UNDERGRADUATE PAPER

Domestic Subversion as Class Revolution: Dismantaling Gender and Destroying Hierarchy in *2 Henry VI*

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Power is a graph with many axes. In early modern England, as the economic framework shifted and the Protestant Reformation brought religion into debate, these axes became simultaneously unstable and incredibly rigid; definitions were changing, but those with power did whatever necessary to keep it. This essay will examine the classed and gendered continuum of power and the women of *2 Henry VI*'s places on it. These women—Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England and Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester—are rebellious within their respective marriages. But because the patriarchy and emergent feudal-capitalism are deeply intertwined in the English hierarchal system, true domestic subversion must be in the same moment a class revolution. To subvert a system of oppression, one must do more than restructure the existing cycle of violence and impose oppressive forces upon a new group. In *2 Henry VI*, Duchess Eleanor's dominant femininity—whether consciously or not—represents the true subversion of all systems of English hierarchy; Queen Margaret's binary masculinity, on the other hand, emulates rather than subverts the patriarchal power which perpetuates cycles of violence within the oppressive feudal-capitalist system.

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2 Henry VI is set in a crucial moment in history: the transition from feudalism to capitalism. With this change came a steady increase in inequality; as Sylvia Federici explains, the proletariat grew poorer, women lost access to property, and the Christian moral code became stricter.[1] At the same time, definitions of womanhood and femininity narrowed, and women as "the servants of the male work-force"—domestic laborers—became fundamental to capitalism.[2] Women were a reproductive source, a good to which any man had access; in response to the enclosures of their commons—what Marx calls "primitive accumulation"—low-class men intensified their control of what property remained, including women. The same forces were used to "conquer" both wealth and women: "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder."[3] Federici calls this domination of women in the wake of capitalism "primitive appropriation" and marks it as a driving force in the wedge between class and gender solidarity—a wedge that would be necessary to quell the possibility of complete uprising during the political turmoil of the ongoing War of Roses.[4]

Gender and class are inherently linked in suppression: the wife is subject to the husband, and servants are subject to the heads of house.[5] This basic model is transferable to English society; in a complicated and imperfect hierarchy, elite women are simultaneously subjugated by men of their own class and the subjugators of people of lower classes. This systematic cultivation of hierarchical conquest is one of the oppressive pillars of capitalism; as women are transformed into means of production and objects of male domination, gendered hierarchy "become[s] constitutive of class rule."[6] To subvert patriarchal roles, then, "feminism needs to refuse this division of labor" in all ways, not just along the lines of the male-female binary.[7] Class hierarchy cannot exist without the patriarchy, and the patriarchy cannot exist without the enforcement of class order, yet gender and class struggles are separated into distinct challenges of different systems of power. For Marx, this is alienation—the separation of the person from human essence; part of human nature is socialization and the joint ability to achieve physical and creative needs.[8] To keep groups quiet and separate is to keep them oppressed.

Despite their mutual dependence, *2 Henry VI* categorically separates the issues of gender and class uprising. Phyllis Rackin

claims the women in *2 Henry VI* "symbolize the dangers of disorder," while the commoners "literalize them."[9] Other scholars simply choose one element or the other to analyze. Stephen Greenblatt's reading of the play as a transformation of status into property relations, which allows aristocrats to subdue peasants without marring their reputations, could perhaps be extended into an analysis of domestic uprising;[10] through this perspective, men must be heroized for tyrannizing women, who could not own property. But even this analysis does not take gender into consideration enough. The question of Shakespeare's radicalism, though, is a moot point, considering his continued reinforcement of patriarchal value, which will be touched on later in the essay.

Scholarship surrounding *2 Henry VI* examines Shakespeare's radicalism predominantly through readings of Jack Cade's rebels. While other texts attempt to fully demonize revolting commoners, Shakespeare aligns himself with many of their values, and the predominant modern scholarship leans toward a reading of Shakespeare as a populist. The enclosure of the commons is presented as an illegal act which must be remedied and Shakespeare's depiction of the rebels is sympathetic with an emergent populist response to economic change.[11] This reading attempts to restore order in England through a strict adherence to the law, which is neither a radical take nor a reformist one, as it wishes to restabilize the systems of power. Others contrast the historical chronicles with the Shakespearean account of Cade's insurgence; because the characters are made more sympathetic in the play than in the source texts, Shakespeare appears to have been a radical anti-elitist. The failure of the revolution demonstrates a relatable flaw which could inspire a sense of mutiny.[12] Yet the rebellion does fail, and other scholars see an entirely different picture: Cade's Rebellion ruptures the country's order and is therefore the cause of England's social problems.[13]

The feminist readings of the text tend to ignore the rebels in favor of Eleanor and Margery. Nina Levine reads Eleanor's punishment as the cause for the collapse of English social order and cites Shakespeare's "reluctance to insist too loudly on the equation between female aggression, witchcraft, and treason" due to respect for his Queen, Elizabeth I, as proof of a rebuke of the punishment system.[14] Yet Eleanor *does* represent an aggressive

woman who commits treasonous acts via witchcraft, and other scholars read the work more harshly: Shakespeare's repression of positively portrayed women "betray[s] deep anxieties about female power and authority."[15] If family is the "basis of order in church and state," Margaret's inversion within her relationship with Henry represents the ineptitude of Henry and the English government.[16] Regardless of Shakespeare's intentions, since the monarchy is an institution of systemized oppression used to uphold class and gender hierarchies, supporting a monarch—regardless of gender—can never be truly radical.

This essay will primarily examine the folio edition of the text, though the disparities between the quarto and the folio are notable. There are several hypotheses in circulation regarding the source of the differences between the two versions of Shakespearean texts: the quarto may be either a memorial reconstruction of a performance or a bardic rewrite specifically for touring productions. The latter seems more plausible for *2 Henry VI*. The quarto is the smaller (and therefore more easily transferable) and more inexpensive text, and the version likely performed for commoners rather than in established theaters. The folio provides a stricter manifestation of the social order by underpinning certain characters—namely Margaret, Eleanor, and Jack Cade's rebels—as the sources of social disorder. The folio, performed for the elite, refuses to question the social other and demonizes these social Others.

According to early modern English values, the woman was the silent, beautiful body, while the man was the mind—the "intellect and spirit."[17] In remarking upon Margaret's "grace in speech, / Her words yclad with wisdom's majesty," Henry subtly masculinizes his bride-to-be and therefore feminizes himself (1.1.32-33).[18] In the same breath, Henry reveals his femininity through his unrestrained emotion; according to Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, "[t]o love a woman too much marked a man as effeminate" (67). It is partially Henry's piety that leaves him vulnerable to the pitfalls of patriarchy; he swoons "womanlike" and prays hysterically in pious grief over the death of Duke Humphrey, for example, and gently dismisses the rebels, saying, "For God forbid so may simply souls / Should perish by the sword" (4.4.9-10).

Even outside of her relationship with Henry, Margaret establishes herself as dominant and masculine. During the early

modern period, sensuality was a distinctly feminine trait.[19] As Suffolk, Margaret's paramour, drapes himself over the Queen and receives her extramarital kiss, he must in some ways also be the female counterpart to Margaret's "man." Shamelessly, Suffolk describes Margaret's place in his heart: "For where thou art, there is the world itself, / With every several pleasure in the world; / And where thou art not, desolation" (3.2.366-368). While Margaret reciprocates Suffolk's attention, as Queen she also exercises class power over him, which results inevitably in her dominance. In fact, she explicitly calls him a woman upon his defeated response to punishment: "Fie coward woman and soft-hearted wretch!" (3.2.310). Yet her power over Suffolk is more covert than that she wields over Henry because he is not so meek, Margaret must mask her masculine power with a feminine appearance. In early modern England, "detachable parts" like handkerchiefs and hairstyles were essential to engenderment. Margaret knows how to navigate this; her feminine form is a large part of her power.[20]

Margaret navigates a delicate balance; she does not wear masculine clothing or too readily speak out of turn, as such may be grounds for a witchcraft accusation.[21] Physically, she engenders womanhood. Emotionally, too, Margaret performs the femininity expected of her. Upon Duke Humphrey's death, she descends into wild, "womanish" hysterics. She does not demonstrate excessively romantic feelings for the Duke of Suffolk except in private, in reciprocation of his own words. Clearly, she understands "the terms of male discourse" within which she must operate to maintain power without breaching completely the gendered code of conduct.[22] Margaret embodies a gendered revolution that aims to uphold the patriarchal society to maintain her elite class status; she seeks to increase her proximity to masculinity without overtly upsetting the social order.

In some ways, though, even Margaret's subdued domestic subversion seeks to deconstruct the entire system; the emergent capitalistic system of patriarchy attempts to prove women are "unable to govern themselves," and the Queen asserts herself as not only capable within her relationships but as the nation's ruler.[23] In this way, her masculinity could be viewed as a subtle undermining of the English hierarchy. Margaret uses her masculinization, however, exclusively to gain individual power; she is, and wants to

be, a singularity. She does not have solidarity with other women—especially those of lower classes—nor does she acknowledge other women except to attack Eleanor.[24] In essence, Margaret transforms herself not into a powerful woman but into a man. At best, she alters the hierarchy to allow for her own domination; at worst, she subscribes to, perpetuates, and internalizes the existing construction of power by diminishing the social mobility of others.

Women had social power in only two important ways within early modern patriarchy: as adulteresses and as scolds. Margaret, in some senses, is a scold, or a woman who rejects "women's [roles of] 'quiet' and obedience" in a public manner.[25] In contrast with Henry's devout religious nature, Margaret's alignment with scolds places her outside the narrow boundaries of Christian morals. This is perhaps another means of villainizing Margaret for her masculine presentation and chastising Henry for his inability to control his wife. If Margaret is a scold, she embodies both forms of "subversion" provided by the state as outlets for controllable disobedience. The legal line between "scolding" and "witch-speak" is hazy, but the punishments indicate "witch-speak" is far greater a crime.[26] Eleanor's witchcraft accusation and Margaret's complete lack of punishment demonstrate Margaret's careful negotiation of gender and power, as opposed to Eleanor's outright defiance of the bounds of femininity.

In *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare emphasizes Joan of Arc's status as leader of France, "defining the conflict between England and France as a conflict between masculine and feminine values."[27] If indeed England is the ideal, masculine state, and France the effeminate and therefore inferior enemy, Margaret's introduction to the play as the catalyst for the forfeiture of Anjou and Maine to France is symbolically the weakening of England's masculine power. King Henry VI, the human manifestation of the state, is from the moment the play begins aligned with feminine fragility. Margaret, on the other hand, embodies masculinity and metaphorically relinquishes femininity in the very act of becoming English. Assuming the preceding play had already been written and performed, the construction of Margaret as the dominant, masculine figure in her relationship with the King would have been evident to the viewer even before she was physically present on stage.

Duchess Eleanor, conversely, performs masculinity in a distinctly un-English way: she plots ambitiously to dethrone a seated King.[28] Under the reign of the devout Henry VI, who seems to be coded as Protestant, Eleanor consorts with Catholic priests.[29] Shakespeare entirely constructed this subversion, as the only priest who was accused during her trial, John Home, was quickly acquitted.[30] Furthermore, the historical Henry VI was a Roman Catholic whose reign predated the Reformation; perhaps Shakespeare used this alignment of the villainess Eleanor with the Catholic church and Henry with the Protestant values of introspection and reading to modify the realm of Englishness and appeal to Elizabeth I's Protestantism.[31] Eleanor's eventual punishment—condemnation to supervised exile on the Isle of Man—physically represents her un-Englishness. She is not only outcast from mainland England for her subversion but symbolically relegated to the realm of the masculine, where she will be constantly presided over by the dominant force of Sir John Stanley.[32] Yet the most un-English of Eleanor's actions is grotesquely feminine—the hiring of Margery Jourdayne, a witch.

Eleanor's performance of gender could be read as parallel to Margaret's, especially within her relationship with the Duke. She is ambitious and dominant. Yet she does not seem to be transformed into a masculine entity; rather, she develops an emergent femininity. As she reveals her ambition, she demonstrates a belief in astrology and premonition through dreams: "Tell me and I'll requite it / With sweet rehearsal of my morning's dream" (1.2.23-24). Consistently, she is related to magic and astrology. She is not masculinized through these associations; instead, she materializes the "wrong" kind of womanhood. Distinctly vocal and incomprehensibly powerful, witchcraft was an area of female dominance through "dangerous talk and strange behavior that [was perceived as] peculiarly female."[33] In early modern England, "the inconceivable reality of female authority and the intolerable fact of female power could be rationalized only in terms of the supernatural."[34] In hiring the peasant Margery, the Duchess also in some ways encourages class subversion. Consciously or subconsciously, Eleanor inherently rebels against the feudal-capitalist social structure when she disrupts patriarchal misogyny.

Eleanor also represents a reversal of traditional gender roles within her relationship with her husband Humphrey of Lancaster, Duke of Gloucester and Lord Protector of England. Her first lines are an encouragement for Humphrey to strive for a higher position in the court: “Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold. / What, is’t too short? I’ll lengthen it with mine” (1.2.11-12). Humphrey, though perhaps the figurehead of loyalty and morality, is feminized just as Henry is. Upon being chided by her husband for recalling a subversive dream, Eleanor covertly emasculates (and, in a subtle display of emotional power, gaslights) Humphrey by asking, “Are you so choleric / With Eleanor for telling but her dream?” (1.2.51-52). Although choler was a masculine humor, irrational anger was a “womanly” trait during the period, and Eleanor weaponizes Humphrey’s anger, which seems to be justified, by framing it as uncalled-for indignation.[35]

The play reveals far fewer instances of gender role inversion within Eleanor and Humphrey’s relationship dynamic than it does in that of Margaret and Henry probably because women were thought to masculinize “when men fail[ed] to assert control.”[36] Unlike Henry, Humphrey checks Eleanor for being “ill-nurtured,” or over-educated, and for speaking out of turn (1.2.42). While both women serve to “expos[e] the weakness of patriarchal authority,” only Eleanor is punished and abandoned by her husband for her subversion.[37] It is Henry’s weakness, not Humphrey’s, that Shakespeare wants to critique. Shakespeare is perhaps, in emphasizing Humphrey’s feminine inferiority to Margaret, demonstrating sympathy with the lower class. The King’s “failings of masculinity” are also failures to reign powerfully—particularly over Suffolk and York, who mistreat those living on their land and enclose their commons.[38]

Shakespeare’s portrayal of Duke Humphrey as loyal and righteous plays well into the readings of *2 Henry VI* as a revolutionary text. The other lords scorn him for the benevolence he shows the peasants who live on his land; the nobility often fought during the War of Roses, and his good standing with his citizenry made him a much more difficult target. In Act 1, Scene 3, commoners come to Humphrey for a fair trial in the case of the enclosure of their commons. In his defense against accusations of traitorous collaboration with Eleanor, he says, “many a pound

of mine own proper store, / Because I would not tax the needy commons, / Have I dispursed to the garrisons, / And never asked for restitution" (3.1.115-118). When Suffolk accuses Humphrey of maltreating his commons—the very thing Suffolk himself is doing—he does so because he fears the commoners' potential power if they are treated well, even according to the constraints of systemic oppression. In conversation about Humphrey's assassination, Suffolk worries "The commons will haply rise to save his life," and the rebels do riot upon learning of his death (3.1.240). Shakespeare encourages a diluted version of populism; Humphrey seems to deserve his wealth and power precisely because he does not maximally capitalize off his peasants.

Yet Shakespeare's moral code is complicated; when Sander Simpcox approaches the lords on the street, it is Humphrey who chases him away and orders his punishment. Thus, he is, paradigmatically, at once an emblem of class traitorhood and of state-enforced justice. The genteel Duke, however generous with his commons and caring to Eleanor, upholds the violent framework of punishment that enforces class and gender hierarchies systemically in England. The Duke of Gloucester represents true nobility, and his death demonstrates how governmental corruption quells righteousness. Shakespeare's commentary seems to be not revolutionary but, at best, a reformist appeal to the monarchy. What revolutionary tendencies Shakespeare does show are not rebukes of the processes of acquiring power but the cruel enforcement of those processes; he is sympathetic, it seems, with only the "principled" low-class men who have been wronged by enclosures, but certainly not with the women who have been wronged by the patriarchy.

Notably, while Suffolk is portrayed as feminine for his overt eroticism and Henry for his passion, Margaret is not feminized but villainized for her sexuality. Her adulterous relationship with Suffolk is dangerous "to the good order of the kingdom;"[39] the lurking potential of illegitimate offspring from women's sexual disobedience threatens patrilineal succession to exponentially increasing degrees as one moves up in the royal hierarchy. Margaret as a sexual being, then, is not admirably feminine but immeasurably dangerous. While she may be a powerful woman, the control she exercises is within the patriarchy and therefore "defined in terms

of menace to" it.[40] The paradigm of femininity is that it represents weakness, and is therefore negative; yet the woman who escapes it, even within the confines of the system, is always the villain.

Eleanor, likewise, presents a threat to not just the immediate monarchy but the entire social order of power. She practices witchcraft, which is itself discrediting as it is simultaneously a feminine act and a subversion of expectation.[41] She challenges the God-given power of the monarchs. And when she hires the peasant woman Margery Jourdayne, lending her magic credibility and therefore providing her social mobility, she becomes subject to accusations of witchcraft when. Early modern society often sensationalized witchcraft accusations to exploit women "for political gain" and to defame and discredit them.[42] As a secondary means of disenfranchisement, the Duchess' agency is constantly stripped from her. Shakespeare's female characters—who are performed by men—"are always, in some measure, the instruments of male ventriloquism," but within the text, too, Eleanor's motivations are interpreted as manufactured by and for men.[43]

Upon her conviction, Eleanor is sentenced to life on the Isle of Man, where her every action is predetermined by the state—entirely stripping her of her agency. And even after her punishment has commenced, Suffolk strips Eleanor of her dominance and imposes it upon Humphrey: "The Duchess by his subornation, / Upon my life, began her devilish practices" (3.1.45-46). It is society's inability to recognize feminine power which ultimately gets Humphrey killed. Even the act of conjuring, for which she is arrested and exiled, is said to be "buzz[ed] … in her brain" by Sir John Hum, who is paid by Suffolk and Winchester (1.2.99). This is not evidenced by the real accounts, which indicate the dukes simply took advantage of Eleanor's imprisonment to acquire power. Furthermore, while in the play Hum is in full control of the women's connection, evidence suggests Eleanor and Margery's relationship had existed for as long as ten years before their sentencing.[44] Margery and Eleanor's unseen relationship along with Margaret and Eleanor's hostile vendetta suggest Shakespeare found the possibility of women in solidarity to be too great a threat to represent in a play wherein peasants were already rebelling.

Margaret and Eleanor are perhaps foils; certainly, they are enemies. Both invert the traditional male-female power dynamics

within their marriages, and both are strong women with agency. Yet Margaret embraces masculinity and seems to masculinize herself without disrupting on a systematic level the binary of gendered power. Eleanor and the peasant woman she hires, on the other hand, navigate dominant femininity. While Margaret is a strong woman, she uses what Audre Lorde would call "the master's tools," masculinity, which "will never dismantle the master's house," the patriarchy.[45] Her subversion is less threatening than Eleanor's because she attempts only to transform herself into a man, while Eleanor's subversive femininity undermines the entire patriarchy and therefore one of the pillars of the feudal-capitalist hierarchical system.

This dichotomy can be seen significantly in the women's respective punishments for their subversion. Eleanor is paraded through the streets in open shame and banished to servitude in exile—a supreme display of obedience and submission. But Margaret finishes the play unpunished, though perhaps despised. Her final words once again display Henry's ineptitude and weakness: "Away my lord, you are slow, for shame, away! / … What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly. / Now is it manhood, wisdom, and defence, / To give the enemy way" (5.2.72-76). She covertly masculinizes herself by calling retreat, the very thing she is suggesting, "manhood." Simultaneously, she emasculates Henry by displaying his inability to win in battle against York. Moreover, she asserts dominance over the King rhetorically; it is she who has the last word in their final moments on stage, not Henry.

Margery Jourdayne (or, historically, Jourdemayne), the witch Eleanor hires to divine the consequences of Henry's reign, suffers a different fate. A peasant woman who adopted the dark arts as a means of gaining money and social power, Jourdayne's pure existence is subversive, and she is ultimately punished as such. In fact, Margery's sedition is so intense that her speech is limited to one line, and her name is uttered only once, at 1.4.11. In the quarto, she gets another mention—"Rise, Jourdayne, rise"—but this only gives further power to Roger Bolingbroke (after F 1.4.39). Though in the historical accounts she is burned at the stake, Margery's character is simply arrested and swept swiftly offstage to be imprisoned.[46] Witchcraft—acknowledged by the English government as the antonym of authority—was punishable

by public torture and death. That Shakespeare chose to reduce Margery's character almost to nothing, without visibility even for punishment, proves the power a poor woman potentially had against the English state.[47]

Upon Margery's arrest, the Duke of York says, "I think we watched you at an inch," demonstrating once again that the English government understood the potential chaos a powerful woman could cause (1.4.41). According to the real account, this was true: she had previously spent time in custody at Windsor Castle for an "unspecified offence" of sorcery and was released under the condition of good behavior. In fact, Eleanor had been accused of using Margery's sorcery for years beforehand to seduce Humphrey when she was still lady-in-waiting.[48] (Interestingly, Shakespeare chose not to mention Eleanor's adultery. Perhaps this was merely to maintain the simplicity of his female characters, who, to remain dehumanized, had also to remain static and flat, or perhaps, Shakespeare chose not to mar Duke Humphrey's image.)[49] Regardless, Eleanor's continued acquaintance with Margery allowed for Margery's upward economic mobility; her husband was a yeoman whose status steadily increased due to their family's relationship with the court.[50] In this way, Eleanor's domestic revolution gave way to class subversion.

Essential to understanding the anti-capitalist nature of magic is the dissection of the importance of control. The natural objective of capitalism is complete control. Magical belief, to the contrary, emphasizes the spirit and unpredictability in all things, alive or not.[51] The patriarchy, too, aims for total control, and in imagining the power of women's speech constructs an even more menacing "witch."[52] The witch hunt, then, was the attempted imposition of patriarchal domination upon women in a moment wherein social expectations were changing; underscored by the chaos caused by the War of Roses and peasant revolts, subversion by women against emergent capitalist control was an immense threat to the stability of the kingdom. In fact, Federici calls the witch hunt "a class war carried out by other means."[53] The issues of gender and class are inseparable—both are pillars of the oppressive hierarchy; without one, the entire institution would fall.

The oppressed group behavior model, wherein one oppressed group exercises violence against another to try to gain access to

power, can be applied to both the women and the commoners in *2 Henry VI*.[54] While Margaret laughs at Simpcox to demonstrate her strength, Cade and his men provide women as an example of the property items made common for all (4.7.19). The separate systems of hierarchy for class and gender made "gender a problem in the class system, just as class became a problem in the gender system," as neither women nor low-class men had a firm positionality of rank.[55] One of the greatest shortcomings of hierarchy is that even those who benefit most from it must buckle to its constraints. Neither the women nor the lower class may have true liberation if they fight in opposition of each other; the English state made sure to keep the two groups systematically opposed through cyclical oppressive violence, and *2 Henry VI* does not represent any divergence from this pattern.[56]

Of course, the crossover between the two most elite women in England and Jack Cade's rebellious men seems, at first glance, nonexistent. Yet the women, "whose labour fuelled capitalist accumulation but outside of contractual relations," serve to enrich the feudal-capitalist system through domestic work just as the commoners do through manual labor.[57] In fact, some scholars see "domestic work as the key element in the production of labour-power," as it allows for the greater dedication of others in the household to work, fight, or otherwise accumulate wealth.[58] The same system that empowers the monarchy to enclose Jack Cade's men's land and exploit their labor encourages men to use women's reproductive work for capital accumulation.[59] In fact, Cade himself blames his poverty on a woman, claiming his father, originally born to a Countess and an Earl, "[w]as by a beggar-woman stolen away" as an infant (4.2.134). Jack Cade's rebels reproduce their own oppression and impose it onto low-class women to retain some semblance of power, and Margaret reproduces her oppression and imposes it onto the commoners for that same reason.

Eleanor, too, is in some ways an agent of class suppression. She uses Margery Jourdayne, a woman of lower class, to increase her own systemic power; she wants to usurp Margaret to become the Queen. She does not provide any indication that, if Eleanor becomes Queen, Margery will be lifted into the high ranks of society. And upon their respective sentencing, Eleanor does not defend Margery. Eleanor's use of Margery's skills to accumulate power could be viewed as exploitative, since Eleanor reaps the benefits of

Margery's labor. In her attempt to acquire these benefits, though, Eleanor begins to unravel the fabric of early modern English society, the same systems which uphold the monarchy. The extent of the real Eleanor Cobham's understanding of power will never be known, but it is not unreasonable to assume she knew she could not gain power through the sanctioned methods of the system. Perhaps she planned to restructure English society, or perhaps she simply did not realize the potential subversive implications of her acts. Regardless, Eleanor poses a threat to the hierarchy by being a traitor to her class and through gender solidarity, no matter how unstable and imperfect they are.

The rebels' solidarity is also a threat. In the play, illiteracy is a symbol of class solidarity; Emmanuel, Clerk of Chatham, is hanged for being "so well brought up that [he] can write [his] name" (4.2.96-100). This was a moment in which Jack Cade's rebellious words—and maybe even his burning of books—would have rung true to the poorest in the audience and outraged the noblest. Literature and learning were emblems of the gate kept elite. Even Duchess Eleanor was likely not well educated, as she was "once waiting-woman to [Humphrey's] first wife."[60] In that moment, both women's and commoners' speech were becoming "recognized as capable of destabilizing authoritative discourses … and power structures."[61] Perhaps, Shakespeare is revolutionary in giving Cade's rebels a place to speak and unite. Yet education is used against and discouraged in the elite women, just as it is for the rebels, and they are not afforded this same space.

While measuring literacy rates is difficult because many women were taught to read but not to write—a tactic used historically to repress groups' voices—the data reveals a staggeringly gendered literacy. In East Anglia, England, in the 1580s, only 6% of artisan women as opposed to 49% of artisan men could sign their names—a low threshold for literacy.[62] In the 1400s, when the play is set, these rates of gendered literacy were even lower. Class, too, played a part: "at least three-quarters [of tradesmen] were illiterate in the 1560s."[63] The emphasis on Eleanor and Margaret's intelligence and education as well as on the commoners' disdain for literature is poignant; *2 Henry VI*, written and performed in the early 1590s, came amid an "educational recession," wherein literacy rates were dropping and unemployment rates rising.[64]

This is not the only instance in which solidarity could exist but is evaded in the text. Margaret and Eleanor aggressively oppose each other, explicitly demonstrating a lack of female solidarity that disempowers them both. According to Sarah Ahmed, "to become feminist can often mean looking for company;" in these terms, Margaret is not even at the cusp of embracing liberation.[65] The Queen even hits Eleanor on the ear, demonstrating the physical violence which is normally relegated exclusively to the realm of men. Women were pitted against one another by the constraints of early modern English culture; as Laura Gowing explains, they had no formal means of expression of anger or frustration, yet they bore the weight of both gendered and classed oppression.[66] The feud between Margaret and Eleanor is no different.

Margaret reduces her gripe with Eleanor to class; her biggest complaint with Eleanor, beyond her husband's influence over Henry, is that "Strangers in the court do take her for the queen" because she is so rich (1.3.80). Because Margaret is not systemically subversive of the patriarchy, she is fundamentally in competition with any other powerful woman. She clings to "the words of sexual insult" ("callet" at 1.3.84 and the double-entendre of "tainture of thy nest" at 2.1.183), appropriating the tools used by the patriarchy to suppress women and weaponizing them against Eleanor.[67] Paradigmatically, the same solidarity Margaret avoids to preserve her class power could eventually bring social liberation.[68]

Margaret separates herself from the subversive elements in the play in another significant way: admonishing commoners. When she is approached with supplications by petitioners who want to prevent the enclosure of their commons, Margaret tears their supplications and shoos them out of the court, calling them "base scullions" (1.3.41). In the quarto, this destruction of the supplication is attributed to Suffolk.[69] For the elite audience, Margaret is once again the figurehead of the deterioration of English social order, whereas for the common audience that blame is shared with male elites. In Act 2, when the lords speak with Simpcox, all of them, including Margaret, make it a point to ignore his wife. Simpcox's wife, who is not given a name, represents the true bottom of the social order; she is not only a woman but a beggar. Margaret does not hide her contempt for the poor or her cruelty. When Henry laments the fraud perpetuated by Simpcox and his

wife, Margaret responds: "It made me laugh to see the villain run" (2.1.151). Again, she is the more masculine of the two, and again, she is fully removed from compassion for the lower class, marking herself in total class solidarity and distinct from any oppressed community. She transforms herself into the peer of the elite men, masculinizing her mind while maintaining the agreeability of her feminine body. In some ways, she becomes maximally palatable for male consumption; despite her vocal command of power, she presents a careful display of solidarity with the men around her.

The question of female palatability and subordination is complicated. Margaret, Eleanor, and Margery are all strong, capable women, each of whom has her own agency and motivations. Each was a real woman attempting to navigate the treacherous waters of patriarchy. Yet in Shakespeare's retelling of their lives, scholars tend to agree that the inversion of women's roles "clarif[ies] the structure by the process of reversing it."[70] Instead of demonstrating women's powers, *2 Henry VI* is Shakespeare's way of proving women who step out of line will be punished. Even read in a more positive light, the play exposes the deeply misogynistic standards of the patriarchy. The extraordinary woman who uses her power for the greater good—and one could argue Margaret re-strengthens the English throne in the wake of Henry's sheepish deficiency—still inspires only the select few to subvert expectations, rather than sparking systematic change.[71]

To truly subvert the patriarchy, women must develop "alternative models of feminine force" outside of the roles imposed upon them by the gender binary—models like witchcraft.[72] Eleanor and Margery, who exemplify what today might be called divine femininity and represent true subversion of class and gender roles, are thoroughly vilified and silenced—given not even the benefit of a representation that could resonate with audience members. Despite his perceived anti-elitism, then, Shakespeare demonstrates support for the institution of monarchy.[73] Even in his quarto, which perhaps intends to spark revolutionary thought among his low-class viewers, Shakespeare refuses to paint the women of the play in a positive light, and in doing so allows for the continued reproduction of patriarchal control. The text can therefore not possibly be truly insurgent; it embraces one pillar of the establishment just as it subverts the other.

Eleanor dismantles the traditional ideal of femininity and creates, instead, a source of power and dominance that does not adhere to masculine stereotypes. Outside of the rigid restrictions of the gender binary, Eleanor and Margery threaten not only their monarchs but also the patriarchy in its entirety. Still, there is something to be said for Margaret's approach. Situated as she is in the highest seat of female power, she does what she can to not only survive the patriarchy but to command agency. She is the only woman who remains alive and unpunished when the curtains close. In modern western societies, some 400 years after the publication of *2 Henry VI*, the prevailing feminism is still that which hopes to achieve Margaret's status. In the age of the "girl boss" who paradigmatically "wins" the patriarchy and upholds it, it is crucial to recognize the fundamental link between capitalistic class oppression and patriarchal power. Feminism cannot be a simple restructuring of capitalism; without solidarity between all oppressed communities, which seeks to deconstruct every pattern of hierarchy, no liberation will ever be achieved.

Notes

1. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 29-31.
2. Federici, *Caliban*, 115.
3. Marx quoted in Federici, *Caliban*, 62.
4. Federici, Caliban, 97.
5. Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 95.
6. Federici, *Caliban*, 64.
7. Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 85.
8. Silvia Federici, "Marx and Feminism," *TripleC* 16, no. 2 (May 2018): 468–75. 468.
9. Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 204.
10. Stephen Greenblatt, "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion," *Representations* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 25.
11. Michael Hattaway, "Rebellion, Class Consciousness, and Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI," *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 1 (April 1988): 13–22. 18.
12. Ronda Arab, "Ruthless Power and Ambivalent Glory: The Rebel-Labourer in 2 Henry VI," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 26.

13. Freisner, 171.

14. Nina Levine, "The Case of Eleanor Cobham: Authorizing History in *2 Henry VI,*" *Shakespeare Studies* 22 (1994): 117.

15. Rackin, *Stages*, 193.

16. Amussen, *Ordered Society*, 66.

17. Rackin, *Stages*, 147.

18. All Shakespeare quotes are from William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Two*, ed. Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

19. Rackin, *Stages*, 172.

20. Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 159.

21. Federici, *Caliban*, 184.

22. Mary-Catherine Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England: Speaking as a Woman* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 58.

23. Federici, *Caliban*, 101.

24. Interestingly, in *Richard III*, Margaret rallies with other women, though it could be argued that upon Henry's death she no longer has the privilege of exercising masculine power and must form solidarity with other women to garner power.

25. Amussen, *Ordered Society*, 103, 122.

26. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 27.

27. Rackin, *Stages*, 151.

28. Ambition was a "masculine" trait. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender*, 330.

29. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1997), 76.

30. Jessica Freeman, "Sorcery at Court and Manor: Margery Jourdemayne, the Witch of Eye next Westminster," *Journal of Medieval History* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 352.

31. Henry is also never shown wearing a rosary, praying to a saint, or performing confessional. David Daniell, "Shakespeare and the Protestant Mind," in *Shakespeare Survey* 54, edited by Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

32. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 77.

33. Sharon L. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 144.

34. Rackin, *Stages*, 194.

35. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender*, 329.

36. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 72.

37. Rackin, *Stages*, 177.

38. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 71.

39. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 73.

40. Rackin, *Stages*, 160-1.

41. Federici, *Caliban*, 101.

42. Levine, "The Case of Eleanor Cobham," 109.

43. Rackin, *Stages*, 205.
44. Freeman, "Sorcery," 348-56.
45. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Ithaca, NY: Routledge, 2003), 38.
46. Freeman, "Sorcery," 357.
47. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk*, 238.
48. Freeman, "Sorcery," 345-6.
49. Ralph Griffiths, "The Trial of Eleanor Cobham: An Episode in the Fall of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51, no. 2 (July 1969): 383.
50. Freeman, "Sorcery," 357.
51. Federici, *Caliban*, 173-4.
52. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 27.
53. Federici, *Caliban*, 174-6.
54. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Education, 1972), 56.
55. Amussen, *Ordered Society*, 3.
56. Federici, *Caliban*, 47.
57. Federici, "Marx and Feminism," 468.
58. Federici, "Marx and Feminism," 473.
59. Federici, "Marx and Feminism," 474; Rackin, *Stages*, 160.
60. A footnote in Warren's *2 Henry VI*. 127n42.
61. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 143.
62. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender*, 164.
63. David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 153.
64. Cressy, *Literacy*, 169-70.
65. Ahmed, *Living*, 66.
66. Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.
67. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 29.
68. Brown quoted in Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt*, 30-36.
69. A footnote in Warren's *2 Henry VI*. 132 n40.1.
70. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara Babcock (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 153.
71. Davis, "Women on Top," 157.
72. Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 112.
73. Although the office of the King of England would not lose power to the Parliament for another century, democratic thought had long been ruminating in Europe; given his knowledge of Italy, Shakespeare almost certainly knew about democracy. Van Zanden, Jan Luiten, Eltjo Buringh, and Maarten Bosker, "The Rise and Decline of European Parliaments, 1188—1789," *The Economic History Review* 65, no. 3 (2012): 835–61.