Act of Attainder against her, he is rather lenient considering the charge:

Yet neverthelesse, oure said Sovereigne Lorde, of his grace especiall, remembryng the good and feithfull service that Thomas Lord Stanley hath doon, and entendeth to doo to oure said Sovereigne Lorde, and for the good love and trust that the Kyng hath in hym, and for his sake, remitteth and woll forbere the greate punysshment of atteynder of the said Countesse, that she or any other so doeyng hath deserved; and in consideration of the premisses, oure said Sovereigne Lorde woll, that it be enacted, ordeigned and established, by the assent of the Lordes Spirituellx and Temporelx, and the Comens of this present Parlement, and by auctorite of the same, that the said Countesse be dishabled in the lawe from hensforth to have, enherite or enjoye any Manours, Londs or Tenements, or other Hereditaments or Possessions whatsoever, and also unhabled to bere or have any name or estate or dignite from hensforth.<sup>17</sup>

Richard chose to have Margaret stripped of her lands and titles, and forced her to surrender all of her estates to him. He gives the service of her husband as the reason why Margaret's punishment is so light, but it is likely that her own public identity came into his decision as well. Margaret Beaufort was a well-known figure; her charitable work towards religion and her piety made her a problematic figure for prosecution.

Richard III had no trouble with constructing his sister in law, Elizabeth Woodville, as a witch, thereby destroying her reputation and gaining the throne. He did not have a problem with taking drastic measures against women who posed threats to his reign, so he must have had a reason why he did not have Margaret arrested. The reason he gives in the attainder is the service of her husband, but that does not quite make sense. Lord Stanley may have been a valuable supporter to Richard, but the king also must have recognized that if the first rebellion had been successful then Lord Stanley most likely would have defected to his

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<sup>17</sup> "A Parliament holden at Weftm', on Fryday the xxiii day of January, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Yeare," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England 1275-1504*, ed. P. Brand, A. Curry, R. E. Horrox, G. Martin, W. M. Ormrod, J. R. S. Philips, and Chris Given-Wilson, 6 (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 273.

stepson's side; therefore he must have had other reasons for not prosecuting Margaret. The most logical explanation deals with the character of Margaret Beaufort. As a public figure, with a reputation for piety and religious devotion, Richard risked tarnishing his own image and turning people against him if he arrested and tried Margaret; therefore, it was easier to strip her of her money and in doing so, hopefully keep her from attempting to help her son financially in the future.

Margaret was very aware of the dangers of her political maneuvering and she understood that if she got into trouble she would need something to protect her. The constructed persona that Fisher described in his remembrance of her and the identity that she created around her religious works and behavior were essential to Margaret Beaufort's political aspirations. While her devotion to religion was well known, and had been in place for many years, she also understood the dangers of a woman's reputation being tarnished, for she had witnessed the downfall of Queen Elizabeth Woodville to accusations of witchcraft. She knew that if her public persona was not presented in such a way as to safeguard her from attack, then she too could be destroyed along with her ambitions for her son, which almost did happen; however, because she was able to maintain her identity as a religious woman when she did get into trouble, the punishment was not as severe as it could have been. Therefore, her religious devotions enabled her to enter a realm of political activity that other women were denied, but at the same time, it also infused her actions with a sense of divine purpose.

In the reign of Henry VII, there was a belief that Henry VI had prophesied that the young child of Margaret Beaufort would become king.<sup>18</sup> This belief was so commonly held

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<sup>18</sup> Dale Hoak, *Tudor Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74.

that Shakespeare incorporated it into his play on Henry VI,<sup>19</sup> and it became a part of popular memory surrounding the Tudors. This concept of being divinely chosen by God, and favored by his Grace, had one source: Margaret Beaufort. Her construction of a religious identity allowed her to do things that were generally not approved of for women, and had enabled her to push forward her son's political career. In adopting a tone of divine inspiration, Henry VII emulated his mother's tactic of using religion to smooth over some of the problematic aspects of his ascension to power while also recognizing the need to create a popular image of himself that would be publicly accepted and tarnish the reputations of his enemies.<sup>20</sup> In this way, he copied the tactics that women had been using for centuries, to protect himself from political attacks, but he also tapped into the public persona that his mother had already created to validate his political goals.

Margaret Beaufort's ambitions for her son never would have been realized if she had not been wily and astute in political movements.<sup>21</sup> While living her life in an almost nun-like state, she still maintained her freedom from the cloister. Her devotions, though sincere, also enabled her to transgress some gendered social boundaries. In this way, her religious piety provided her with the ability to act within her male-dominated culture without too much scrutiny. While her devotions might have fit well into the regimen of a nun's life, she used them to further her political ambitions.

While Lady Margaret Beaufort's political ambitions were somewhat unique to her, many women in her time period walked the line between religious devotion and social life.

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<sup>19</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part III*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare, the Complete Works Second Edition*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), IV.6. 70-74.

<sup>20</sup> This is most obvious in the Shakespeare plays on the War of the Roses, the first Henriad. Within these plays Richard III is not favorably portrayed which is a direct influence from the Tudor's propaganda movements.

<sup>21</sup> Bartlett, "Translation, Self-Representation, and Statecraft," 55.

Dedicated to God, but also to their freedom, they created a somewhat flexible religious identity. Theoretically, the ultimate religious devotion for these women would have been to enter a convent, but they chose instead to use their social positions to further religious goals, for example by establishing colleges and almshouses.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, women like Margaret Beaufort also used their religion to further their political ambitions within society; however, not all women were able to use their constructed identities with as much success, or were able to utilize their identities to the fullest potential.

#### The Pomegranate and the Widow

The daughter of Isabel of Castile, a woman who ruled her kingdom in her own right, Catherine of Aragon was raised in an environment where the religious constructed identity of her mother was necessary to the continuation of the stability of the world around her. If Isabel's construction as a religious, virgin-like figure had been destroyed, then she might have been dethroned, or forced to take a more removed approach to government, relying on her husband.<sup>23</sup> For the young Catherine, watching her mother's constructed identity would have been an informative lesson on how to present herself as queen, and as an adult, it was an example that she would follow, though she would not, as her mother had done, create an equal partnership with her husband in their marriage or the running of England.

At the age of sixteen Catherine was sent to England to marry the crown prince, Arthur. In 1501 the marriage took place but by 1502, Catherine was a widow trapped in England without her mother's or father's protection. For several years she lived in relative

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<sup>22</sup> Harris, "A New Look at the Reformation," 107.

<sup>23</sup> Theresa Earenfight, "Two Bodies, One Spirit, Isabel and Fernando's Construction of Monarchical Partnership," in *Queen Isabel I of Castile: Power, Patronage, Persona*, ed. Barbara F. Weissberger (Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis Books, 2008), 8.



poverty, unable to go back to Spain, because Henry VII did not want to return her dowry.<sup>24</sup>

During this time, Catherine found herself either in negotiations to marry the younger prince Henry, or ignored by the royal court. However, soon after Henry VII's death, it became clear that Henry VIII wanted his brother's former wife as his bride and they were married in 1509 with a special dispensation granted by the pope. In later years this dispensation would become the catalyst for Henry's break with the Catholic Church.<sup>25</sup>

For Catherine, her twenty-four years of marriage to Henry were relatively stable. Her position within Henry's court was secure, and she was optimistic that she would bear the king an heir. This optimism can be seen in the symbol that Catherine chose to use to represent her presence in court life—the pomegranate. The pomegranate was an object with rich symbolism that went back to the time of the Greeks:

In the Greek myth of Persephone, it represents fertility and regeneration; the Old Testament associates its many seeds with God's commandments, and it became a symbol of the Resurrection in Christian iconography. English Crusaders would have seen pomegranate trees during their travels to the Holy Land: native to Iran, the pomegranate has been cultivated throughout the Mediterranean region since ancient times.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, Catherine's use of the pomegranate was deliberate. Its long history of symbolism and its association with her homeland made it especially appealing as her court symbol. In choosing the pomegranate Catherine maintained her Spanish identity while also aligning herself with the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy G. Elston, "Widow Princess or Neglected Queen?: Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII and English Public Opinion, 1533-1536," in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Carole Levin and R. O. Bucholz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 16-30.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hope Johnston, "Catherine of Aragon's Pomegranate, Revisited," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 13, no. 2 (2005): 153.

The early conception of the pomegranate as symbolism for fertility and regeneration endured and there are paintings by Lorenzo di Credi (ca. 1459-1537) and Sandro Botticelli (ca. 1445-1510) which depict Mary holding a pomegranate and the Christ child.<sup>27</sup> The pomegranate was therefore both a symbol of fertility and of chastity, which within a religious context was not paradoxical, since the Virgin was both fertile and chaste. Adopting the image of a chaste, dutiful wife was powerful, especially for queens who needed to ensure the legitimacy of their offspring in the eyes of the world, given that rumors of impropriety could instigate the overthrow of a dynasty.<sup>28</sup>

In adopting the pomegranate as her symbol Catherine achieved two things. She maintained her Spanish identity, which could be used for diplomatic reasons, and she also cast herself in the role of the chaste wife. The question of whether her marriage to Arthur had been consummated had created problems in the negotiations for her marriage with Henry. If the marriage had been consummated then Henry and Catherine would have been considered, in the eyes of the Church, brother and sister.

Catherine claimed that she and Arthur had never consummated the marriage, even though they had on some occasions shared the same bed. Despite Catherine's claim, the Pope issued two dispensations to cover the possibility that Arthur had actually consummated the marriage, making Henry and Catherine's marriage acceptable within the Church, no matter the circumstances of her first marriage.<sup>29</sup> Despite the Pope's dispensation, Catherine always maintained that the marriage had never been consummated, the safer route to securing her second marriage's legitimacy in the eyes of the world, or so she thought.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 154; see Figures One and Two.

<sup>28</sup> Weissberger, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power*, 1-27.

<sup>29</sup> Elston, "Widow Princess or Neglected Queen?" 17.



*Figure One:* Lorenzo di Credi, *Madonna and Child with Pomegranate*, 1475-80. Oil on panel. National Gallery of Art, Washington.





*Figure Two: Sandro Botticelli, Madonna of the Pomegranate, 1487. Tempera on panel. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.*

In aligning herself with the Virgin Mary through symbolism, Catherine assuaged fears about her first marriage and was able to present to the public an image of a pious, fertile woman who was devoted to her husband. The pomegranate's association with fertility was also important because one of Catherine's main duties as queen was to provide an heir to the

throne. Catherine, however, had trouble fulfilling this duty, only producing one child who survived infancy, Princess Mary, who posed a problem for the English in that they had never had a queen who ruled in her own right, and not as queen regent.<sup>30</sup> While early on the pomegranate as symbol of fertility would have been a sign of the hopeful queen's intention to give birth to a son, as time passed and the possibility of a male heir waned the symbol became problematic. Catherine maintained the symbol, but it had also become a sign of her inability to fulfill her primary role as queen.

From the beginning of her marriage with Henry, it was clear that Catherine's position in the court was subservient to his. This dynamic can be seen in how Catherine's symbol was incorporated with Henry's Tudor Rose. Sir Thomas More presented the royal couple with an image of the rose and the pomegranate entwined together under a single crown; however, this image was not the norm.<sup>31</sup> In most visual representations of the king and queen, the king, or his symbol the rose, took center stage, while the queen, or her symbol, were smaller and in supporting positions.<sup>32</sup>

The image of Catherine as being smaller, and in supporting positions to Henry, shows that their marriage was not constructed as a partnership. Catherine was subordinate to her husband, and not his equal. This kind of marriage was logical given Henry VIII's temperament, and Catherine, for her part, publicly constructed her image as that of the dutiful and devoted wife in support of her husband. While it was not uncommon for queens within England to assert power and to have their own councils, Catherine's focus on constructing her image as that of a good, loyal wife appears to have been the dominant character trait on

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<sup>30</sup> Earenfight, "Two Bodies, One Spirit," 10.

<sup>31</sup> Johnston, "Catherine of Aragon's Pomegranate, Revisited," 154.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-60.

which she based the rest of her public image.<sup>33</sup> Her choice to construct herself in this way indicates that she found it useful. Henry VIII did not like strong women, as shown by his interactions with Anne Boleyn after they were married. Catherine, though she was fully capable of managing a country on her own, decided to present herself as the subservient partner, to make herself palatable not only to the English people but also to her husband. This construction was so successful that most narratives of her life follow very specific formulas that reinforce the subservient wife image.

In 1533 Henry VIII annulled his marriage with Catherine of Aragon. He had started the process of divorce some time previously, about the time when it became clear that Catherine would never be able to give the king a son. Catherine had failed to produce a male heir and the English were not comfortable with the idea that a woman would become the next ruler of England, which was the excuse that Henry gave for wanting to get rid of his wife.<sup>34</sup> Annulments were not unheard of in such circumstances, but Catherine did something unexpected, which changed the religious landscape of England forever.

Instead of obeying Henry's orders and going along with the annulment, Catherine defied him and enlisted the help of her nephew, the Emperor Charles V, to prevent the Pope from granting a divorce on the grounds that her marriage to Arthur had not been consummated.<sup>35</sup> In this action, Catherine appears to be breaking the image which she had presented to the public of subservient, devoted wife. However, she skillfully managed to

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<sup>33</sup> Anne Crawford, "The Queen's Council in the Middle Ages," *The English Historical Review* 116, no. 469 (November, 2001): 1193–1211, doi:10.1093/ehr/116.469.1193.

<sup>34</sup> Elston, "Widow Princess or Neglected Queen?: Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII and English Public Opinion, 1533-1536," 20.

<sup>35</sup> Henry VIII came to believe that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was sinful, because she had been married to his older brother and that was the reason why they were not able to have children, Mary being the exception. He claimed that the Pope who granted their dispensation to marry had done so in error, so the central debate for the divorce was around whether Arthur and Catherine's marriage had been consummated. Henry argued that it had been and Catherine denied it.

manipulate this image so that as a subservient, devoted wife, she refused to allow her husband to forsake her.

After the divorce, Henry intended that Catherine would assume the role of a widow. She would retire from public life and live quietly. Under English law, she would have been considered Arthur's widow and not Henry's ex-wife, a position that would have been less defined than widow and more problematic for society at that juncture of time. Instead their twenty-four years of marriage would have been declared unlawful, meaning that they had never really been married to begin with, so Catherine, the pious, devout wife, had been living in sin for over two decades. While it is likely that she would have been treated with respect and dignity, with the majority of people understanding that her removal as queen had less to do with her and more to do with Henry, Catherine for her part was not content with the proposed arrangement:

Catherine pursued a conscious strategy of continuing to portray herself in the manner the English people had come to expect, whatever her husband chose to do. Catherine had a twenty-four-year reputation of piety and advocating for the people. After the annulment, in her "widowed" isolation, Catherine exploited the expectations of both her own Christian humanist training and those of an aristocratic English society that often treated widows harshly in order to reaffirm her status with the public and, in a small sense, to subvert Henry's proclamation.<sup>36</sup>

During her reign as queen, Catherine had gained a very good reputation among the English people. She was seen as an advocate for them to the king, a role commonly filled by queens in England.<sup>37</sup> Also her devotion and piety had given her a certain amount of power.

Catherine cast herself in the role of wronged wife. Her duty, therefore, to her husband and her people, was to stand firm and not quietly allow her husband to be led into sin.

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<sup>36</sup> Elston, "Widow Princess or Neglected Queen?", 17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

So when the emissary from Rome, Cardinal Campeggio, arrived to hear the case between Henry and Catherine in 1529, she took the opportunity to very publicly defy her husband's wishes and to present her own case for her marriage being legitimate. In this speech, which she used to publicly refute her husband's claims that their marriage was invalid, she still adopted the persona of a subservient, submissive wife—the image that she had used throughout her marriage. On her knees, she addressed her husband directly, calling him “Sir,” and not Henry.<sup>38</sup> She then continued:

Wherein have I offended you, or what occasion of displeasure have I deserved?... I have been to you a true, humble and obedient wife, ever comfortable to your will and pleasure that never said or did any thing to the contrary thereof, being always well pleased and contented with all things wherein you had any delight or dalliance, whether it were in little or much. I never grudged in word or countenance, or showed a visage or spark of discontent. I loved all those whom ye loved, only for your sake, whether I had cause or no, and whether they were my friends or enemies. This twenty years or more I have been your true wife and by me ye have had divers children, although it hath pleased God to call them out of this world, which been no default in me...<sup>39</sup>

Within this speech, Catherine relies on her reputation as a good wife to prove her case, and even takes the blame for her current situation onto herself. In asking how she has offended him, she creates an assumption that she must have done something wrong, but at the same time refutes that idea by listing the ways in which she has been a perfect wife to Henry, and fulfilled every duty that was within her power.

She then goes on to call Henry as a witness to her virginity at the time of their marriage, and says that God will be her judge, adding that “if there be any just cause by the law that ye can allege against me either of dishonesty or any other impediment to banish and

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<sup>38</sup> “Catherine of Aragon’s Speech at Blackfriars,” in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the archives and collections of Venice and in other Libraries of Northern Italy*, Vol. 4 (London: Norfolk Chronicle Company, 1900), 878.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



put me from you, I am well content to depart to my great shame and dishonour.”<sup>40</sup> Catherine within the entire speech is both defiant and submissive. Her speech relies on the public identity that she had created of herself at the beginning of her marriage, and her rhetoric uses both her religion and her constructed persona as reasons why Henry’s case should be dismissed. While Catherine’s speech may have gained her respect and support, it only managed to delay the divorce until Henry broke with the Catholic Church—an action that Catherine would have been unlikely to be able to predict.

When Henry decided to break with the Catholic Church, Catherine came to represent orthodoxy. The image that she had created of the chaste, pious, devoted wife came to be seen as a stable force by her supporters. Henry’s behavior therefore became destabilizing.<sup>41</sup> His actions especially regarding religion challenged how the English had always understood their religion and their relationship with the Pope. Even though kings in England had always chafed under church doctrine, the English people understood themselves to be Catholic and therefore looked to the Catholic Church for guidance. Catherine, therefore, despite her role in forcing Henry to more drastic measures to achieve a divorce, was still viewed as a wronged woman and a dearly beloved figure within the English community. In using the reputation she had constructed over the years, Catherine managed to defy the will of her husband, while maintaining that she was not being defiant, and without ruining her public image.

Being degraded from queen to Prince Arthur’s widow should have meant that Catherine adopted a life of solitude:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kathryn M. Brammall, “Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 1 (April 1996): 3–21, doi:10.2307/2544266.

Catherine had to negotiate and, to some extent, negate contemporary expectations of widowhood. From the Christian humanist perspective, two differing assessments of widowhood appear in the early sixteenth century. Most familiar in England, and perhaps to Catherine, were the opinions of Juan Luis Vives in his *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*. Vives insisted on widows maintaining their chastity, and thus safeguarding their late husbands' reputations, by staying home, remaining aloof from worldly matters and assiduously avoiding opportunities for the community to question their reputations.<sup>42</sup>

In English culture women who were widowed were expected to maintain their husband's honor. Therefore having been in a false marriage for twenty-four years should have damaged Catherine's reputation, and quietly retiring to a less public position should have restored some of her dignity. At least that was how Henry VIII would have wished things to play out with Catherine. Instead she managed to use her reputation as a devout Christian to damage the reputation of her rival Anne Boleyn, who is still seen today as the cause of the dissolution of Catherine's marriage and the architect behind Henry's break with the Catholic Church.<sup>43</sup>

Like her rival, Catherine's persona has endured since the time of Henry VIII's reign; however, Catherine's reputation and piety came to be her defining traits, which have characterized how she has been constructed since her lifetime, and became the measure by which the other wives of Henry VIII were compared:

Among the wives of Henry VIII, only his first and last Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr, possessed both the education and the intelligence to exemplify the Renaissance ideal for a woman born to gentle life. Both Katherines took their religion seriously, and in spite of the papal loyalties of the one and the Protestant proclivities of the other, they belonged to the same tradition of Renaissance religion which J. K. McConica has most recently traced in his study of English humanists.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. See also, William P. Haugaard, "Katherine Parr: The Religious Convictions of a Renaissance Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (December 1969): 346–59, doi:10.2307/2859043; and Betty S. Travitsky, "Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (April 1997): 164–74, doi:10.2307/3039332.

<sup>44</sup> Haugaard, "Katherine Parr," 346.

Even when the focus of a scholar's argument is not on Catherine, she still remains as the standard for how queens were meant to behave. Her reputation and her piety have become the example by which the other wives of Henry VIII were measured, and only Katherine Parr came close to her predecessor in both learning and religion—despite the obvious difference in their beliefs and educations. Catherine of Aragon's image therefore has transcended both political and religious barriers.

The removal of Catherine of Aragon's image from political or religious contexts is not a new concept. In England during Elizabeth's reign, it would be logical to find that Catherine of Aragon was viewed with suspicion, since Elizabeth was the daughter of Catherine's rival, but that was not what happened:

Anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish feeling had certainly not disappeared in England in the years between the papal bull encouraging Elizabeth's assassination (1570), the Throckmorton and Babington conspiracies, the execution of Mary Stuart, and the mounting of the Armada (1588). But the turnabout in [*De Institutione Feminae Christianae*] suggests that the Katherine of Aragon celebrated thirty years later in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* had become depoliticized by the latter part of the sixteenth century, that she was seen by that time in decidedly non-threatening and non-sectarian terms, and perhaps that the type of pious, learned, and domesticated woman she had come to represent had become more widely celebrated in that age.<sup>45</sup>

Even during the reign of Elizabeth Tudor, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, Catherine of Aragon was still constructed as the ideal woman. This is a testament to the image that Catherine was able to construct for herself. That Catherine of Aragon was able to so skillfully construct an image of herself as the perfect woman of the day, even when she was being defiant, and breaking conventional roles ascribed to women, shows that the public perception of her character and religious devotion were themes that even later generations could venerate as

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<sup>45</sup> Travitsky, "Reprinting Tudor History," 170.

desirable in women that allowed them to act with agency within their homes and within society.

### Bloody Mary

In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which granted Henry VIII,

his heirs and successors, kings of this realm ... full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, record, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offenses, contempts and enormities, whatsoever they be, which by any manner of spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed ... most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of peace, unity, and tranquility of this realm.<sup>46</sup>

This Act of Parliament gave the kings of England power over the church and led to the dissolution of the monasteries. However, the act also created a divide within Henry VIII's family. His oldest daughter Mary maintained her Catholic faith, even under threat of severe punishment, even death, while his younger children accepted the religious change and even helped to reform the church further in some instances. Despite her disobedience, Mary was still considered a member of the royal family, and even when she was in open defiance of her father, lords still attempted to place their daughters in her household.<sup>47</sup> The fact that people still sought to be near Mary indicates that her disobedience did not harm her position within English society and despite the religious problems apparent in her succession, Henry VIII still made her an heir to the throne in the event of her brother's death.

Mary's decision to not follow her father's choice of religion, and instead to side with her mother in the matter of the divorce, could be seen as an attempt to protect her own status within the court. However, given Henry's temperament, it would have been safer for her to

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<sup>46</sup> Tudor, Henry. "Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy (1534)," in *Statues of the Realm*. 3, [1509-1545] (Burlington: Tanner Ritchie Publishers, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Lorraine Attreed and Alexandra Winkler, "Faith and Forgiveness: Lessons on Statecraft for Queen Mary Tudor," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 972.

adopt a more flexible attitude and to bend to her father's will instead of being defiant, therefore her decision, though religiously motivated, also had political motivations. Mary constructed her public identity around religion, as her mother had done, casting herself into the role of a woman who was devout but also persecuted in her devotions. This construction not only gained her sympathy from other Catholics, but also served to protect her, since persecuting her could lead to the creation of a martyr for the Catholics, something that Henry wanted to avoid.<sup>48</sup> Instead, threatening, but then ignoring his daughter for portions of her life, were far simpler solutions to her disobedience.

When Mary did inherit the throne, she sought to return the kingdom to Catholicism. Henry VIII had gotten Parliament to grant the king absolute power to reform the Church in any way that adhered to the law, and for the good of the realm. While his reforms within the Church were minor, his major changes involved seizing land from monasteries. Edward VI's reforms were more bent towards Protestantism, but he had not had the opportunity to implement many radical reforms.<sup>49</sup> Mary Tudor's ascension to the throne of England presented a problem to reformers, and not long after her succession she had Parliament issue a new law.

Whereas, since the twentieth year of King Henry VIII of famous memory, father unto your Majesty, ... much false and erroneous doctrine hath been taught, preached and written ..., by reason whereof as well the spirituality as the temporalty of your Highness's realms and dominions have swerved from the obedience of the See Apostolic and declined from the unity of Christ's church, and so have continued until ... your Majesty being ... raised up by God and set in the seat royal over us ... the Pope's Holiness and the See Apostolic sent hither ... the most reverent father in God, the lord Cardinal Pole, legate de Latere, to call us home again into the right way ... and we ... seeing by the goodness of God our own errors, have acknowledged the same unto the said most revered father, and by him have been ... received and

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<sup>48</sup> Attreed and Winkler, "Faith and Forgiveness," 971–89.

<sup>49</sup> Robert M. Healey, "Waiting for Deborah: John Knox and Four Ruling Queens," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 371–86.

embraced into the unity and bosom of Christ's church ... upon our humble submission and promise ... to repeal and abrogate such acts and statutes as had been made in Parliament since the said twentieth year of the said King Henry VIII against the supremacy of the See Apostolic.<sup>50</sup>

There was nothing in the Act of Supremacy to prevent her from undoing the reforms of her father and brother. Instead the Act granted her the power to reform the Anglican Church in any way that she saw fit and necessary to guard against heresy, which she did. In her *Statute of Repeal*, Mary returned the country to Catholicism, in act if not in deed.

However, within the act, it is clear that she is taking her cues not only from Rome but also from religious advisors. This did not sit well with the English people and eventually led to the Wyatt rebellion of 1554. Her construction of her identity around Catholicism, for her made perfect sense, but in her people it caused problems and when Mary began to burn Protestants, she lost support, even from Catholics. A Catholic observer wrote about the death of Archbishop Cranmer in terms showing that he felt great sympathy towards the dying man:

I would not at this time have written to you the unfortunate end, and doubtful tragedy, of Thomas Cranmer late bishop of Canterbury: because I little pleasure take in beholding of such heavy sights. And when they are once overpassed, I like not to rehearse them again; being but a renewing of my woe, and doubling my grief. For although his former life, and wretched end, deserves a greater misery, (if any greater might have chanced than chanced unto him), yet, setting aside his offenses to God and his country, and beholding the man without his faults, I think there was none that pitied not his case, and bewailed not his fortune, and feared not his own chance.<sup>51</sup>

Mary in her persecutions of Protestants gained little support from the people around her.

Unlike her father, Mary's persecution of those who defied her led to the creation of a new public identity for her, one in which she was presented as a religious zealot. The difference

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Tudor, "Second Statute of Repeal (1555)," in *Statutes of the Realm*. 4, part 1, [1547-1585] (Burlington: Tanner Ritchie Publishers, 2007), 275-7.

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous, "The Execution of Archbishop Cranmer," in Henry John Todd, *The Life of Archbishop Cranmer*, 2 (London: 1831).

between her and her father was that she was female, and her more militant actions therefore were problematic, since they violated the traditional roles of women.

Unlike her Catholic predecessors, Mary Tudor was unable to successfully use religious devotion to further her political ends. While her faith did propel her to certain political actions, these same actions did not protect her from political condemnation. Margaret Beaufort had used her religious devotion to help further her political ends, and her piety had granted her a certain position within society, but that piety was also, to some extent, considered separate from her political movement. Her devotions gave her a certain power and presence, and she used them to her advantage, but she was not controlled by them. Her political ambitions, though sometimes mixed with pious rhetoric, were separate from her devotions.<sup>52</sup> So while she used religion to make herself acceptable to the public, in her own mind she was able to separate religious devotion from her every action. Mary Tudor, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with religion, and it was the driving force behind many of her policies. Her determination to reinstate the Catholic faith led her to political actions which made her unpopular in her country. Her Spanish marriage and the burning of heretics created both unrest within England and drew the ire of reformers like John Knox who in the last year of Mary's reign published *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*.<sup>53</sup>

Mary Tudor's inability to separate her religious identity from her political actions deviates from the relationship seen between her great-grandmother and her mother and religion. They both constructed identities around their religious devotion, but at the same time were able to manipulate those identities to suit their needs at any given moment. Mary,

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<sup>52</sup> Attreed and Winkler, "Faith and Forgiveness," 981.

<sup>53</sup> Healey, "Waiting for Deborah," 379.

on the other hand, did not merely construct a public persona around religion, but claimed it as her whole identity. Her strict adherence to religious principles and determination to put those principles onto other people harmed her cause and created a situation where religious devotion, instead of helping with a woman's reputation, harmed her public image.

John Knox published *The First Blast of the Trumpet* as a reaction to Mary Tudor's Catholic policies, though it had implications for other female monarchs who ruled in their own right. Within this work, the reaction to Mary Tudor's policies not just by Knox but by others also, is evident, along with their distrust of female monarchs. He wrote that he was "assured that God [had] revealed to some in this our age, that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above man."<sup>54</sup> Knox believed that women were meant to be subservient to men, and that they could not be trusted as monarchs, let alone religious leaders.

In this belief he did not differ much from pre-Reformation male thinkers when it came to women and religion. However, there was some flexibility within his beliefs for the place of a female monarch. In discussions with John Calvin, Knox came to the conclusion that a female monarch who resembled Deborah, within the Bible, could be a good religious example and an acceptable monarch.<sup>55</sup> However, of the three female monarchs that Knox had to contend with, only Mary Tudor really embodied the concept of a queen who based her policies on religious devotion.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Knox. "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women 1558," in *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises and Expositions to the Year 1559*, (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Healey, "Waiting for Deborah," 378.

<sup>56</sup> Knox also had dealings with Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stewart. Mary Stewart gave him the most attention, and he supposedly left her crying on at least one occasion. He had high hopes for Elizabeth Tudor, as a Protestant monarch, but despite her success as a ruler, she fell short of his hopes because she did not listen to



Knox, in elevating Deborah as a role model for queens to follow, wished these monarchs to adopt a persona of unworthiness and be dedicated to ruling solely by the word of the Bible. His construction of how a female monarch should present herself was based on his understanding of women's moral inferiority.<sup>57</sup> Though he disagreed with her religious beliefs, Mary Tudor was the only female monarch who came close to this definition. While her interpretation of the Bible and the word of God was dictated by the pope in Rome, she was the monarch who was most ruled by religious devotion.

Knox of course, did not see this connection, or the broader implications of what he was advising. Mary Tudor's dedication to her religious beliefs had made her an unpopular monarch, and threatened the stability of her kingdom. Knox, in advocating that a female monarch should be ruled by the Bible, was advocating for a monarch that could not separate political decisions from religion or show any flexibility within religious devotion. He was arguing for a monarch who was dedicated to religious devotions but had little political mobility. While in Knox's mind this would lead to a better Christian society, in actuality it proved a rather problematic concept.

For Mary Tudor, her identity as a religious woman overtook her politics. She understood herself to be the savior of her people and thought of herself as leading them back to the true faith. Her zealous determination, and her fusion of her religion with her political identity, however, did not protect her from attacks from outside forces. Catherine of Aragon, though she successfully portrayed herself as a pious and devoted wife, was unable to hold onto her position as queen, even though she was able to win the public's support and create

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his advice on how to rule and did not fit into his "ideal" of how a female monarch should construct herself. Healey, "Waiting for Deborah," 376

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

an identity that would outlive her. Her success at constructing a viable public identity was therefore successful in that it kept her in good standing, and if it had not been for the political maneuverings of Henry VIII, she would have maintained her position within his court.

Of the three, Margaret Beaufort was the most successful at achieving her desired goals, even though it took her most of her life to do so, and at times it appeared that she would be punished. All of these women felt that religion was an important force within their lives, and even if they did use their faith to help shield themselves from danger, they really were dedicated to God. Through their understanding of faith and piety, they constructed an ideal image of themselves that they put forward, and to some degree they were all successful, for they are remembered for their devotions, even if that cultural memory is, in some cases, negative.

## Chapter Two

### Prophecies and Visions: Women and Divine Influence

During the medieval period, many women who felt a strong pull towards religion claimed to have experienced visions. While these claims became increasingly questioned by society during the transition from the medieval period to the early modern, women still believed that visions helped them gain some popularity within their communities. Some were respected, like Julian of Norwich, and others were regarded with more skepticism, like Margery Kempe, while still others found themselves with a massive following only to later be discredited and executed, like Elizabeth Barton.

For all three of these women, how they presented their visions and the unique identities that they presented the public are very different. Julian has remained an enigma, someone who was respected and admired in her own time and afterwards, but who has left very little behind to illuminate her own life.<sup>58</sup> Margery Kempe, on the other hand, wrote about herself when she dictated her autobiography, giving a good picture of who she was. There is far more known about her life, when she was born and her family, than there is known about Julian. Elizabeth Barton is interesting because Henry VIII had her works destroyed, so anything that she had written about herself has been lost, and yet there are still things about her life that are known.

These women's visions and how they presented themselves to the public also widely differed. Julian saw herself as a teacher, and presented her ideas in a way to help instruct

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<sup>58</sup> Kim M. Phillips, "Femininities and the Gentry in Late Medieval East Anglia: Ways of Being," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 20.

others.<sup>59</sup> Margery, while also calling herself a teacher, more directly attacked those that she saw as spiritually lacking.<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth used her visions to gain political influence, which eventually led to her execution. While how they presented themselves and their visions varied, all three of these women exemplify the different aspects of a visionary, and the different approaches that they had illustrate the differing levels of risk that women took when they preached about faith. Julian, took the safest path, presenting her beliefs as orthodox and also de-gendering her works as much as possible, whereas Margery was not afraid to dance between defiance and compliance with the authorities and Elizabeth actually crossed into the realm of treasonous activity when she believed that she had to redirect the course in which England was headed.

#### Reputations of “Holy” Women

Within the medieval and early modern periods, women were regarded with some suspicion when it came to religion.<sup>61</sup> While many were relegated to nunneries, either through their own choice or because they had no other options,<sup>62</sup> these women were not considered to be as religiously devout as their male counterparts.<sup>63</sup> Within these institutions, the lives of religious women become clearer, as did the limitations that they found themselves facing. Often the lives of women who were meant to be “holy” caused problems for women who truly wanted to see religious reform, or to live a spiritual life.

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<sup>59</sup> Jane Duran, “Julian of Norwich: Mysticism and Philosophy,” *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1029 (September 2009): 552–59, doi:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2009.01275.x.

<sup>60</sup> Isabel Davis, “Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy,” in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 49.

<sup>61</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara J. Harris, “A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic Women and Nunneries, 1450–1540,” *Journal of British Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 1993): 90.

<sup>63</sup> Claire Cross, “Yorkshire Nunneries in the Early Tudor Period,” in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 145.

The wealthier orders, with consistent benefactors, tended to do well and to attract richer women into their cloisters. However, there were several smaller convents that had financial trouble.<sup>64</sup> This monetary strain was partially due to the larger corruption within the Catholic Church and to women's subordinate nature within the religion. While certain male figures within the church were able to amass a great deal of wealth, these smaller convents saw very little of the church revenue and because their followers were not considered as devout as their male counterparts they were largely ignored except when their behavior drew the attention of the bishop.<sup>65</sup>

This situation meant that the orders had to find ways of raising capital by themselves, much to the annoyance of the bishop. There are many letters from male religious leaders to the mother superiors of different Yorkshire nunneries warning them off certain behaviors, including in one instance running an alehouse within the convent at Esholt.<sup>66</sup> These women also got into trouble for more obvious breaking of the rules. A mother superior was forced to resign her position after it was discovered that she was pregnant. It appears that it was not entirely uncommon for nuns to become pregnant, and the bishop, in one case at least, prescribed the punishment of having the pregnant nun locked in a secret room for two years and fed a very meager diet.<sup>67</sup>

While the behavior of these pre-reformation nuns might be surprising, it is not unreasonable given their conditions in life. These women through financial strain managed to keep their convents open by adopting new means of generating revenue. While the case of running an alehouse was perhaps extreme, other forms of extracting money were not

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<sup>64</sup> Claire Cross, "Yorkshire Nunneries in the Early Tudor Period," 146-8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

uncommon within the church. Having potential nuns provide a donation to the order, though cautioned against in some circumstances, kept the convents open. While not all the women within these orders were particularly dedicated to God, many of them did approach their religion seriously, and during the reformation did all they could to keep their convents operational.<sup>68</sup> However, how these women approached their religion and their situations in life was more flexible than their male counterparts would have liked. To these women, their first concerns were of the more earthly variety, mainly keeping the roof over their head. In this way, their faith was malleable. To keep the house of God, they had to perform tasks and exact payments that were perhaps not in the spirit of Christianity or within the remits of their order. They performed these tasks not only to keep their homes but also to enable their continued service to God.

The pregnant nuns also exemplify this characteristic. While some of these pregnant nuns might have wished to escape convent life, the case of the mother superior points to a more complex relationship between sexuality and religious life.<sup>69</sup> This woman, while performing her duties as head of her order, also became pregnant, indicating that, at least in her case, she did not believe violating the vows of chastity was a grievous sin. The number of pregnant nuns within convents points to a more loose understanding of the rule and a flexibility in how they applied their vows. Their male counterparts might have reacted to their flexibility with condemnation and harsh punishments, like the two-year imprisonment; however, the women within these orders persisted in showing a more dynamic and flexible relationship with religion.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

This flexibility in their approach to religion did not help other women when they perceived that there was something wrong with the church. Women who were reform-minded often met with resistance to their ideas. This is perhaps not surprising. While nuns were supposed to be holy, many found themselves in convents without really wishing to actually participate in the regimen of a religious life. Therefore there were two types of religious women, those who took their vows seriously and dearly wished to devote themselves to God, and those who turned to nunneries for security and a place to live.

Because of the way that women were conceptualized within their religion, and the problems that came from some nunneries, women who wished to separate themselves from their counterparts and to have a more active voice within their religious communities needed something to set them apart. Many of these women presented their ideas in the form of divinely inspired visions or prophecies. The presentation of their ideas within a vision or a prophecy often helped them to make their ideas palatable and accepted within the larger community. For those who wished to comment on religion, some form of divine approval was necessary, “more so for women, who were much more likely to be relegated to the grey area between orthodox thinking and heterodox subversion and who therefore, were particularly in need of authoritative endorsement of any prophetic or visionary activity.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the use of visions, when they were recognized by the church as genuine, were an invaluable source for women to be able to comment on religion.

Many of these visions had a time frame in which they were useful, and there was a sense in which people who sought help from visionaries needed reassurance that things would happen within a given time. In the cases of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe,

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<sup>70</sup> Liz Herbert McAvoy, “Introduction,” in McAvoy, *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, 6.

“the spiritual community of which both women were part, a spiritual community for which prophetic knowledge of judgement and salvation had considerable urgency,” was considered necessary for the betterment of society.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, for these women, while their religious devotion was genuine, their visions also helped to make them acceptable to the wider religious communities in which they lived.

### The Recluse

Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342-1414) is an unusual figure. Very little is known about her life and “allusions to Julian in high cultural literary texts often present her as a disembodied, dehistoricized seer whose revelations address the most profound spiritual enigmas.”<sup>72</sup> Her works therefore appear to transcend the historical time in which she lived while her person, who she actually was, and not just the image of herself that she presented to the public, has been lost.

Many have speculated about Julian’s life. Was she married, or was she a nun before her visions? What was her position in society? What was her family like? All of these questions, however, lead to nothing more than speculation.<sup>73</sup> Her vocabulary within her writings makes it seem that she was from the gentry, though that particular social designation was not as clear as that of a knight or a merchant, but it would indicate that her family probably owned land.<sup>74</sup> Whatever the case, it would appear that Julian’s family were not nobles but did have some means. While it is not clear if Julian was a nun when she first had her visions and decided to become a recluse, it is clear that she still remained an active

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<sup>71</sup> Diane Watt, “Saint Julian of the Apocalypse,” in McAvoy, *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Legacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6.

<sup>73</sup> Phillips, “Femininities and the Gentry in Late Medieval East Anglia: Ways of Being,” 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



member of her community. In a series of legal documents from the time after she became a recluse (c. 1393-4) Julian is mentioned, which indicates that she was a part of a Christian community. While she was living as a recluse, she also interacted with the people around her, giving guidance and advice to the people of East Anglia.<sup>75</sup>

What role Julian had within her Christian community is not completely clear. Margery Kempe met with Julian and sought her approval, which would indicate that Julian was viewed as a respected and authoritative figure within the community of Norwich, by both secular and religious entities.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, Norwich was considered a religious center, and therefore Julian might have been a product of the spiritual activity going on around her.<sup>77</sup> What is perhaps most striking about Julian, however, is that she chose not to illuminate her life within her writings. While she was a part of a religious-minded community, within her writings, she only makes references to a handful of people, and many of them are not even named, but referred to in increasingly gender-neutral terms.<sup>78</sup> Julian chose to write about her visions instead of the world around her, and in doing so, she presented herself in a way that is unusual.

When Julian writes of herself, she expresses anxiety about her gender, which is a little unusual for mystics:

Botte God forbade that ye shulde saye or take it so that I am a techere. For I meene nought so, no I mente nevere so. For I am a woman, lewed febille, and freylle. Botte I wate wele, this that I saye I hafe it of the shewing of him that es soverayne techare. Botte sotherlye charite stirres me to tell yowe it. For I wolde God ware knawen and min evencristene spede, as I wolde be myself, to the mare hatinge of sinne and loving of God. Botte for I am a woman shulde I therefore leve that I shulde nought telle

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<sup>75</sup> McAvoy, "Introduction," 6-7.

<sup>76</sup> Watt, "Saint Julian of the Apocalypse," 72.

<sup>77</sup> Cate Gunn, "'A Recluse Atte Norwyche': Images of Medieval Norwich and Julian's Revelations," in McAvoy, *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Watt, "Saint Julian of the Apocalypse," 65-66.

yowe the goodness of God, since that I sawe in that same time that it is his wille that it be knawen?<sup>79</sup>

Within this statement, Julian appears to grapple with her place as a transmitter of God's knowledge. She conceptualizes herself as a woman and therefore unworthy to know the will of the almighty, but also as someone who has a duty to express her knowledge of God. Julian's understanding of the role of women within religion appears to be similar to that of her male counterparts, and she struggles with her identity as a woman who has experienced something divine. However, Julian became more confident in her writings as she continued.

She wrote two works.<sup>80</sup> The first was *A Vision Shown to a Devout Woman*, which still exists in a medieval manuscript. The second was *A Revelation of Love* which only exists in copies from later periods.<sup>81</sup> In her first work, she is often shown as timid, and the statement above is typical of her thought process, whereas in her later work, she not only expands some of her beliefs, but she also gains more confidence within her writing.<sup>82</sup>

Along with this confidence is her habit of trying to de-gender not only herself but other women to whom she makes reference within her works.<sup>83</sup> "I desired to wit of a serteyn creature that I loved if it shulde continue in good leving, which I hoped by the grace of God was begonne."<sup>84</sup> This quotation from the *Revelation of Love* originally appeared in *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and within the early work Julian wrote "I desired of a certaine

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<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Vision 6.35-42.

<sup>80</sup> Michelle Karnes, "Julian of Norwich's Art of Interpretation," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, no. 2 (2012): 334, doi:10.1215/10829636-1571903.

<sup>81</sup> McAvoy, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>82</sup> Abram Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's *A Revelation of Love*," *Literature and Theology* 23, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 1-17, doi:10.1093/litthe/frn035.

<sup>83</sup> Watt, "Saint Julian of the Apocalypse," 65.

<sup>84</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *Writings of Julian of Norwich*, Revelation 35.2-3.

person that I loved howe it shulde be with hire.”<sup>85</sup> Using the word “creature” de-genders the person that Julian was concerned about.<sup>86</sup> Julian therefore appears to be trying to deal with her anxiety about her gender and unworthiness by cutting out her sexuality from her works.

Julian seems to have chosen not to show her life or focus on her position as a woman within her writings, not only because she is uncertain about the proper place of women within religious discourse, but also to make her writings widely acceptable. By focusing on her visions and the lessons that they teach, she manages to neutralize the problem of female spiritual authority. But Julian is also unique in another way. For many mystics, the role that they play in society is one that they cannot teach to others and one that was irreplaceable. Julian, however, does not see herself within that particular construct. She “feels that she has been blessed with a special mode of knowing and yet she feels that all can be so blessed. In other words, Julian’s revelations are a sort of teaching, but one to which anyone can aspire.”<sup>87</sup> For her, then, her experiences of divine visions were not something that were unique; anyone could come to have this kind of experience.

Julian was unusual in the tradition of female mystics, for unlike Margery or Elizabeth, her writings and her visions were less intuitive and more perceptive. While Margery and Elizabeth would both attempt to predict the future, Julian would always present her visions as being incomplete and restricted.<sup>88</sup> She presented herself both as unworthy and as feeling compelled to spread her knowledge of God, and this tactic worked. In her presentation, she created a work that came to be widely accepted and was not challenged by church authorities, even though some have now argued that she constructed herself as

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 16. 12-21.

<sup>86</sup> Watt, “Saint Julian of the Apocalypse,” 65.

<sup>87</sup> Duran, “Julian of Norwich,” 552-59.

<sup>88</sup> Watt, “Saint Julian of the Apocalypse,” 70.

orthodox to push her own agenda.<sup>89</sup> It is true that Julian did write with a purpose, but she also understood how to make herself palatable to a wide audience, something that Margery Kempe would struggle with.

### The Housewife

For a long time the completed autobiography of Margery Kempe was lost. While her words had been published in edited versions, a full text of her reminiscences was not discovered until the 1930's, which prompted work to be done on the text of her autobiography but also on her place in history. However, the reaction to Barton was mixed, with some describing her as a 'minor mystic.'<sup>90</sup> Despite this reaction, which was similar to how people responded to Margery when she was alive, she still is important for understanding how female mystics took on their roles, understood what they were capable of, and where the boundaries for their abilities to preach to the public were. At the same time, Margery is also unusual for she was not associated with a religious order or a community.<sup>91</sup>

Margery Brunham was born circa 1373, to John Brunham of Norfolk.<sup>92</sup> They were part of the bourgeoisie and lived in an urban center,<sup>93</sup> which helped to expose Margery to tradesmen from the continent.<sup>94</sup> At the age of twenty Margery was married to John Kempe, a burgess, and they had fourteen children together.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Julian and Elizabeth, Margery was very much tied to the secular world. Her connections with trade enabled her to travel

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<sup>89</sup> Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives," 1-17.

<sup>90</sup> Barry Windeatt, "Introduction," in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500*, Brepols Collected Essays in European Culture 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 1: 217-38.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Davis, "Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy," 36

<sup>94</sup> Kate Parker, "Lynn and the Making of a Mystic," in Arnold and Lewis, *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Margery Kempe," 214.

abroad, even to Jerusalem,<sup>96</sup> and even though she at some point decided to take a vow of chastity, she was never part of a religious community.<sup>97</sup> Her autobiography, unlike Julian's, was filled with her life and mentions of her family.

Whan this creatur was tenty yer of age or sumdele mor, sche was maryed to a worschepful burgeys and was with chylde within schort tyme, as kynde wolde. And, aftyr that sche had conceived, sche was labowrd wyth grett accessys tyl the child was born, and than, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng and for sekenesse goyng befor, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche mygth not levyn.<sup>98</sup>

This is how Margery chose to open one of the sections of her work. It is not about her piety but about her life, and her experiences with childbirth, something unusual for mystics. Her reminiscences therefore were more personal and her reactions to the world around her were also less reserved than those of Julian.

Much of the trouble that Margery got herself into was based around her attitude to gendered barriers. Unlike Julian, Margery did not seem to recognize that women were not supposed to be religious agents or the equals of men in the world, and that they had to present their visions in ways that would allow them to be accepted by the vast majority of the public. Instead Margery engaged in a strange dance with authority.

When Margery was accused of heresy in York in 1414, she stated that she was not a preacher but a teacher—a distinction which was important. She presented herself as someone who was like Saint Katherine, who had converted people to the Christian faith through intelligent argument. While she did this, she also presented her ideas as orthodox, which helped to clear her of heresy charges.<sup>99</sup> However, “at the same time she acts in what were

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<sup>96</sup> Parker, “Lynn and the Making of a Mystic,” 67.

<sup>97</sup> Anthony Goodman, “Margery Kempe,” 215.

<sup>98</sup> Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 130.

<sup>99</sup> Davis, “Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy,” 49.

perceived to be unfeminine ways, in ways which encroach on male, clerical prerogative, and she is often less than deferential, denouncing clerics when she thinks they are sinful or misguided.”<sup>100</sup> Margery had an interesting response to religious authority figures—those she thought were spiritual, she respected, but those she deemed not especially religious, she distrusted. This is especially evident in how she interacted with bishops.<sup>101</sup>

Margery therefore managed to maintain a balance between showing due respect to authority figures and expressing her displeasure with people she believed were not sufficiently religious. While clerics in different parts of England were hostile towards her, they rarely took action against her, and when the secular authorities made noises about her, it was because they were concerned about her possible connection with Lollards.<sup>102</sup> Despite the trouble that she occasionally found herself in, Margery always managed to avoid punishment and circumvent charges of heresy that would stick.

At one point, Margery recounts a vision in which Jesus reminds her of a vision she had of Saint Paul coming to her and apologizing for placing a ban on female preachers. In this vision, he did not retract his statement on the position of women, but implied that he had made things difficult for her.<sup>103</sup>

Dowtyr, I sent onys Seynt Powyl unto the for to strengthyn the and comfortyn the that  
thū schuldist boldly spekyn in my name fro that day forward. And Seynt Powle seyde  
unto the that thū haddyst suffyrde meche tribulacyon for cawse of hys wrytyng, and he  
behyte the that thū schuldist han as meche grace ther agens for hys lofe as evyr thū  
haddist schame er reprefe for hys lofe.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Parker, “Lynn and the Making of a Mystic,” 63.

<sup>102</sup> Windeatt, “Introduction,” 5

<sup>103</sup> Davis, “Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy,” 50.

<sup>104</sup> Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 65: 3796.

This vision not only gives Margery authority to teach her beliefs, but also attempts to place her into a position that makes her an exception. This vision is more showy than Julian's statement about her being unworthy because she is a woman, but it is along the same lines. Margery's Saint Paul makes an exception out of her, but not of all female preachers. The implication is that Margery is somehow unique and therefore should be listened to. The visionary Saint Paul is not giving all women permission to preach their ideas; instead, he is specific that Margery is special.

If Margery's visionary Saint Paul had expressed a desire for women to be allowed to preach, she would have met with more resistance. Instead, Margery's vision manages to do something quite different. While not everyone accepted Margery's ideas, people did listen to her because her beliefs were not outlandish, or laughable. In a sense, Margery knew how to present her ideas, which were sometimes challenging, in ways that they could be acceptable if not accepted. If she had claimed that Saint Paul wanted women preachers, then people would not have listened to her because of their understandings of religion; however, making an exception to a rule was different from completely destroying how people understood a saint's words. In this way, Margery managed to strike a balance between presenting problematic ideas and finding a place within orthodox belief to position her thoughts.

Around the year 1431, John Kempe died, but Margery continued to live at least until the very late 1430's. It was within this decade that she composed her autobiography, which recounted her conversations with Christ.<sup>105</sup> Margery did not physically write her own autobiography, which might indicate that she did not know how to write, therefore having to rely on someone else to take the dictations of her memories. She had access to books, and

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<sup>105</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Margery Kempe," 219.

recounts that a priest read to her for many years, so she might not have been able to read.<sup>106</sup> Her autobiography, however, is the earliest surviving vernacular work of its kind in England. The choice for it to be in the vernacular is curious. Margery did not know Latin, but the Carmelite Friar Aleyn, who wrote her work based on her dictations, would have done.<sup>107</sup> It is possible that Margery wished her autobiography to be in the vernacular so that it could be read more widely, but that is speculation, and it could just as easily be that Friar Aleyn did not wish to translate her words into Latin.

If Margery did wish her autobiography to be widely read, she would have been disappointed. Her autobiography appeared in two highly edited versions in the sixteenth century. Wynkyn de Worde published *A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon* in 1501 and Henry Pepwell also took her edited work, releasing it under the title *The Cell of Self Knowledge* in 1521.<sup>108</sup> This indicated that even after her death, some of Margery's beliefs were problematic for the people who read her, but at the same time, it also shows that there was something of value within her works. If her autobiography was too problematic, and her ideas too challenging, then the portions of it selected by these men would probably not have been printed. Her edited work must therefore have had something of value to present to society. Julian of Norwich did not have this problem with her work being printed in its entirety.<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth, on the other hand, would find that her works were targeted for destruction.

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<sup>106</sup> Parker, "Lynn and the Making of a Mystic," 66.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Nancy Bradley Warren, "Feminist Approaches to Middle English Religious Writing: The Cases of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich," *Literature Compass* 4, no. 5 (September 2007): 1378–96, doi:10.1111/j.1741-4113.2007.00487.x.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



### The Traitor

Elizabeth Barton (ca. 1506-20 April 1534) is an odd figure, for she fits rather nicely into the mold of a medieval, female saint, but during the Reformation that construction would become highly suspect.<sup>110</sup> Starting as a servant to a farmer in Aldington, Thomas Cobb, Barton gained a certain autonomy through visions, and later became a nun at St. Sepulchre's in Canterbury.<sup>111</sup> Like many medieval visionaries,<sup>112</sup> her prophecies came from what could be described as epileptic seizures, which people did recognize as a medical condition though they had another name for it, "the falling Euill." These types of seizures were thought to allow the sufferer better access to God. When suffering an attack, Barton's throat would swell, then she would fall to the ground, her limbs jerking around her, and she would utter words.<sup>113</sup>

Her early visions and prophecies were highly influenced by church doctrine and common beliefs that had been held during the medieval period, indicating that she was well versed in the religious discourse of her time.<sup>114</sup> While she may or may not have orchestrated her visions, the fact that she was able to call upon these highly religious dialogues as discourse for her prophecies is important because it meant that she was knowledgeable about religious principles and was orthodox enough not to be branded as a heretic. Barton quickly

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<sup>110</sup> Peter Marshall, "Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII," *Past & Present* 178 (February 2003): 40.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>112</sup> Both Margery and Julian talk about illness bringing on their visions. For Julian she was nearly dead when she received her vision and recovered, while Margery talks about her visions starting around the time when she first gave birth. Some kind of physical affliction was often linked with being granted insight into the divine, though Elizabeth's affliction continued while both Margery and Julian recovered.

<sup>113</sup> Diane Watt, "Reconstructing the Word: The Political Prophecies of Elizabeth Barton (1506-1534)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (April 1997): 142.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-8.

gained followers and even people from the court of Henry VIII visited her. However, when Henry decided to divorce his wife, the favor that she had been shown began to disappear.

Early on, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn both tried to get Barton on their side, Henry even offering to make her an abbess.<sup>115</sup> Even at that point, Barton had made clear her feelings about the divorce, so Henry trying to get her to cooperate with him, shows how much influence he believed that she had in England. When he failed to enlist her support, and her prophecies became more pointed, telling Henry that he would be dead in one month if he got rid of Catherine:

that in case hys Highnes proceded to thaccomplishment of the seid devorce and married another, that then hys Majestie shulde not be kyng of this Realme by the space of one moneth after, And in the reputacion of God shuld not be kyng one day nor one houre.<sup>116</sup>

This prophesy, which was related by multiple sources, precipitated Barton being arrested; her visionary authenticity was called into question, and her works were largely destroyed.<sup>117</sup> Henry even issued an act of Attainder ordering that Barton's works and the printing of her speeches be confiscated and destroyed, which makes it difficult to find her own voice on paper.<sup>118</sup> The effort put into discrediting her shows how much Henry feared she might be able to achieve, if she was able to stir the populace against him.

However, Barton admitted, twice, that she had no real visions and instead had been helped by the men around her, which utterly destroyed the faith of her followers in her.<sup>119</sup> While some copies of her works did survive, they were very rare, and by 1570 people were

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 150-1.

<sup>116</sup> There are many accounts of Elizabeth's prediction, with some variation between them, but the core of what she said remains the same. See London, British Library, MSS Cotton Cleopatra E. IV and Hrley 4990.

<sup>117</sup> Watt, "Reconstructing the Word," 158.

<sup>118</sup> Henry Tudor, *Statutes of the Realm*, 3:451.

<sup>119</sup> Diane Watt, "Reconstructing the Word," 158.

lamenting that everyone knew how her story ended, but not how it had begun.<sup>120</sup> Barton came to be seen not only as a fraud, but as a woman whose ideas were not even her own.

Such representations of Barton as ignorant, frail, vulnerable, self-deluded, susceptible to the sins of lust and pride, and completely reliant on her confessor and other churchmen, are not untypical of misogynistic attacks on pious women.<sup>121</sup>

Barton's character was destroyed before she was hanged because Henry VIII and those around him did not want to turn her into a martyr. Discrediting her authority as a visionary, when in the past they had given her favor, and turning her into a woman who was reliant on the influence of men, took away any danger that she might have posed to the stability of the realm. While her prophecies about Henry were not flattering, the actions taken against her show how much authority people believed that she had, and could successfully wield.

Like other women before her, Barton attempted to use religious authority to influence politics. Saints Bridget, Catherine, and Joan were all women that did similar things. While Bridget and Catherine were not executed, they did attempt to influence the course of political events when they found the situations of their countries or the situation within the papacy to be troubling, using their piety as a way of safely entering a sphere they otherwise would have been prevented from joining. "Indeed prophecy could offer women a rare opportunity for direct involvement in the political sphere."<sup>122</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, women were able to access politics through religious discourse but also through visions.

Somewhat paradoxically, the intellectual, social and moral inferiority of women made them particularly appropriate candidates for the role of prophet; by effacing their own identities and denying that they themselves spoke, they were able to claim that they were merely passive transmitters of or conduits for divine inspiration.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent: Containing the Description, Hystorie, and Customes of That Shire* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, Paternoster-Row, 1570), 174-176.

<sup>121</sup> Watt, "Reconstructing the Word," 160.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 144.

However, becoming a visionary came with risks. Like Joan of Arc, Barton was initially given leeway for her preaching and indulged, but was later executed. Joan was relatively quickly rehabilitated, but Barton has remained somewhat stigmatized in historical memory. Devoted Catholics did not rally around her, using her identity as a prophet in rhetoric aimed against Henry VIII. This was partially because Barton damaged her own image. By recanting, not once but twice, she lost much support within the Catholic community, which brought her authenticity as a prophet into question.

Accusations of being a fake visionary could be somewhat circumvented by the character of the accused. If a visionary was able to stay resolute through torture and interrogation, then their public image might not suffer as much damage, but admitting to being a fake destroyed that identity. Barton, however, had another problem—visionaries were becoming more suspect. While there had always been a certain number of queries surrounding miracle workers and visionaries, during the Reformation both forms of religious devotion became highly suspect—especially in Protestant-leaning areas. Barton therefore became a symbol of popish trickery.<sup>124</sup> She was not only a fake, but a symptom of some of the abuses of the Catholic Church that Protestants found deeply troubling. So despite her former position of reverence within the Catholic community, Barton was not seen as a viable figure for Catholic resistance to the oncoming Protestantism.

Barton attempted to use religious piety and her prophecies to influence the powerful people around her. Though in the end she was not successful, her attempts to gain political and spiritual agency place her into a wider context of women who used religion to gain

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<sup>124</sup> Marshall, “Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII,” 43.

power. However, her inability to maintain her image destroyed her reputation and made it difficult to rehabilitate her.

While all three women took different approaches to their presentation of their visions and the public response was different with each, they still believed that their visions were important and needed to be shared with the public. Julian was the most successful, because she not only saw herself as unworthy, but her visions were more detached from the everyday workings of society. Instead, she presented her ideas and relationship with the Almighty as things that anyone could achieve if they were sufficiently spiritual.

Margery, on the other hand, personalized her visions of Christ, which turned her into a figure that some people had a difficult time accepting. While she did get into trouble with the orthodox authorities, she managed to keep what she said mostly within the bounds of what was acceptable to the people around her. Both of these women saw their visions as important lessons for the people around them, and hoped to enact change through their teachings. Elizabeth, however, was different. Her visions strayed into an area which the other two women stayed away from—politics. And it was this connection with politics that caused Elizabeth to fall from her position.

While Margery did use her prophetic abilities to predict when people would die, or if an illness would be fatal, Julian had stayed away from such predictions.<sup>125</sup> Julian presented her knowledge of the future as “partial and restricted.”<sup>126</sup> This is important. She chose not to comment on whether someone would die, or if a king would fall. Presenting her visions as imperfect and not complete protected her from charges that her visions did not come true, or that she had made claims that were false. Margery’s predictions about the illness and death of

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<sup>125</sup> Watt, “Saint Julian of the Apocalypse,” 67.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 70.

people around her were also somewhat safe. It was riskier to make such predictions, but spun in the correct way, they could bring validity to her claims of divine insight.

However, it was very dangerous to claim to know how political situations would turn out. Someone who was canny could astutely predict the outcome of certain events, but Elizabeth went too far with her predictions. Her vision of Henry's downfall was politically motivated, and while she might have believed that it would happen, making such a statement was too risky and caused her position as a trusted visionary to be questioned. Therefore, while there were different approaches to how to present visions in a way that would be acceptable to the public, sometimes women took risks to further their own beliefs and goals. These risks, however, did not always pay off in their favor.

### Chapter Three

#### Eye of Newt and Tail of Frog: Women and the Witchcraft Construction within Politics

“When shall we three meet again/ in thunder, lightning or in rain?”<sup>127</sup>

This line opens Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth* and introduces the audience to the Weird Sisters. These three female characters are instantly recognizable, even to modern audiences, as witches even though they are never called so by any character in the play. Shakespeare’s portrayal of witchcraft emulates the theories and beliefs about witches of the time; however, that particular construction was relatively new to England. While there was a long history of belief in witchcraft and in malignant forces, many aspects of the Weird Sisters’ behavior were relatively recent additions to beliefs about witchcraft within English society. Across Europe at the end of the medieval period the image of the witch had changed. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, along with other texts, though widely condemned at the time of its publication, had become increasingly important in how people discussed and thought about witchcraft.<sup>128</sup>

In England, however, the changes were slow to take effect. England had a long history with magic, which was not always considered malevolent, and many women could be found guilty of practicing magic without receiving the death penalty.<sup>129</sup> This was not because people in England did not believe in magic, but because magic, in varying forms,

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<sup>127</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare, the Complete Works Second Edition*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), I. 1.1.

<sup>128</sup> Hans Peter Broedel, “To Preserve the Manly Form from so Vile a Crime: Ecclesiastical Anti-Sodomitic Rhetoric and the Gendering of Witchcraft in the *Malleus Maleficarum*,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19, no. 1 (2002): 136–48, doi:10.1353/ems.2003.0001.

<sup>129</sup> Jessica Freeman, “Sorcery at Court and Manor: Margery Jourdemayne, the Witch of Eye next Westminster,” *Journal of Medieval History* 30, no. 4 (December 2004): 343–57, doi:10.1016/j.jmedhist.2004.08.001.

was widely used for both benevolent and malignant purposes.<sup>130</sup> This meant that when someone was accused of using magic and was brought to court there generally were other factors that contributed to the accusations. Often, specifically when it came to women in positions of power or influence, accusations of witchcraft facilitated the removal of these women and the threats they might have posed to the stability of the country. In these cases, the women involved were often considered “undesirable” because of their behaviors or attitudes. These women, though they were accused of witchcraft, and some even found guilty, were not always severely punished; instead, the construction of a witch was used to remove women from positions of influence and nullify the dangers that they potentially posed, without actually having to put them to death. The construction of the witch’s identity therefore was considered a tool with which society could deal with problematic women, without having to exert much effort; the accusations served as a way to discredit women without, in some cases, causing lasting damage to their lives or reputations.

#### The Construction of the Witch’s Identity

During the medieval period, witchcraft could be performed by either men or women, and it could be benevolent or malevolent. Benevolent witchcraft included the use of remedies to heal the sick, charms to protect against evil, or using magic to help with the conception of children. Malevolent witchcraft, on the other hand, was the use of supernatural elements to harm another person, crops, or livestock. Intention was the key, and those who were believed to use malevolent witchcraft generally did so for some kind of personal gain. These constructions of good and bad types of magic allowed people to use spells within the context of benevolent witchcraft. So while the Catholic Church was opposed to witchcraft, it did

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<sup>130</sup> Sally Parkin, “Witchcraft, Women’s Honour and Customary Law in Early Modern Wales,” *Social History* 31, no. 3 (August 2006): 295–318.



permit the use of charms and spells to protect against malignant magic because it believed that it might be the only way that good Christians could protect themselves. The Church, however, eventually came to see all magic as problematic, especially when it came to whether a miracle was divine intervention or the result of magical influences.<sup>131</sup>

The initial tolerance of the church towards witchcraft was the result of what people perceived as the pervasive nature of malevolent forms of magic. The use of effigies, usually made of wax though they could also be constructed from other substances, was believed to have been relatively common. It would have been relatively easy for someone with no magical training to construct a figure of their enemy and stick it with pins.<sup>132</sup> Witchcraft therefore was not considered the domain of a certain type of person. While magic was subdivided into two types, no specific image or identity had been assigned to the people who used magic. Instead, the magic itself had a type of identity. Anyone could potentially use magic to harm another and protecting oneself with magic against malevolent influences was logical. Over time, however, certain types of magic did become associated specifically with women.<sup>133</sup>

Although the Catholic Church did allow the use of charms to ward off malevolent magic, the use of magic did create a problem—at times it could be difficult to tell the difference between divine miracles and magic.<sup>134</sup> Over a long period of time the Church solidified its power and formalized canon law, which made it easier for the Church to appear

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<sup>131</sup> Michael David Bailey, “The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19, no. 1 (2002): 120–34, doi:10.1353/ems.2003.0002.

<sup>132</sup> Christina Hole, “Some Instances of Image-Magic in Great Britain,” in *The Witch Figure: Folklore Essays by a Group of Scholars in England Honouring the 75th Birthday of Katharine M. Briggs*, ed. Venetia Newall (London: Routledge, 2013), 81.

<sup>133</sup> Bailey, “Feminization of Magic,” 124.

<sup>134</sup> Anita Obermeier, “Witches and the Myth of the Medieval Burning Times,” in *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen J. Harris and Byron L. Grigsby (New York: Routledge, 2008), 218–30.

to have a uniform stance when it came to certain problems or concepts. These laws, while they were not always enforced, did start the trend towards more severe reactions to witchcraft.<sup>135</sup> Women specifically were extremely vulnerable to the more stringent approach to religion. Seen as morally inferior to their male counterparts, women were believed to be susceptible to the seductions of using malevolent magic.<sup>136</sup> Because women were seen as not being as morally fixed in their beliefs, the theory that they would turn to magic for personal gain seemed logical, and the perceived moral shortcomings of the female gender were incorporated into the construction of malevolent witchcraft. Women accused of witchcraft during this period were charged with causing famine and infertility as well as holding unnatural influence over men.<sup>137</sup>

Two of those charges are directly linked with female sexuality and female identity. In a way, the construction of the malevolent witch as a woman who took fertility away from other women created two identities for women. One identity was that of the good wife, whose duty it was to produce children, and the other was that of the woman who willfully destroyed the primary directive of her own gender. In a sense, the witchcraft construction was an antithesis to how women were meant to behave. They were meant to want children, and they were not supposed to ensnare the feelings of men who were promised to other people or who were already married. Therefore, the negative construction of certain female tendencies or behaviors became linked with malevolent magic, and served to explain why good women sometimes experienced infertility and the loss of their husband's affections.

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<sup>135</sup> Linda E. Mitchell, "Women and Medieval Canon Law," in Linda E. Mitchell, *Women in Medieval Western European Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 143-55.

<sup>136</sup> Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 195-222.

<sup>137</sup> Karen Jones and Michael Zell, "'The Divels Speciall Instruments': Women and Witchcraft Before the 'Great Witch-Hunt,'" *Social History* 30, no. No. 1 (February 2005): 45-63.

The charges of causing infertility and ensnaring the affections of men came to be applied to women who did not fit easily into the societal roles assigned to them, which was similar to how other minority groups were treated at the time. Often a constructed identity might be placed onto a group, like Jews or lepers, but when that group failed to embody that constructed identity, there was a clash between the cultures. Women in particular were vulnerable to constructed identities being placed upon them, because if their actions came to be questioned by the people around them and seen as problematic, they could be labeled a witch—a way of dealing with the problem without addressing the reasons why a woman might not fit into certain roles.<sup>138</sup>

At the end of the medieval period, beliefs about witches once again shifted slightly, and the idea of the coven was introduced. It was believed that witches would gather together, much like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, and during these meetings they would summon the devil, perform malevolent spells, eat kidnapped children, and desecrate holy objects. Added to these beliefs was the strong suspicion that these women were sexual deviants and had congress with demons and the devil.<sup>139</sup> The new construction of the witch deviates from the concept that a malevolent witch was a construction of the negative traits associated with women.

The concept that women would eat abducted children, which would have been considered contrary to how a woman should react to a child, does appear to fit into the other tradition, but it also is linked with blood libel tales about the Jews. In these stories, a

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<sup>138</sup> Elspeth Whitney, “Witches, Saints, and Other ‘Others’: Women and Deviance in Medieval Culture,” in Mitchell, *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, 297.

<sup>139</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, “The First Wave of Trials for Diabolical Witchcraft,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159-79.

kidnapped child would be tortured, and eventually killed by a malevolent Jew, and some stories do involve cannibalism.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, this new construction of witchcraft, while associated with women, also played into wider societal fears of cannibalism and sexual deviancy which were not necessarily directly linked to women, but to any group that was considered 'other' within a Christian society.

While the new construction of the malevolent witch played into fears within society, at first many people were suspicious of the newer theories about witches. Heinrich Kramer (ca. 1430-1505), the author of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, came to fervently believe that only women could be true witches. Before he wrote his most famous work, he spent some time in Innsbruck accusing local women of witchcraft only to be driven out of the city because people were tired of him bothering their wives and daughters.<sup>141</sup> This shows that while people were able to accept the new construction of the malevolent witch, and fuse it with older attitudes directed at minorities, they were less willing to accept accusations made against people they knew and cared about, especially when those people were not obviously conducting their lives in ways that appeared contrary to society. Group accusations of witchcraft, therefore were still difficult to prosecute, unless there was something about the women who were accused that troubled society.

The concept of the witch changed substantially over the medieval and early modern period. It transitioned from a de-gendered concept surrounding malignant influences that were meant to cause harm, to a gendered construction based around negative female attributes, and finally incorporated many actions that had been attributed to minority groups

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<sup>140</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 32-45.

<sup>141</sup> Broedel, "To Preserve the Manly Form from so Vile a Crime," 138.

in earlier times. The early flexibility of the witchcraft construction allowed it to be used in court cases in a way that often enabled women to escape execution; however, by the time that the construction of the coven was firmly in place, it became far more difficult for women to come away from witchcraft accusations with their lives.<sup>142</sup>

### Women and the Constructed Identity of a Witch

For many women in the medieval period, being accused of witchcraft was not a death sentence. Many realized that if they adopted certain tactics they could get off with doing penance, or without any punishment at all. Some never even were brought to trial, but managed to wait out the crisis that had precipitated the accusation and return to society. That is not to say that all women escaped execution, because some were killed, but when it came to accusations of witchcraft being used in conjunction with politics, women often were able to find ways of saving themselves—even if it did damage their reputations.

In 1441 Eleanor Cobham, the duchess of Gloucester, and Margery Jourdemayne, a common woman, were put on trial for conspiring to use witchcraft to kill the King, Henry VI. Margery, who was commonly known as the Witch of Eye next Westminster, had been on trial before for witchcraft, and had confessed and been let go on the condition that she no longer perform spells. She was well known, and probably many people at court had sought out her services in the past.<sup>143</sup> That Margery had once before been accused of using witchcraft and had been released indicates that she was not considered a threat. Her possible popularity at court would indicate that she constructed herself as a benevolent magic user,

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<sup>142</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft, Politics, and Memory in Seventeenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 290.

<sup>143</sup> Jessica Freeman, "Sorcery at Court and Manor: Margery Jourdemayne, the Witch of Eye next Westminster," *Journal of Medieval History* 30, no. 4 (December 2004): 343–57, doi:10.1016/j.jmedhist.2004.08.001.

and that her services were used by people who needed charms or healing remedies. Margery choosing to construct a public persona around her magical abilities, shows that while it was not completely safe to do so, it was also not particularly dangerous, if she was careful. However, becoming linked with Eleanor Cobham and accused of conspiring to kill the king with magic, along with the fact that it was her second trial, led to her being condemned to death and burned. Duchess Eleanor's fate was quite different.<sup>144</sup>

Eleanor Cobham was a woman of relatively low birth who had worked as a lady in waiting to the Duke of Gloucester's first wife. He left his wife and married Eleanor, which caused a scandal. The first Duchess of Gloucester managed to maintain a sympathetic identity, which did not help Eleanor's popularity.<sup>145</sup> The first Duchess cast herself as the wronged dutiful wife, while Eleanor was considered ambitious, ruthless and calculating—character traits that become important when considering the accusations of witchcraft against her.<sup>146</sup> While Duke Humphrey of Gloucester's first wife was able to maintain an image of purity and virtue, Eleanor took on the role of the seductress.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, her trial and the accusations of witchcraft against her had less to do with her connection with Margery than with her unpopularity and the unpopularity of her husband. As a possible heir to the throne Humphrey had made a nuisance of himself at the English court and made foreign policy difficult. The English government, in accusing his wife of witchcraft, helped to destroy Humphrey's political career.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Freeman, "Sorcery at Court and Manor," 345.

<sup>145</sup> Marie Harker, "The Two Duchesses of Gloucester and the Rhetoric of the Feminine," *Historical Reflections* 30, no.1 (2004): 111.

<sup>146</sup> Ralph A. Griffiths, "The Trial of Eleanor Cobham: An Episode in the Fall of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 51, no. 2 (1969): 385.

<sup>147</sup> Harker, "The Two Duchesses of Gloucester," 112.

<sup>148</sup> Griffiths, "The Trial of Eleanor Cobham," 387.

At her trial, Eleanor admitted to using magic, but not to harm the king. Instead she claimed that she had been using magic to try to conceive a child. Because she stuck to this story, admitting the witchcraft, but claiming it was not malevolent, she was found guilty but not of treason and not condemned to death. A fact that John Foxe would discuss in his *Acts and Monuments*,

Sixtlye, it is not to be supposed, if any suche hye treason had bene wrought or pretended agaynste the kings person by these, that eyther the Duches shoulde so escape with bearing a taper and banishment: or that Iohn Hume should be pardoned his life, the fact being so heinous that neyther any durste aske hys pardon nor if it had ben asked, it had not ben like to be granted.<sup>149</sup>

Foxe's comments on Eleanor's trial shows that people after her death understood that the accusations against her were constructed for political reasons and not because of an actual attempt on the king's life. However, these accusations were very successful. Her marriage was dissolved and she was forced to do penance. However, after her trial was over, she was able to be rehabilitated into society, and even though her reputation was damaged, she was still alive, with the possibility of being able to reconstruct her life.<sup>150</sup>

The difference between the outcome of her trial and that of Margery is not surprising. Margery was a chronic magic user who had once before sworn to mend her ways and then had gone back to using spells. While her expertise would have been used by many people seeking magical remedies, her reputation as a magic user who had gotten into trouble before would have made her an easy target. In connecting Margery with Eleanor, the charge that the Duchess had been using magic seemed more plausible. Margery was Eleanor's access to magic, just as Eleanor was Margery's access to the king. Even if neither had any malevolent

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<sup>149</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (HRI Online Publications: Sheffield, 2011).

<sup>150</sup> Freeman, "Sorcery at Court and Manor," 346.

intentions, their connection with each other allowed for both to be accused of witchcraft. Because of the nature of the charge, and because she had been convicted once before, Margery's fate was unlikely to have been anything other than death.

Eleanor Cobham's trial, however, was mostly political. While the courts did take the threat of malevolent magic seriously, for the English government the destruction of Duke Humphrey's political ambitions was extremely important at that particular point in time. Eleanor provided an easy way of taking care of the problem. Her reputation as an ambitious, ruthless, calculating seductress fit into the image of the witch who could manipulate and enthrall men for personal gain, and her inability to construct an identity around herself that would have protected her from slanders only helped to make it easier to place a negative construction like witchcraft onto her person.

The witchcraft construction therefore not only served to nullify her husband's power, but also put Eleanor back into her place. She had transgressed the bonds of marriage and in conjunction with her husband, presented a problem for society. As a woman, and one with a negative reputation, it was easier to attack her directly than it would have been to attack her husband; however, just because she was constructed as a witch and admitted to using magic did not mean that she had to be executed. The death penalty, despite her use of witchcraft, was unnecessary because her power had been destroyed, and her husband's power had likewise been dealt with. Her position and marriage had been taken away from her, which was all that medieval society needed to redress the power balance that she had threatened. And her husband's political endeavors had been tainted by association with his wife, and therefore there was no need to take any further action.



Eleanor Cobham was not the only noblewoman who was accused of witchcraft, and even though her case is unique in that she confessed, it was not uncommon that other women would have to deal with similar accusations, especially when they too were in marriages that society deemed problematic. Elizabeth Woodville and her family also had to contend with witchcraft accusations, and in her case it was more surprising, since at the time she was the queen of England. Elizabeth was a noblewoman who married the king of England, Edward IV, in 1464, in a secret ceremony, which immediately caused problems.<sup>151</sup>

Their marriage was scandalous because Elizabeth was not a royal and more importantly, she had been married before and had children by her first husband—something people thought undesirable in the wife of a king.<sup>152</sup> Politically the marriage was extremely problematic. Edward was a usurper and his place on the throne was not secure, since he was threatened with invasion and the old king, Henry VI, was not yet dead. Edward's marriage contributed to an estrangement with his most valuable supporter, the Earl of Warwick, who led a rebellion against his former ally and put Elizabeth's mother, Jaquetta, on trial for witchcraft.<sup>153</sup>

Jaquetta of Luxembourg was a woman who was easy to point to as socially problematic and therefore a perfect candidate for being constructed as a witch. She had been married advantageously as a young woman to the Duke of Bedford, but her husband died. She then spent a great deal of time lobbying for his estates, which was not uncommon. She was entitled to at least her dowry's worth of property, after his death, and many women had

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<sup>151</sup> John Leland, "Witchcraft and the Woodvilles: A Standard Medieval Smear?," in *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth Century Europe*, ed. Douglas L. Biggs, Sharon D. Michalove, and A. Compton Reeves (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 270-72.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>153</sup> Lucia Diaz Pascual, "Jaquetta de Luxembourg, Duchess of Bedford and Countess Rivers (c.1416-1472)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/101258>.

to lobby for money or land that should have been theirs by right, after their male relatives died. However, eventually she married Elizabeth's father, who was far beneath her in social standing, which did cause a scandal.<sup>154</sup> While a man of high rank could marry a woman from a lower place on the social scale, as the Duke of Gloucester did with Eleanor Cobham, it still did cause some uneasiness, and in some cases scandal among his peers. For a woman to marry a man who was significantly below her in rank, it was doubly problematic, partially because women were generally expected to marry advantageously, for the benefits of their family, and usually these marriages were arranged by their fathers or other male relatives.<sup>155</sup>

Like Eleanor Cobham, Jaquetta did not fit into the approved societal role of a woman. She not only was financially independent, but had made a love match with someone who was unsuitable given her social status. While at the time people were willing to largely ignore her actions, when later her daughter made a similarly unsuitable marriage, though in the opposite direction, suspicions began to appear that would haunt Elizabeth later in life.

At her trial, Jaquetta was accused of using lead effigies to enchant the king and facilitate the marriage to her daughter.<sup>156</sup> The trial, however, went nowhere. King Edward regained power, Warwick was killed, and Jaquetta maintained her innocence. Unlike Eleanor Cobham, Jaquetta did not take the defense that the magic she had used was benevolent and for herself. To have done so would have allowed the possibility of invalidating her daughter's marriage, and she could not risk being constructed as a witch. Using benevolent

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Barbara J. Harris, "A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic Women and Nunneries, 1450-1540," *Journal of British Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 1993): 89-113.

<sup>156</sup> Leland, "Witchcraft and the Woodvilles," 272.

magic was no longer a defense strategy because women's association with magic had begun to shift toward the construction involved in the witch's coven.<sup>157</sup>

While magic was still widely used it had changed. Attempting to divine the future was still widely accepted, and people like the Woodvilles might have used that kind of magic.<sup>158</sup> However, the use of charms for protection and fertility spells was fading away. To Jaquetta, being accused of witchcraft and being found guilty were two different things. She could be accused, but so long as she was not convicted and admitted to nothing, then she could walk away with her reputation more or less intact. While there would be rumors and whispers about her trial, as long as nothing was proved and she maintained a separate image of herself that had nothing to do with witchcraft, then her daughter's position, and her station within society, would be safe.

While Jaquetta was able to escape her trial unscathed, her daughter was not so lucky. After the death of Edward IV, Elizabeth found herself in a precarious position. Her sons were both minors, which meant that they could not solidify their power without the support of the lords. Richard III, perhaps seeing an opportunity, invalidated Edward and Elizabeth's marriage. The marriage "betwixt the above named King Edward and Elizabeth Grey,<sup>159</sup> was made of great presumption, without the knowing or assent of the lords of this land and also by sorcery and witchcraft, committed by the said Elizabeth and her mother, Jacquetta."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Broedel, "To Preserve the Manly Form from so Vile a Crime," 140.

<sup>158</sup> David Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower* (Stroud, U. K.: The History Press, 2011), 150-53.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth father's name was Woodville. Her first marriage was to Sir John Grey, and as his widow she would have been known as Elizabeth Grey; however, she is more commonly referred to as Elizabeth Woodville rather than Elizabeth Grey. Richard II refers to her as Grey, probably to draw attention to her previous marriage.

<sup>160</sup> "Titulus Regius," in John Speed, *History of Great Britaine under the Conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans, Their Originals, Manners, Warres, Coines & Seales: With ye Successions, Lives,*

By using the older witchcraft charges, without evidence or proof, Richard was able to nullify the marriage and declare Elizabeth's children bastards. He also threatened to put Elizabeth on trial, but she was safely ensconced in a church with the claim of sanctuary which put her out of his reach.<sup>161</sup>

Elizabeth stayed in sanctuary until Richard was safely enthroned and her two sons had disappeared from the tower.<sup>162</sup> In staying in sanctuary until late in Richard's reign, Elizabeth protected herself from being put on trial, and also kept her daughters' reputations intact. To validate his claim to the throne, Richard needed to invalidate her marriage, and if she had been available, he would have put her on trial. Even with her marriage invalidated in her absence, by staying away from him and protecting herself, she managed to outlive the dangers posed by the witchcraft accusations, and in doing so, also spared her daughters from being stained with similar slanders.

There is some debate about whether Richard truly believed that Elizabeth had used witchcraft, or if the accusations were merely political.<sup>163</sup> In invalidating her marriage Richard gained the throne, which indicates a political motive, but the lack of a trial to establish guilt is very telling. Elizabeth and her mother both fit into the personal gain image of the witch, and although never found guilty of witchcraft both were treated with suspicion, indicating that although nothing was ever proved definitely against them, people within the

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*Acts & Issues of the English Monarchs from Iulius Caesar, to our Most gracious Soueraigne King Iames* (George Humber: London, 1611), 712-13.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> No one knows what happened to the two princes in the tower, and there are many conspiracy theories surrounding their disappearance, who was responsible and what their eventual fates were.

<sup>163</sup> Leland, "Witchcraft and the Woodvilles," 273.

English nobility were willing to believe that there was something odd about Elizabeth's marriage.<sup>164</sup>

If the suspicions about Elizabeth had not been so widespread, then it would have been more difficult for Richard to invalidate her marriage based on accusations of witchcraft. However, despite people being willing to believe the accusations, when Elizabeth did come out of sanctuary towards the end of Richard's reign, he did not pursue the witchcraft accusation because the threat that she had posed had passed. Her sons had both disappeared, which meant that they would no longer be able to grow up and lay claim to the throne, and her influence over them would be nothing. Her husband was dead, and therefore, he could no longer be influenced by her and there were very few people who were willing to make alliances with her.<sup>165</sup>

In short, whatever political influence she had once had was gone, and whatever threat she might have posed towards Richard was almost completely nullified; therefore, it was no longer necessary to put her on trial. Richard needed to use the witchcraft construction to destroy her power and influence, but after that was completed, and without the need of a trial, there was no need to pursue the matter further and Elizabeth ended up living the rest of her days quietly on one of her estates, with very little damage having been done to her reputation.

In both the Eleanor Cobham and the Woodville cases, accusations of witchcraft were not fatal. While Eleanor was found guilty in a court and Elizabeth was found guilty in public opinion, they both managed to stay alive. Another woman also accused of witchcraft was not

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>165</sup> Apart from Margaret Beaufort who managed to get into contact with Elizabeth when she was in sanctuary and used that to draw up a marriage agreement between her son, the future Henry VII and Elizabeth's daughter, also called Elizabeth. This marriage, however, would have helped to legitimize Henry's claim to the throne, and therefore was in Margaret's best interest, given her political ambitions.

so lucky. Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, was executed on May 19, 1536 for adultery and treason, not for witchcraft. However, she was commonly believed to have bewitched the king, much like Elizabeth Woodville.<sup>166</sup>

Unlike her predecessor, however, Anne's reputation as a witch was based on two distinct images of witches—the personal gain image and the devil's consort image, created by Kramer and others. In a common description of Anne, she had six fingers, a projecting tooth, and a mole on her throat.<sup>167</sup> Such attributes were common in the newer image of the witch, but her motivations were from the earlier construction. Anne was constructed as a woman who bewitched the king for access to power and then used that influence to manipulate him into making decisions that were to her benefit and harmed the English people. This construction of Anne was around even before Henry wanted to get rid of her, and many believed that it was her fault that he decided to break with the Catholic Church.<sup>168</sup> However, after Henry accused his wife of being a witch more attention was paid to her deformities and the rumors about her moral character.<sup>169</sup>

While there was a duality within the accusations levied at Anne between the old and new images, the newer image was more potent. Her motivations were almost taken for granted, with more time going into describing her physical and moral deformities. The focus on the newer image indicates that although power was still considered the motivator behind witchcraft, people were becoming more focused on the physical looks of the witch.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Nicholas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*. ed. David Lewis (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 148-9.

<sup>167</sup> Retha M. Warnicke, "The Physical Deformities of Anne Boleyn and Richard III: Myth and Reality," *Parergon: Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies* n.s.4 (1986): 135-53.

<sup>168</sup> Sander, *Rise and Growth*, 148-9.

<sup>169</sup> Warnicke, "Physical Deformities of Anne Boleyn," 140.

<sup>170</sup> Kieckhefer, "First Wave of Trials," 160.

However, despite the broad acceptance that Anne had bewitched the king, her execution was for treason and adultery, not witchcraft.<sup>171</sup> That her trial was not about witchcraft is very telling. In the past, women like Anne had not been executed for witchcraft, either by avoiding trial altogether, or by admitting to other benevolent uses of magic. While the benevolent witchcraft defense would no longer have worked, Henry VIII still thought that treason was a better, more certain way to get rid of his wife.

Like her predecessors who entered into marriages that were considered socially problematic, Anne was unable to construct for herself a sympathetic public identity. This was partially due to the success that Catherine of Aragon had in her own construction of her public identity, but it also was related to how women who were seen as seductresses were viewed by society. The construction of Anne as a witch figure has persisted, and though the idea that she used magic to ensnare Henry has been pushed aside, she is still generally thought to have been responsible for introducing him to Protestantism, and to being deformed, where there is no proof for either claim.<sup>172</sup> The construction of her as a witch, therefore, was highly successful and her execution only served to turn it into a more sensationalized concept.

In all of these cases, women were accused of witchcraft, and the construction that came with those accusations was placed onto their person. While some of these women were able to leave the courts alive with some damage to their public images, others were able to go free and still others were executed. The outcome of each case depended on the needs of the people pursuing the accusations. If damaging a woman's reputation was all that was needed

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<sup>171</sup> "Roll and File of Court of the Lord High Steward and Peers Principal Defendants and Charges: Queen Anne Boleyn, Sir George Boyleyn Lord Rocheford, High Treason, Adultery, and Incest. National Archives, Kew London, Roll, KB 8/9.

<sup>172</sup> Sander, *Rise and Growth*, 148-9.

to reach a specific goal, as in the case of Eleanor Cobham, than there was no need to push for a death sentence, but if the object of the accusations was to help make it possible to permanently get rid of a woman, as in the case of Anne Boleyn, then death was a necessity.

However, the common thread within all of these cases is the women themselves. Often they were involved in marriages that were considered detrimental to the wellbeing of England and their behavior marked them as non-conventional in their lives. This in itself could just be slightly bothersome to the people around them, but when their lives intersected with political troubles, as happened with Jacquetta, they were accused of witchcraft as a way of diffusing the situation with the least amount of trouble.



## Chapter Four

### Warring Identities: Anne Askew and the Three Constructions

On July 16, 1546 a woman named Anne Askew was burned for heresy.<sup>173</sup> She had been imprisoned and tortured before her execution, and after her death, something strange happened. While the courts had attempted to portray Anne as a woman who was mistaken in her opinions, and dangerous to the faithful, others tried to show her as a martyr to the Protestant cause. Anne for her part managed to smuggle her account of her interrogation out of the Tower, which helped those who wanted to portray her as a martyr, even though aspects of her personality would prove problematic for them.

For Anne, like other women who found themselves on trial,<sup>174</sup> how they were presented and how they chose to try and construct their personalities was important to how they were remembered. In Anne's case, discrediting her and silencing her opinions on religion were important for Henry VIII's government; however, for the people who tried to appropriate her image to further protestant reforms, she was useful as a tragic figure who underwent suffering for the sake of God. In both cases, who Anne was, her character and personality, were not as important as the public image of her that was put forward, something that Anne herself recognized.

In the case of Anne Askew, and other women, public identities were placed upon their persons to achieve specific political goals. Anne, however, is unique in that she constructed her own political image, which did not always fit with how other people attempted to present her. In her writings, Anne chose to present herself in a way that did not

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<sup>173</sup> Susan Kirtley, "Anne Askew's Indirect Ethos," in *Rhetoric in the Rest of the West*, ed. Shane Borrowman, Robert L. Lively, and Marcia Kmetz (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 155.

<sup>174</sup> See Chapter Three on witchcraft constructions.

always match how a Protestant martyr should behave, though she consistently made sure to construct her opinions in ways that made it difficult to prove she was a heretic. It is important to remember that, although Anne was writing about her own experiences, she was very aware of what the probable outcome of her trial would be, and she deliberately made choices that would make her sympathetic to her intended audience.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, there are three constructed identities of Anne that surround her life—all three meant to elicit a specific response from the public.

Anne Askew was born into an upper-class family, with her father being the Sheriff of Lincolnshire and a member of parliament.<sup>176</sup> Although she was well educated, there are indications that Anne was not happy with her home life. Anne was forced to marry her dead sister's fiancé, Thomas Kyme. Although the couple would have two children, it does not appear to have been a happy marriage, with Anne refusing to change her surname from Askew, continuing to sign documents with her maiden name.<sup>177</sup>

Anne's life and her interactions with her husband were not conventional. They did not get along, and Askew kept her family name rather than her husband's, something that was very odd for the time period. When she became interested in Protestantism, her relationship with her husband further deteriorated, and eventually she sought a divorce from him because he was Catholic.<sup>178</sup> This would cause problems for the people who would later attempt to

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Theresa D. Kemp, "Translating (Anne) Askew: The Textual Remains of a Sixteenth-Century Heretic and Saint," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 1999): 1021–45, doi:10.2307/2901834, 1024

use her as a martyr, because it showed her as defiant and self-reliant, things that seemed to trouble male writers about women.<sup>179</sup>

When Bishop Bale published his *Examinations*, he tried to smooth over her problematic relations with her husband. He attempted to make it clear that Askew only sought a divorce after her husband had kicked her out of their home. He wrote that she “sought of the law a divorcement from him, namely and above all, because he so cruelly drove her out of his house in despite of Christ’s verity.”<sup>180</sup> In this statement, Bale is turning the fault for the divorce onto Anne’s husband. To him it was important that Anne was not to blame for the divorce, because the dissolution of a marriage was a rare thing, especially coming from a woman.<sup>181</sup> Anne’s behavior was unconventional for women of her time period, and therefore problematic for those who wanted to present her as a figure to be emulated. Therefore, an excuse for some of her problematic behavior was created, which allowed Anne’s actions to be seen in the best possible light; however, it would be Anne’s outspoken behavior that would get her into trouble with church authorities.

Before Anne was tortured and interrogated in the Tower, she had another trial presided over by the Bishop of London, Edmund Bonner. In 1545, Bonner wrote an abjuration for Anne, one that shows the different constructed identities that were placed onto her person.<sup>182</sup> For many, trials for heresy were terrifying, but to some, especially women, the trials also presented a unique opportunity for them “to speak in the heresy tribunal and defend articles of belief [which] was to exercise a female spiritual authority that countered

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> John Bale, *Select Works of John Bale, D.D. : Bishop of Ossory. Containing the Examinations of Lord Cobham, William Thorpe, and Anne Askewe and the Image of Both Churches*, ed. Henry Christmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 199.

<sup>181</sup> Kirtley, “Anne Askew’s Indirect Ethos,” 156.

<sup>182</sup> Genelle Gertz, “Heresy Inquisition and Authorship, 1400-1560,” in *The Culture of Inquisition in Medieval England*, ed. Mary Catherine Flannery and Katie L. Walter (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 136.

centuries of Christian tradition.”<sup>183</sup> These trials therefore were a kind of battleground in which the judges and bishops were not necessarily seeking the deaths of the people they were prosecuting, but attempting to gain the submission of the defendant in order to bring them back to the Church, while the defendant was able to display their knowledge and understanding of their faith.<sup>184</sup> Within these battles, it was very rare for the defendant to be acquitted unless, like Margery Kempe had done, they were able to present their beliefs as orthodox.

When Anne was arrested for her preaching, the men who interrogated her attempted to get her to recant, or trick her into saying something that they believed was heretical. Anne, however, did not fall into their trap. Anne wrote about an interview with one of her interrogators:

Secondly, he said, that there was a woman which did testify, that I should read, how that God was not in temples made with hands. Then I shewed him the seventh and seventeenth chapter of the Apostles’ Acts, what Stephen and Paul had said therein. Whereupon he asked me, how I took these sentences? I answered, that I would not throw pearls among swine, for acorn were good enough.<sup>185</sup>

Anne, in using specific points within scripture, and then refusing to interpret them for her interrogators, was adopting a tactic that kept her from having words put into her mouth. Demonstrating her knowledge of an orthodox text, while also refraining from interpretation, would have frustrated her interrogators in that she was not incriminating herself.

If she had attempted to elaborate on her beliefs, they would have twisted her words into heresy, but because she relied on the Bible, and kept silent, she managed to avoid implicating herself in false beliefs. Therefore, the judges had to try and get her to recant her

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<sup>183</sup> Genelle Gertz, *Heresy Trials and English Women Writers, 1400–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Introduction.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Bale, *Select Works*, 149.

ideas, but Anne chose not to. She understood her fate, and the probable outcomes, both of recanting and of staying firm.

If she recants, they will make her do so publicly ... in a spectacle reaffirming their disciplinary power over subjects. And if she remains obdurate in her heretical convictions, the authorities will burn her ... in a public spectacle of their own displeasure and retributive power.<sup>186</sup>

The public spectacle that would follow her time in the Tower, and her other trial headed by Bishop Bonner, could not be avoided, but Askew knew that she could help to spin her image. She understood that those who questioned her would attempt to portray her as “recalcitrant and obstinate in her heresy.”<sup>187</sup> The court would then attempt to appear as a benevolent force that had rehabilitated Askew.<sup>188</sup> This would justify their treatment of her and damage the memory that she would leave behind.

In her trial with Bonner, he wrote an abjuration which from his standpoint would have shown that Anne was a heretic. However, Anne managed to take that document and twist it to her own advantage. Abjurations were usually written in English, to demonstrate that the defendant, who might not know any Latin, could understand the contents.<sup>189</sup> These abjurations sometimes prodded people into writing their own accounts of their beliefs that were separate from the court records, in order to clarify what they actually believed. Therefore, these abjurations, which were written in the first person to implicate the defendant, and the documents drafted in reaction to them, illustrate the battle that went on between defendants and prosecutors over how heretical beliefs were presented.<sup>190</sup> Askew would enter into this type of battle herself. She would not only write an account of her

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<sup>186</sup> Kemp, “Translating (Anne) Askew,” 1038.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 1023.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 1025-6.

<sup>189</sup> Gertz, “Heresy Inquisition and Authorship, 1400-1560,” 133.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 130-1.

experiences under her interrogators, but would also take the unusual step of amending the abjuration that was written for her.<sup>191</sup>

When presented with an abjuration in her first trial, Anne made amendments to it that make it appear that she did not hold heretical beliefs.<sup>192</sup> However, there are two versions of her abjurations that were circulated at the time. Her amended abjuration was printed in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, which differs from the previous ones in circulation.<sup>193</sup> There is another abjuration that can be found in Bonner's register. This abjuration is not signed and does not contain any amendments from Anne. This abjuration was not added to the register at the time of her first trial, but appeared during her second trial when she had been in the Tower. It is therefore likely that Bonner kept a clean copy of the abjuration and placed it into the records when it became obvious that Anne would not be reconciled with the church.<sup>194</sup>

In choosing to make amendments to the abjuration presented to her, Anne made a conscious decision to fight her heresy charges. She was not only attempting to illustrate her own beliefs, but also understood what precisely caused certain ideas to be heretical and which ideas were orthodox. As she would later do with her interrogators in the Tower, she recognized that allowing someone else to draft her ideas and commit them to paper could lead to her being misunderstood or constructed as another misguided woman. In writing her abjuration, Bonner was attempting to construct Anne in a certain way and to show that her heresy was a problem for the church, as her interrogators in the Tower would also attempt to do; however, the court managed to both damage its own image and allow Askew to shape her own.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 136

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 137.

During her time under interrogation in the Tower, Askew was subjected to torture. She was the first woman to be illegally rack-tortured and then executed for heresy, though she was not the only woman to suffer this fate. However, she was the only one to leave behind a written record of her ordeal.<sup>195</sup> In her account of being tortured, Anne presents herself as strong and resistant to the pain that she experienced.

Then they did put me on the rack, because I confessed no ladies nor gentlewomen to be of my opinion, and thereon they kept me a long time. And because I lay still and did not cry, my lord Chancellor and master Rich, took pains to rack me with their own hands, till I was nigh dead.<sup>196</sup>

Within her retelling of her ordeal, Anne makes the decision to portray herself as being brave and not crying out when racked. While it is unlikely that she was able to undergo torture without making some noise, the image that she creates is what is important.<sup>197</sup>

Anne was attempting to cast herself into the role of a martyr who suffered for her faith and did so willingly and bravely. For her intended audience, this would have been a very powerful image, and would have helped her to gain support. While she was aware that she would be executed at the end of her ordeal, her writings gave her the opportunity not only to show the world that she was not a heretic, but also to construct an image of herself that would contradict the one set forward by the courts. Being tortured brought Askew public sympathy and called the courts' role as 'rehabilitators' into question, which also damaged their ability to characterize her as a heretic.<sup>198</sup> It was her writings, however, that garnered the most attention.

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<sup>195</sup> Tarez Samra Graban, "Feminine Irony and the Art of Linguistic Cooperation in Anne Askew's Sixteenth-Century Examinacions," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 387.

<sup>196</sup> Bale, *Select Works*, 224.

<sup>197</sup> Kirtley, "Anne Askew's Indirect Ethos," 162.

<sup>198</sup> Kemp, "Translating (Anne) Askew," 1028.

Anne was able to smuggle her account of her interrogation out of the Tower, and it eventually found its way into the hands of John Bale, a Protestant bishop.<sup>199</sup> In 1546 Bale had the work published under the title the *Examinations*, but not unedited.<sup>200</sup> Adding his own commentary, Bale constructed a new image of Askew, one that could be used as a Protestant martyr. He was not alone in doing this sort of thing:

Reformist hagiographers show themselves no less likely than court conservatives to appropriate representations of the executed women to their own ends, rewriting Askew as a female saint of their movement and a compelling image of the power of faith over secular government.<sup>201</sup>

In appropriating Askew's work, Bale attempted to show her as a weak woman that had been made strong by God.<sup>202</sup>

If ye mark well these two examinations of Anne Askewe, ye shall find in her and her other three companions, besides other who the bishops in our time and afore hath brent, the express tokens that Christ sealeth his martyrs with. They appeared as sheep among wolves. They were thrown in strong prison. They were brought forth into councils and synagogues. Their answers were out of God's Spirit (as herein appeareth), and not out of their own.<sup>203</sup>

This image was not uncommon for women martyrs that found strength through their faith in the face of adversity. However, it did not fit with Anne's personality.

Anne was a strong woman who had deemed her husband an unsuitable partner because of their religious differences. The tactics she describes employing against her interrogators also make it seem unlikely that she was a weak woman who was made strong through the intervention of God.<sup>204</sup> However, Bale manages to "transform Askew into a

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Graban, "Feminine Irony and the Art of Linguistic Cooperation in Anne Askew's Sixteenth-Century Examinacyons," 389.

<sup>201</sup> Kemp, "Translating (Anne) Askew," 1029.

<sup>202</sup> Bale, *Select Works* 193-4.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>204</sup> Kemp, "Translating (Anne) Askew," 1029.



mere conduit for a battle between male figures, the Henrician Conservatives and God.”<sup>205</sup>

Bale was more interested in the possible use that a Protestant martyr could have for further reforms in England than he was in the true identity of Anne. In her writings, he found aspects that would help the Protestant cause and used those to his advantage, even though Anne did have some problematic personality traits that he chose to downplay.

During her interrogations, Bale attempts to silence Anne, making her a silent martyr, which would have been more palatable for some readers.<sup>206</sup> However, Anne used many different devices against her interrogators, choosing not always to remain silent.<sup>207</sup> When her interrogator asked her questions about transubstantiation she wrote that:

Then he compared it unto the king, and said, that the more his majesty’s honour is set forth, the more commendable it is. Then said I, that it was an abominable shame unto him to make no better of the eternal word of God than of his tenderly conceived fantasy. Far other meaning requireth God therein, than men’s idle wit can devise, whose doctrine is but lies without his heavenly verity. Then he asked me, if I would confer with some wise man? That offer, I said, I would not refuse.<sup>208</sup>

In this statement, Anne is snarky. She is not showing herself to be demure or a silent martyr, but someone who is willing to challenge other people, even the king, if she did not believe in what they said. She also implies that her interrogator was not a wise or intelligent man, which was perhaps not a wise strategy. However, in presenting her interrogation in such a way, she was intentionally placing herself into a position that would be sympathetic to Protestant reformers.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Bale, *Select Works*, 154.

<sup>207</sup> Kemp, “Translating (Anne) Askew,” 1029.

<sup>208</sup> Bale, *Select Works*, 205.

In characterizing herself as being able to outwit her interrogators, and unafraid to express opinions about the king, Anne was attempting to illustrate the foolishness of the people around her, especially in one instance.

Besides this, my lord Mayor laid one thing unto my charge which was never spoken of me, but of them: and that was, whether a mouse eating the host received God, or no? This question did I never ask; but, indeed they asked it of me, whereunto I made them no answer, but smiled.<sup>209</sup>

Unlike in her previous response to her examiner, she does not reply with anything witty in this instance. Instead, she allows her silence to illustrate how silly the question is to her, and how other educated people would also find it amusing.

Anne used many different ways of responding to her interrogators, and some of them did involve silence, but not in the way that Bale implied. Instead, her silence was a rhetorical device to show the silliness of her interrogators. The many different approaches that she used exemplify how skilled she was at constructing a persona on paper.

That Askew chose to respond scripturally to these interrogations exemplifies her learnedness and fortitude; that she chose to respond ironically, or not to respond at all, could exemplify her participation in such feminine rhetorical strategies as taking an oath of silence, invoking formal styles of argument, and using humor as a form of evasion.<sup>210</sup>

Anne was always conscious of her public image, and how what she said could be used against her, so she was very cautious in her answers to the interrogators, sometimes not answering, or giving them riddles to work out.<sup>211</sup> Mindful of how she could be constructed

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>210</sup> Graban, "Feminine Irony and the Art of Linguistic Cooperation in Anne Askew's Sixteenth-Century Examinations," 388.

<sup>211</sup> Kemp, "Translating (Anne) Askew," 1038-40.

to further the political ends of her enemies, Anne was careful in her writings to project herself towards a Protestant audience.<sup>212</sup>

Anne managed to resist her interrogators' attempts to damage her reputation. While they did create an identity around her, their construction was not as influential as Bale's and even though he used her writings for his own cause, Anne's voice is still present in the *Examinations*. Interestingly however, the depiction of her execution in a woodcut is surprisingly neutral.

The anonymous woodcut titled *The Order and Manner of the Burning of Anne Askew, John Lacels, John Adams, Nicholas Belenian, with certayne of the Councell*, shows the execution of Anne Askew, but it is very interesting in that it does not try to elicit a certain reaction towards the condemned.<sup>213</sup> Anne and the others condemned are in the center of the woodcut, but they are indistinguishable from each other. One figure is not clearly female or different from the others. This is surprising, given that other works of art use female figures in ways that are meant to provoke reactions.

The anonymous *The Slaughter of Zutphen* shows both men and women being executed.<sup>214</sup> Not being a woodcut but a plate, the figures are somewhat more defined, and the men and women are very distinct from each other. The plate depicts the actions of the Duke of Alva against Protestants in the Netherlands.<sup>215</sup> Despite the different country of origin from the woodcut of Anne Askew, the treatment of women in distress in artwork was mostly universal and this particular example helps to illustrate the differences between how men and

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 1041.

<sup>213</sup> Within the *Actes and Monuments* no artist is named for this woodcut. It is simply printed with its title. See Figure Three.

<sup>214</sup> See Figure Four.

<sup>215</sup> Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155.

women were constructed when it came to martyrdom. The drawing shows men and women who are mostly stripped of clothing being pushed off a ledge into a frozen river. The men in the drawing seem resigned to their fate and not particularly fearful, whereas the women look at their attackers with obvious terror.

**The order and maner of the burning of Anne Askew, Iohn Lacels,  
Iohn Adams, Nicholas Belenian, with certayne of the Councell  
sitting in Smithfield.**



*Figure Three: Anon., The Order and Manner of the Burning of Anne Askew, John Lacels, John Adams, Nicholaps Belenian, with certayne of the Councell (1548). Taken from John Foxe, Actes and Monumentes of the Church, 1563 ed.*



*Figure Four: Anon., The Slaughter of Zutphen (1620). Courtesy of Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.*

Their appearance is also very different. While both men and women are stripped, except for a piece of cloth to cover their groins, the men appear humble, almost penitent, while the women seem earthy. Their breasts are uncovered and their hair is loose, which seems to add to a sense of fear that comes from these figures. This is very deliberate. Women being portrayed as victims of violence was common and was meant to provoke certain

emotions or feelings. The men who meet their fates as martyrs, and the women who have to suffer under the barbarous attacks of vicious men, elicit sympathy from the onlooker.<sup>216</sup>

While visually different, the figures are meant to provoke the same response from those viewing the plate, which makes the woodcut of Anne Askew very odd.

If it was meant to be read as Protestant propaganda, the decision not to focus on Anne as a martyr figure and to clearly define her within the woodcut is puzzling. Similarly, if the woodcut was meant as Catholic propaganda then again it does not make sense that Anne is not clearly defined, for there were ways of making her into a demonic figure as well. Instead the woodcut does something very odd. It points out the public spectacle of an execution as the primary focus of the scene. The woodcut then underscores the main conflict within Anne's trial and execution.

During her interrogation Anne had to fight to maintain her public identity in the way that she wanted it to be seen, and two groups attempted to construct and claim her public identity after her death. To both groups, spectacle mattered. For the conservatives, the spectacle of killing a heretic brought them good publicity and reaffirmed their power, whereas for the reforming Protestants, the spectacle of a godly woman, who had been tortured, being burned gained them sympathy and brought validity to their cause. The woodcut then shows that what was important was not really the executions, but the draw of the crowds to such places; at the same time, it also shows how contradictory the separate images of Anne were.

While she has come to be remembered more as the Protestant martyr than an unabashed heretic, both characterizations of Anne are not completely accurate. In Bale's

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

highly edited treatment of her writing, her real personality does come through, and sometimes conflicts with the image of her that he was trying to show the world. Anne did attempt to construct her own public image; however, because men like Bale saw an opportunity within her story, the construction that she created became somewhat distorted.

Anne was not interested in political power, but wanted to help shape the religion of England. Her beliefs might have clashed with the conservatives within Henry's court, but she understood that if she was able to maintain her image as a religious and spiritual woman, then her beliefs would not be stigmatized by fellow Protestants. While she was not able to fully maintain her constructed identity in the way that she would have wanted, she still became known as a Protestant martyr.

## Chapter Five

### Comparative Apocalyptic Identities During the Reign of Elizabeth Tudor

Following the break with the Catholic Church, England underwent rapid changes. While the religion remained close to the Catholic faith, the break with Rome created a rift between England and other orthodox nations. This rift is most visible in the relationship between Spain and England which culminated in the rhetoric of Philip II and Elizabeth Tudor, especially around the failed invasion of the Armada. Philip, when he talked about the invasion of England and other campaigns, used messianic rhetoric to justify his actions, and often ignored the advice of the people around him, sometimes with disastrous results. Elizabeth also perpetuated the notion that she had a special relationship with God, and people supporting both monarchs attempted to portray their nations as truly godly and divinely favored.

This rhetoric was highly influenced by apocalyptic ideas and principles. Within England apocalyptic rhetoric, and how it was employed in literature and plays, came to represent how the people saw the position of their nation. The playwright William Shakespeare used apocalyptic rhetoric and imagery to portray England as a nation favored by God and true in its faith, sometimes with the result that he demonized other nations, allying them with the whore of Babylon and the Antichrist. Shakespeare's work is just one instance of such usage of apocalyptic rhetoric; however, many used expectations about the end of days to try to portray England, and especially Elizabeth, as chosen by God.

Elizabeth, as the queen of England, came to stand for the nation, something that she encouraged, and in doing so, she picked a very specific religious trope to give herself legitimacy. She chose to portray herself as a virgin, a figure that has a great deal of meaning



within the Book of Revelation and Christianity as a whole. In perpetuating this image of virginity, Elizabeth crafted her own apocalyptic image, one that Philip and others attempted to destroy; however, the Tudor image, though imperfect, came to embody what it meant to be English.

### Whores and Virgins

Within the Book of Revelation, there are two types of women—whores and virgins. These representations are more metaphorical than literal. The women who are regarded as whores by the writer are the ones who have agency and bring about the destruction of the men around them. The virginal figures, while they might have children, are seen as semi-divine and lack any form of real agency. “Some of the images/symbols in those stories portray vivacious, intelligent women who control not only congregations but empires. Other female images feature beautifully dressed women who have no control over themselves, their offspring, or their environment.”<sup>217</sup> The author of Revelation used the trope of sexual power that women could hold over men to show negative power and to make the women appear unsavory. Therefore the Whore of Babylon and Jezebel embody the negative effects that the author perceives around women who were associated with power.<sup>218</sup>

Jezebel, a false prophetess, misleads Christians, eats food meant to be sacrificed to idols, and tempts men into fornication. However, it is not her diet or teachings but her sexual practices that are most vehemently attacked. She is given the opportunity to do penance for her sins, but she does not repent her fornication, transgressions not being mentioned.<sup>219</sup> To this the author wrote “behold, I will cast her into a bed: and they that commit adultery with

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<sup>217</sup> Marla J Selvidge, “Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse,” *Neotestamentica* 26, no. 1 (January 1992): 158.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Revelation 2: 20-23.

her shall be in very great tribulation, except they do penance from their deeds.” While Jezebel taints the men who come in contact with her, they are able to alleviate their sins through repentance and penance—something that she never achieves, and the author even says that he will kill her children, which are the results of her sexual transgressions.<sup>220</sup>

The Whore of Babylon is a similar figure, for she also gains power through her sexuality. Seen in rich clothing and riding a great beast, she has tempted kings and therefore wielded influence over them: “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication. And they who inhabit the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her whoredom.”<sup>221</sup> Both women exhibit agency, and both also pose a threat to men’s chastity, threatening their adherence to their faith. Earlier the author wrote “these are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins.”<sup>222</sup> The tone of this statement implies that even sexual relations that are within the bounds of marriage dirty men and make them less holy. Men are tempted away from the spiritual pursuit of true Christianity by the sexual allure of women, even when those relationships are sanctioned by faith. Within this context, though, it is not explicitly women like Jezebel that are the problem, but all women are seen as defiling influences. Women therefore are regarded as the agents of men’s fall and the source of their heresy from the true Christian faith, as well as distracting influences from pious devotion.

In contrast with these women is the image of a woman clothed in the sun. She, though she is pregnant, is a virginal figure. She is never shown displaying any agency and instead must rely on outside forces to save her from danger.<sup>223</sup> “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that there they should feed her, a

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Revelation 17:2.

<sup>222</sup> Revelation 14:4.

<sup>223</sup> Selvidge, “Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse,” 162.

thousand two hundred sixty days.”<sup>224</sup> God comes to her aid and protects her, which is something that is not seen with Jezebel or the Whore. This woman evokes images of the Virgin Mary and her child, which is immediately taken into heaven and is destined to rule over the world.<sup>225</sup> However, the woman has no influence over her child and must flee on her own from the dragon. The virgin figure, therefore, is one of religious purity, and women especially could not be active agents within this context.<sup>226</sup> Women who did hold agency were seen as threats to male sovereignty and shown as weaknesses in their faith, whereas women who had to rely on outside forces to guide them and protect them from danger were regarded as vessels for the creation of potentially good men.

In this relationship, women were seen as possibly polluting influences that could bring down the spirituality of men, and even nations—a relationship that becomes relevant when discussing the Reformation in England. The dynamic between the fear of female agency and the veneration of the virgin was widely accepted and allowed actions to be taken that would limit female power.<sup>227</sup> Though some women managed to avoid negative portrayals of their relationships with power, others found themselves used as scapegoats for political schemes.

### Disturbances in England

When Henry VIII first broke with the Catholic Church, anger was directed not at him, but at Anne Boleyn. She came to be seen as a witch-like figure, who seduced the king into

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<sup>224</sup> Revelation, 12:7.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> While the author of Revelation might have believed that women could not be active agents in a religious context and many people also mimicked that belief, there were a great many women who used their faith, visions and so forth to enter into realms of politics and church reform, where they would usually not have been welcomed. See Chapters One and Two for more details.

<sup>227</sup> Anne Laskaya, “The Feminized World of Divine Violence: Texts and Images of the Apocalypse,” in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 299-300.

heretical practices.<sup>228</sup> After her death, her role of corruption was taken over by Henry's advisors and their maneuvering and shady interactions kept Henry from reconciling with the Catholic Church, even when he desired to do so.<sup>229</sup> Henry is portrayed as a monarch without real agency, being pushed about both by the witch, Anne Boleyn, and by his duplicitous advisors.

Strangely, when Elizabeth, Anne's daughter, came to the throne, a similar situation arose in the Ridolfi Plot, where people believed that once Elizabeth had been removed from the negative influence of her advisors, she would be reconciled with the Catholic faith.<sup>230</sup> The habit of blaming outside influences for the behavior of the monarch was not uncommon. The idea that once 'bad influences' were removed the monarch would behave in a more rational and appropriate manner was not unique to the Tudors. However, this concept had little to do with the reality of either Tudor's reign, giving agency to Anne that she did not really possess, and taking it away from Elizabeth when she actually did wield enormous power.

For people outside and inside of England, however, it was easier to have Henry VIII be influenced by the witch-like Anne than to accept that their monarch was solely responsible for unpopular decisions. This also allowed for the possibility that the Catholic faith might be restored to the nation, which many writers who demonized Anne, and later Elizabeth, wanted. This hope during the reign of Elizabeth eventually became untenable. Elizabeth as a

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<sup>228</sup> Christopher Highley, "'A Pestilent and Seditious Book': Nicholas Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani* and Catholic Histories of the Reformation," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68, nos. 1–2 (March 2005): 11–15.

<sup>229</sup> Nicholas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, trans. David Lewis (London: Burns & Oates, 1877) 148–9.

<sup>230</sup> Geoffrey Parker, "The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II of Spain: The Prothero Lecture," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 12 (2002): 189.

Protestant queen, wielding her own power and pushing her own religious agenda, therefore became a very dangerous threat.

What was most alarming... was that women were no longer just conduits of heresy but also, in the person of Elizabeth, its very fountainhead. Catholic writers saw Elizabeth's triumph as the ultimate heretical woman-on-top as the inevitable consequence of Henry's double repudiation of Catherine and the pope and the subsequent disruptions of religion, family and gender.<sup>231</sup>

To Catholic sympathizers, Anne had been the conduit by which Henry had been corrupted. Much like the Whore of Babylon, or Jezebel, Anne was seen as the woman who exerted sexual power to pull Henry into heresy. However, her power was reliant on her ability to keep the king enthralled with her person, and therefore there was hope that her influence would be destroyed when she was removed. As a conduit, she might wield power, but it was limited in its effects and her range of influence was also limited.

Elizabeth, however, was seen as the very center of the heretical movement. Her influence did not depend on her ability to sexually ensnare men, which threatened the old apocalyptic stereotype that women with agency had to be guilty of sexual transgressions. This does not mean that Elizabeth was not branded as a Jezebel—she was—only that the relationship was different.

Nicholas Sander wrote a history of the English schism. As a Catholic, he believed that Henry had been misled by Anne Boleyn and his advisors. Sander also believed that England could be made Catholic once more. So while he portrayed Henry as a misguided, though extremely cruel monarch, he believed that Henry truly wished to be reunited with the true faith and that the succession of Edward harmed England because the boy did not try to

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<sup>231</sup> Highley, ““A Pestilent and Seditious Book,”” 16.

restore Catholicism.<sup>232</sup> However, he applauded Mary Tudor for her actions as monarch and when she faced rebellion, he wrote that she overcame her enemies “not so much by the valour of her troops as by her own admirable faith.”<sup>233</sup> Mary, therefore, like the virgin from the Book of Revelation, is guided and protected by God. Her forces and her ability to deploy them are not what saves her kingdom but her faith in the Almighty.

His treatment of Elizabeth, however, is hostile. He takes great pains to assure his readers that Elizabeth is a bastard.<sup>234</sup> Through his understanding of the law, and how Henry VIII arranged his will and the order of succession, Sander argues that Elizabeth had no legal right to the throne. “The marriage of Anne ... could not be valid, and her issue must be bastard, and incapable, naturally, of succeeding in any way according to the municipal law, which gives bastards no title to the crown of England: and to this day this law has not been repealed even by Elizabeth herself.”<sup>235</sup> Sander attempts to discredit Elizabeth not only by branding her a heretic, but also by showing that she had no legal right to the throne of England. More troubling to Sander, however, was Elizabeth’s assuming the position as head of the Anglican Church.

He argues that women are not allowed to be the head of churches: that they are forbidden from doing so because women were created from men and therefore were always meant to be subject to men.<sup>236</sup> His imagery about the place of women within the church is very similar to the images shown in the Book of Revelation. While his arguments are not overtly apocalyptic, he uses the archetypes created for women within Revelation to explain

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<sup>232</sup> Sander, *Rise and Growth*, 148-9.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

the heresies of Elizabeth.<sup>237</sup> Mary, who was of the Catholic faith, is shown relying on her piety for salvation against her enemies. Her connection with God therefore protected her from harm, but also made her an acceptable female monarch who took a husband and attempted to restore the proper faith. Elizabeth, however, a heretic in Sander's eyes and an unmarried woman, became allied with Satan.<sup>238</sup>

Because Elizabeth wielded power that Sander found troubling, he cast her into the role of a woman who was allied with evil. While he does not overtly call her a whore, he pulls on this larger tradition of women who led men into sin, like Eve had done in the Garden of Eden. The power that Elizabeth wields, and her ability to act with agency, therefore troubled him. While he was able to downplay Mary's agency and replace it with piety, he uses Elizabeth's capabilities as a sign that she is a malignant force that was dangerous to the souls of the people around her. Sander's view of Elizabeth, however, was not universal, even within Catholic communities, especially when it came to England's relationship with Spain.

#### The Armada

Philip II initially was more tolerant towards Elizabeth. He had been married to her older sister, Mary Tudor, and tried to restore England to the Catholic faith. However, this attempt failed, with Mary becoming increasingly unpopular as she burned Protestants, and Philip eventually becoming the target of assassination attempts.<sup>239</sup> When Elizabeth came to the throne, Philip continued to believe that England could become a Catholic nation once more, and even tried to marry Elizabeth, which did not work out.<sup>240</sup> He maintained his

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 238-240.

<sup>239</sup> Parker, "The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II of Spain," 184.

<sup>240</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 21-25.

interest in England, and when the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth, Philip was upset that he had not been consulted because he believed that he knew more about the situation in England than any other European power at the time.<sup>241</sup>

While his interest in England would never diminish, his toleration of Elizabeth eventually did, partially because of problems with English pirates.<sup>242</sup> However, his ability to take action against England was hampered by his messianic visions. Philip believed that he had a special relationship with heaven, and relied on God to ensure his victories.<sup>243</sup> This was not unique to his relationship with England. His interactions with the Turks and other groups showed similar beliefs. Philip truly believed that he was a messianic ruler; however, such a title and distinction was problematic.

Messianic imperialism seldom lasts long, however. Although it gains strength when it runs in harmony with other considerations—dynastic, economic, religious—it proves difficult to sustain when Time perversely refuses to stop, or when the designate world conqueror fails to achieve his goals.<sup>244</sup>

As long as Philip was able to win and continue to expand his empire, he could claim a special relationship with God and encounter little resistance. However, when his messianic vision failed, his reputation became damaged.

In the conflicts with England, Philip ignored his advisors and relied on God to ensure victory, a decision that proved unwise.<sup>245</sup> The Armada was destroyed, mostly by hurricanes and then by the cunning of Sir Francis Drake, which gave Elizabeth a chance to turn Philip's

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<sup>241</sup> Parker, "The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II of Spain," 185.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-9.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-80.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.



failure into her success.<sup>246</sup> Strangely, after this failure, Philip remained convinced that he could still take over England and unseat Elizabeth.

For the rest of his reign, he strove to topple Elizabeth Tudor, sending two more Armadas. In each case, he counted on God to overcome logistical deficiencies with a miracle and dismissed the objections of his admirals with messianic statements.<sup>247</sup>

Philip truly believed that he was a messianic ruler, much like the one that was prophesied to come in the Book of Revelation. However, his reliance on God for the success of his ventures proved problematic. When Philip took on the role of the messianic ruler, he then placed Elizabeth as his nemesis, or aligned her with the forces of evil against Christians. This idea played into the larger Catholic response to Elizabeth's reign, characterizing her as an apocalyptic entity that had to be defeated by true Catholic Christians. These visions, however, were not able to be carried out, and the competing apocalyptic imagery within England served to create multiple concepts of Elizabeth.

### Apocalyptic England

Henry VIII's reign and the successive reigns of his son and oldest daughter left England in an unstable state. During Henry's reign, religion might one day be closer to Catholic orthodoxy and the next adhere to Protestant doctrine. Under his son Edward VI, the kingdom headed in a more puritanical direction, while under Mary Tudor, England was restored to Catholicism, though haphazardly and many people were burned as heretics.<sup>248</sup> The religious uncertainty made the kingdom unstable and provoked anxieties among the English. During this period more 'monstrous births,' or animals and children born with physical disfigurements, were recorded—a phenomenon that people interpreted as a sign of

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 212-13.

<sup>248</sup> John Foxe, "The Lady Elizabeth," in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs Select Narratives*, ed. John N. King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.

the oncoming apocalypse.<sup>249</sup> While it does not seem likely that there were more disfigured births during this time, that people paid more attention to them and applied meaning to these events indicates that they were nervous about the fate of their kingdom and feared what was to come.

Starting with the reign of Henry VIII, literacy and access to books had improved, which also prompted the spread of heretical ideas.<sup>250</sup> People in England were looking around, seeing the destruction of the monasteries by Henry, the burnings by Mary, reading books and coming to conclusions about the fate of their nation. To them, the uncertainty in their religious practices, the conflict within the ruling classes and the violence that came with the rapid shifts between one extreme and another became linked with apocalyptic rhetoric.

After Elizabeth Tudor came to the throne, and the English perceived that the country was stabilizing, the rhetoric began to shift slightly. When looking at English plays from the time of her reign, it becomes clear that while the English people still viewed themselves as at the center of an apocalypse, their position within that destructive envisioning of events had changed to one in which they were divinely favored. This shift pitted the English Protestants against the Pope and other Catholic nations.

During the sixteenth century, the Book of Revelation served as the primary theological source for reformation attacks on the Pope as Antichrist and the Roman Catholic Church as the Whore of Babylon, the tyrannical enslaver of the beleaguered Protestants, who were compared to the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity imposed by King Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Kathryn M. Brammall, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 1 (April 1996), 8.

<sup>250</sup> T. Wilson Hayes, "The Peaceful Apocalypse: Familism and Literacy in Sixteenth-Century England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, no. 2 (July 1986), 132.

<sup>251</sup> Frank R. Ardolino, "'Now Shall I See the Fall of Babylon': 'The Spanish Tragedy' as a Reformation Play of Daniel," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, New Series / Nouvelle Série, 14, no. 1 (January 1990), 49.

While the Protestant English did envision themselves as the oppressed struggling against the forces of evil, they also envisioned themselves in the role of a chosen people who were made special by their brand of faith.

Within Shakespeare's history plays, there are a few figures that are overtly apocalyptic, some interestingly so, and these figures show the sense that people within England had of their own place within the apocalypse. The first figure is Henry V. Shakespeare uses Henry V, or Prince Hal in the two parts of *Henry IV*, to show the perfect Protestant king. This is odd because Henry V would not have been a Protestant ruler, but a Catholic.<sup>252</sup> While Henry V would not have been a Protestant, and would not have been familiar with Protestant teachings, he gives a lecture to Falstaff that is reminiscent of a Calvinist lecture:<sup>253</sup>

I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers; / How ill white hairs become a fool and jester! /... So surfeit-swell'd, so old and so profane; / But being awakened, I do despise my dream. / Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace; / Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape / for thee thrice wider than for other men.<sup>254</sup>

Henry, in this speech, reproaches Falstaff for his way of life and his unrepentant nature. He makes allusion to Falstaff's grave, which is open and there for Falstaff to fall into. The emphasis on Falstaff's girth draws attention to his excesses, something that Calvinists condemned.

Shakespeare's choice to use Henry V as a mouthpiece for Protestant rhetoric has nothing to do with the actual faith of Henry and more to do with the cultural memory of the

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<sup>252</sup> Michael Davies, "Falstaff's Lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in 'Henry IV,'" *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 56, no. 225 (June 2005), 353.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>254</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part II*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare, the Complete Works Second Edition*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). V. 41-8.

prince. Henry V was remembered as a great military leader and one of the best kings in English history, even if his actual behaviors and actions did not always fit with how he was remembered. In this way, Henry became not just a monarch of the past, but ideas of the present could be placed upon him. He transcended time: as a figure that was well loved and recognized by the English, he could be made relevant to audiences that held very different beliefs from the ones that he had.<sup>255</sup>

Prince Hal, in his lecture to Falstaff, presents the concept that one must live a godly life and not wait until the very end to confess.<sup>256</sup> The character of Falstaff understands the doctrine and knows what must be done to live a godly life, and yet he does not reform himself, instead using his knowledge to turn religion into a humorous accomplice to his misbehavior.<sup>257</sup> In this way, Falstaff appears to represent a form of Catholicism. While he is not overtly Catholic, or overtly evil, he does represent a figure who is irreverent, trusting that his sins will be forgiven when he repents in his final hours. This idea of final repentance was more aligned with Catholic doctrine than with the philosophy of Protestants, who believed that one must always live a religious life to be saved—confession would not absolve a person of their sins so easily.

Falstaff, therefore, while not an overtly malevolent figure, is a character who threatens the moral well-being of his fellows, especially Prince Hal, whom he appears to have a very strong influence over. However, when Prince Hal becomes Henry V and is crowned king, he turns on his former friend, giving him a sermon-like lecture.<sup>258</sup> Henry's shift from Falstaff's accomplice to his lecturer therefore represents the Protestant hero

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<sup>255</sup> Davies, "Falstaff's Lateness," 353.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

pushing away the influences of Catholic-like doctrines for the truer faith of Protestantism. While Falstaff's influence through most of the play seems relatively benign and he takes on the role of a friendly rascal who is more bumbling fool than capable trickster, the danger that he posed to young Prince Hal was very real. His misguided approach to religion could cost the people around him their place in heaven and condemn them to hell, so while he might seem relatively benign, the threat that he posed was very real. The triumph of Protestantism over the Catholic-like influence of Falstaff represents a subtle push in the favor of England's religion.

Shakespeare, in appropriating Henry V as a Protestant hero who rejects the inviting influences of Catholicism, reshaped history to fit into a reformist narrative. By making Henry a Protestant hero, he also created a shining character who overthrows malevolent influences and by the end of *Henry V* has reclaimed territory in France, expanding the English empire. However, while Henry V might have become a savior-like figure, bringing England back to the glory of the past, Shakespeare uses this heroic figure to lead into a different play, which he had actually written earlier, where the apocalyptic role of England was more defined and less overtly hopeful.

Within *I Henry VI*, Shakespeare presents the character of Joan of Arc as a witch and aligns her with the figure of the Whore of Babylon. By the end of *Henry V*, the young king had led a successful campaign against the French; however, within *I Henry VI* what the previous king had won had mostly been lost. Joan becomes the center of that loss. She is seen approaching the Dauphin of France and enthraling him with desire.<sup>259</sup> Within the play, there

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<sup>259</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part I*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare, the Complete Works Second Edition*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). I:2. 210-6.

is no doubt that Joan is not only a witch, but closely aligned with destruction, which was something very different from how she was in reality.<sup>260</sup> The disconnect between how Joan was portrayed in the English historical records, which were not favorable, and how Shakespeare chose to have her played on the stage, shows how he constructed apocalyptic rhetoric to reflect the state of English politics at the time.

Shakespeare wrote *I Henry VI* at a time when the Armada was a real threat. For the English people the possibility of being invaded by Spain and overrun by Catholics was something that created a great deal of fear and anxiety.<sup>261</sup> When the Armada was destroyed, the English took it as a sign of their place as a chosen people, but before that people feared what would happen within their country if the Spanish did succeed in their invasion. Shakespeare's play reflects these anxieties, placing conflict with other nations into an apocalyptic form not only to illustrate that England belonged to God's chosen, but also to prepare people for war.

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.<sup>262</sup>

The threat of war and invasion, coupled with apocalyptic rhetoric, gave the English people a cause. Their position as a Protestant nation that stood opposed to the misguided faith of the Catholics was a powerful motivator, but only if they were convinced that Catholicism was dangerous and malignant.

Throughout *I Henry VI*, the English struggle against the French not only on the battlefield but morally as well. Like in the Book of Revelation, sexuality and chastity center

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<sup>260</sup> Patrick Ryan, "Shakespeare's Joan and the Great Whore of Babylon," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, New Series / Nouvelle Série, 28, no. 4 (October 2004), 62.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 56.

the debate about who is one of the elect and who is damned. The English Talbot resists sexual temptations in France and is a chaste figure, while the French Dauphin is enthralled with Joan and therefore corrupted.<sup>263</sup> While Shakespeare uses the formula presented within the Book of Revelation, with Joan taking on the role of the Whore of Babylon, it is important to note that Talbot takes on the role of the woman who gave birth to a son. Talbot also has a son within the play and resists the advances of the French both on the battlefield and in other situations. His chastity therefore marks him as someone who is close to God, and unlike the woman figure in the Book of Revelation, he does have agency, though in the end he dies tragically because of Joan, despite the English eventually being successful in their campaign.<sup>264</sup>

Talbot dying because of the work of a malevolent figure like Joan evokes a very powerful sentiment. The good Englishman, who was correct in his faith, is killed as a result of the actions of one of the Antichrist's agents. To the English, this scene would have had strong resonance, showing the destruction that forces outside of England could inflict on the nation if they invaded. Good men were not spared in the conflict of the apocalypse, but could be destroyed by the agents of evil. However, Joan's defeat, trial and execution show the eventual triumph of the English over the forces that threatened to destroy them.

At a time when Elizabeth's troops are fighting for the Protestant cause in France, Shakespeare represents Joan as an avatar of the Great Whore to arouse a sense of national pride that valiant English knights have sacrificed themselves in a battle against the ungodly forces of the Catholic France.<sup>265</sup>

The English, therefore, had to be prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Protestantism and to fight against the malevolent forces of the Catholics.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>264</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part I*, V: 5. 1-109.

<sup>265</sup> Ryan, "Shakespeare's Joan of Arc and the Great Whore of Babylon," 74-75.

The figure of Joan contrasts sharply with the figure of Falstaff, one being overtly malevolent and characterized as a figure that is meant to bring about the destruction of men, and the other being subtly Catholic in his influence and philosophy. However, both figures illustrate the anxiety that Protestants felt towards Catholics. The threats that both figures pose to the people around them are real and their eventual defeats show the triumph of Protestant idealism.

In the case of Falstaff, the defeat is less jarring. His removal from Prince Hal precipitates his slow decline and eventual death. While he dies peacefully, his death is a result of being deprived of the light of Henry V, a figure who evokes the supreme king prophesied in the Book of Revelation. Henry V in his role as conqueror of France seems to reference the king that will rule the earth with “an iron rod.”<sup>266</sup> Henry V’s reign, like the reign of the king, while bringing stability, is also too short because after his death, war breaks out once more.

Joan’s more overt and horrific end in *1 Henry VI* illustrates how the threat she posed was easier to spot, but also far more dangerous. While Falstaff could lead people into error, he failed to sway nations with his charms, whereas Joan did. Her association with a figure from the Book of Revelation and her actions as a witch earned her a more overtly gruesome end, but her fate was tied to how people in England were dealing with their daily reality. *Henry IV* Parts I and II along with *Henry V*, were written after *1 Henry VI*, which is reflected in the dangers that Catholic-like characters are shown to pose.

When the Armada and other foreign invasions were imminent and there was real fear that the nation might be invaded and possibly conquered by Catholics, the figures within the

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<sup>266</sup> Revelation, 12:5.



plays that are associated with Catholicism are more overtly malignant. The dangers posed by the Armada and other armies therefore are transformed into a battle against the forces of evil in characters like Joan. The ultimate triumph of the English within the play was not a prediction of the outcome of conflict with other nations, for Shakespeare foresaw the need for sacrifice on the part of the English people in the upcoming conflicts, but a metaphor for the heavenly triumph of the true faith against the forces of evil.

In contrast, the character of Falstaff, written in *Henry V* after the defeat of the Armada, is less overtly malevolent. While he does lead those around him astray, and this does endanger them, the effect is different. He is not presented as a foe that deserves a horrible death, or that is intentionally working for the forces of evil. Instead, Falstaff's main problem comes from his misguided idealism and philosophy. He believes things that are wrong and that endanger his soul and the souls of the people around him; though comical and entertaining, his threat is more subversive. He is presented as the danger that lone Catholics might pose to the faith of good Protestants.

The shift is visible from an overt fear of what horrors would transpire, from invasion of a Catholic army to the subtler danger that Catholic ideology might pose to the faith of the people. This shift represents the real change that transpired after the failure of the Armada. While Shakespeare's plays cannot be taken as presenting a universal view of how people in England understood their political state, or how it fit within an apocalyptic rhetoric, that he chose to use this formula to show the dangers of invasion and Catholic doctrine indicates that people were very familiar with the idea of the apocalypse and that they understood the broader implication of his characters' behaviors and motivations.

### England Stabilized

The shift in apocalyptic rhetoric is also visible in the works of John Foxe, who viewed Elizabeth as a stabilizing figure in England. He writes of the relief that people felt when Elizabeth came to the throne:

Not so much for that having now overpassed the bitter and sorrowful matters of such terrible burning, imprisoning, murdering, famishing, racking and tormenting, and spiteful handling, of the pitiful bodies of Christ's blessed saints, as also for that we are now entering into the time and reign of such a worthy princess and queen.<sup>267</sup>

Foxe's description of the horrors of what transpired under Mary are counterbalanced by how he treats Elizabeth. She is always described in glowing terms and her presence is closely associated with God. The Almighty granted that Elizabeth

Governeth her subjects, keepeth all things in order, quieteth foreign nations, recovereth towns, enlargeth her kingdom, nourisheth and concilieth amity, uniteth hearts and love with foreign enemies, helpeth neighbors, reformeth religion, quencheth persecution, redresseth the dross, frameth things out of joint.<sup>268</sup>

Foxe's glowing construction of Elizabeth does have one important thing that it hinges upon—her virginity. He says early on that she is a virgin and therefore “mildly ruleth men.”<sup>269</sup>

This construction of Elizabeth as virginal, and therefore better able to govern her subjects and be more closely aligned with God, used the apocalyptic image of the virgin to legitimize Elizabeth's role. However, the image does not fit with reality, for Elizabeth was never mild in her interactions with her advisors or her dealings with Parliament. The image of the virgin, therefore, had to smooth over the more problematic actions that Elizabeth might

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<sup>267</sup> John Foxe, “The Lady Elizabeth,” 264.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

have taken, while at the same time giving her agency. Foxe's construction of Elizabeth, however, was just one circulating at the time.

John Bale also presented a construction of Elizabeth in which he shows her as a figure to be emulated. However, where Bale diverges from many other writers of the time is in his belief that women were just as capable of redemption and being fully formed figures of agency within the church.<sup>270</sup> Unlike Sander, Bale believed that women and men were equal in their corruption and were basically the same in the eyes of God. This is a shift away from the archetypes presented in the Book of Revelation, in that it allows for women to also take on the roles that are prescribed as male within those writings. Elizabeth's actions therefore were not problematic in the context that she was only doing God's work, and as a devout member of the faith was expected to do no less.

Similar to these male writers, Elizabeth Tudor used apocalyptic imagery in her dealings with Spain, but she also used that imagery to present herself as a viable and capable monarch. While Catholics characterized her as a Jezebel-like character, she chose to present herself as the virginal figure who with God's aid was able to protect and save her people. While she did not present herself as a mild ruler, she used the idea of virginity to safeguard herself from outside attacks.

Elizabeth understood that as an unmarried queen, she had to use the image of the virgin for her public identity. While medieval queens who were married also called upon this imagery to secure their political power, for Elizabeth maintaining an image of purity was

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<sup>270</sup> Krista Kesselring, "Representations of Women in Tudor Historiography: John Bale and the Rhetoric of Exemplarity," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, New Series / Nouvelle Série, 22, no. 2 (April 1998): 43.

doubly important.<sup>271</sup> Not only as a solo monarch, but as a Protestant, Elizabeth had to be especially careful of things that could damage her image. Her decision to portray herself as a virginal figure allowed her to resist attempts to marry her off, couching her answers to Parliament in the rhetoric that God was the one who would have to incline her to marry.

If any of these, I say, could have drawn or dissuaded me from this kind of life, I had not now remained in this estate wherein you see me. But so constant have I always continued in this determination, although my youth and words may seem to some hardly to agree together, yet is it most true that at this day I stand free from any other meaning that either I have had in times past or have at this present; with which trade of life I am so thoroughly acquainted that I trust God, who hath hitherto therein preserved and led me by the hand, will not now of his goodness suffer me to go alone.<sup>272</sup>

In her speeches, she often, like Philip, used references to God to further her agenda. When Parliament wanted her to marry, she assured them that when God wanted her to marry, she would be aware and would take appropriate action. However, unlike Philip, Elizabeth's relationship with God was slightly more practical.

Philip relied on God to provide him with miracles in battle, assuming that the Almighty would remove obstacles from his path. Elizabeth used her special relationship with God in her speeches as a way of legitimizing her decisions. However, in her rhetorical use of God, she did not expect him to remove objects from her path, but to incline her in one direction or another. For Elizabeth, God therefore was more of a compass that guided her decisions, rather than a being who could solve her problems.

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<sup>271</sup> Barbara F. Weissberger, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 115.

<sup>272</sup> "Response to the Parliament's Petition that She Marry (1559)," in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58-60.

This is most evident in her speech at Tilbury in 1588. She does not call upon God to smite her enemies, but instead takes on a position of an embattled nation that is prepared for destruction.

Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safe guard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of battle to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust.<sup>273</sup>

Elizabeth's speech was meant to provoke a very visceral reaction from her people. If the Armada landed, then she needed her people to be willing to fight and to resist the invasion. Therefore, she uses references to God in ways that will evoke positive reactions from her subjects.

She places her safety into the hands of God, but at the same time, says that she trusts her people almost as much. While her people might not have the same power as a divine being, she still trusts them to ensure her safety and protection. God might be a supreme power, but comparing his protection with that of her subjects indicates that Elizabeth was trying to stir her subjects into a feeling of national pride. She trusted them more than she trusted her own advisors, and therefore her relationship with them is close to her relationship with God.

The other reference to God within the speech comes when she says that she will lay down her life for "my God," closely followed by her kingdom, people and so forth. In this statement, she is making a distinction between her beliefs and those of the Spanish. She lays claim to God, and to her religion. While not explicitly stating that her religion is Protestant,

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<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Tudor, "Queen Elizabeth I: Speech to the Troops at Tilbury" in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 1., ed. M. H. Abrams New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 762.

the implication is there, along with the idea that she has a special relationship with the Almighty.

In referring to God not only as her compass but also as her protector Elizabeth created a sense that not only were her policies divinely inspired, but also that she was favored by him. Even though Sir Francis Drake was the one who set the Armada on fire after bad weather had mostly destroyed the fleet, Elizabeth claimed his victory as her own. The Armada Portrait, painted in 1588 and commissioned by Elizabeth to celebrate the defeat of the Armada, shows Elizabeth in the center of the picture. She is elegantly dressed, showing off her wealth, but while she draws the eye, in the background of the picture is something important. There are two windows. On the left-hand side, ships are seen on calm waters, almost bathed in a holy glow, whereas on the right, ships are seen being battered by a storm.<sup>274</sup>

The battered ships are the Armada, and in this portrait, Elizabeth is showing off that they were destroyed. Her own ships are portrayed as being blessed with fair weather while the Spanish are tormented by storms. In this portrait, Elizabeth not only claims God's assistance and intervention with the destruction of the Spanish fleet, but also places herself in the center of the action. Her figure is positioned between the two groups of ships, indicating that both would have to interact with her before colliding. While Elizabeth had very little to do with the destruction of the Armada, the idea that her favor with God had helped to ensure the defeat of the Spanish gave her power.

Also within the portrait, Elizabeth is seen with a globe. Her hand is draped over it in a possessive manner. The inclusion of the globe shows that Elizabeth's empire no longer

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<sup>274</sup> See Figure Five.

consisted of just England. “Under Elizabeth I ... England abandoned its insular status and embarked on worldwide exploration and colonization.”<sup>275</sup> England was becoming an empire, gaining territories outside of its borders, and with this change came another shift in the apocalyptic rhetoric. No longer was England afraid of being overrun, but the country was beginning to see itself as the beacon of the true faith in the world, and Elizabeth as the monarch who would further English interests abroad.



*Figure Five: Anon., Armada Portrait, 1588. Oil and Paint on Oak. Woburn Abbey, England.*

<sup>275</sup> Albert C. Labriola, “Painting and Poetry of the Cult of Elizabeth I: The Ditchley Portrait and Donne’s ‘Elegie: Going to Bed,’” *Studies in Philology* 93, no. 1 (January 1996): 42.

After the turbulent reigns of Elizabeth's predecessors and the fear of invasion from Catholic nations, England began to be more hopeful. The fear and anxiety that had marred previous generations were replaced by national pride. Elizabeth, as the figurehead of the nation, was at the center of this movement, constructing a "cult of queenship" to further her goals and to help sell herself to her people.<sup>276</sup> Through her portraits, speeches and careful management, Elizabeth became the very embodiment of England, the most potent symbol of the nation.

Like Shakespeare's Henry V, Elizabeth rose out of a nation that was in turmoil, dispensing with the Catholic influences around her and becoming a shining figure. Unlike the play version of Henry, she intentionally constructed her images, and appropriated the events around her to solidify her power. However, in both cases, rulers became conquering heroes, elevating England into a position of power, and marking it as chosen by God. While the Spanish and other Catholic nations constructed Elizabeth's reign in negative apocalyptic imagery, the English adopted new ways of using the archetypes within the Book of Revelation not only to legitimize Elizabeth's reign, but also to further their own ideas of what it meant to be English.

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 43.



## Conclusion

For many women within the medieval and early modern periods, gaining access to politics was a tricky proposition. They found ways of commenting on the things that were important to them. For some, like Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, attempting to reform the Church and helping people to become better Christians were the things that they cared about the most. Using their visions as ways of commenting on the Christian faith, they were able to get people's attention, though sometimes not in the ways that they would have wanted. For Margaret Beaufort and Catherine of Aragon, presenting themselves as pious women was a political move that helped them to interact in realms of discourse where they usually would not be allowed to enter, and sometimes protected them from their monarchs.

In all of these cases, however, there was a line which they were not supposed to cross, or that would bring them into great danger if they did. For mystics that line was how precise their predictions were, and how relevant a vision was to current events. When Elizabeth Barton predicted Henry's death, she crossed that line and put herself in danger. She might have believed that she was doing the right thing but challenging a king was never a safe tactic.

Likewise, Mary Tudor's use of piety also brought her trouble when she was unable to use her religious persona as a public identity and instead became characterized as a woman who was unable to tell the difference between religion and political necessity. These women who constructed their public identities around piety or visions were tapping into older forms of identity that had served women well for a long time. However, these identities could only be useful if they were employed correctly, if certain lines were not crossed, and if the identities were still relevant to the time in which the women tried to employ them. Elizabeth

Barton used her visions in a time period when people were becoming more suspicious of mystics, while Mary tried to employ her religious identity in a time when the appearance of religious fluidity was important to her nation. Elizabeth Tudor was not necessarily more tolerant towards Catholics or other minority religious groups, but she was able to cultivate the appearance of being so.

Mary was unable to adopt the tactics that Elizabeth Tudor would later employ and therefore her reign has been eclipsed by that of her successor. For all of these women, the success of their constructed identities and the identities that were constructed for them was dependent on how adaptable they were to the changing society around them. Barton was unable to adapt to the changes around her, and Mary did not recognize the political instability inherent in pushing her policies on a nation that was not ready to accept them.

Other women could recognize the moments where they appeared to be in grave danger, but in reality were merely temporally in trouble. Elizabeth Woodville and her mother both rode out their accusations of witchcraft, managing not to incriminate themselves and recognizing that the political turmoil around them would shift in the future, changing their situations. Similarly, Anne Askew chose not to take actions that might have saved her life, instead constructing her identity in a way that would help people's memory of her to be positive. In each instance, the ability of these women to read the political situation that they found themselves in led to their success or failure, and the cultural memories of these women are built on how capable they were at adapting to the events around them.

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