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Motherhood and Meaning: the Transformation of Tradition and
Convention in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in English

Felicity Dunworth



University of Kent

2004

For my sisters Katie, Sarah, Charlotte and Caroline

In memory of my mother Elizabeth and my daughter Clare

And for my darling daughter Helen

'The breaking of tradition does not at all mean the loss or devaluation of the past: it is, rather, likely that only now the past can reveal itself with a weight and an influence it never had before.'

Giorgio Agamben, The Man Without Content

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Abstract

By the sixteenth century the figure of the mother had an established and complex significance. The traditions of Christian and classical culture contributed to a double-edged ideal which signified both authority and vulnerability, spirituality and corporeality, sacrifice and beastliness. As provider of heirs and nurse, the mother mediated the public and political and the most private; her office was both mystical in its significance and practical in its implications. Such complexity imbued the mother figure with unique narrative potential as a container of opposites, a place where ideals collided and were contested, where conflicts could be mediated and synthesised.

The Reformation endowed motherhood with political and religious significance, as reformers and counter-reformers developed competing readings of traditional emblems. In the competition which characterised mid-sixteenth century politics, Catholic and Protestant propagandists fought over the mother figure as a benign allegory of church or nation, confirming her emblematic importance as a political and religious signifier. Later sixteenth-century dramatisations of English history developed and exploited this significance which allowed the creation of a complex historical narrative.

This thesis argues that the dramatic representation of the mother was continuously modified in response to cultural, political and religious shifts in ideas and practice. Traditional comic narratives and moralities were appropriated by Elizabethan and, especially, Jacobean dramatists to offer a more prurient pleasure. The popular genres of city comedy and domestic tragedy told jokes or salacious tales about contemporary motherhood at the same time as the constitution and social function of the family were under scrutiny from Protestant reformers. Tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* interrogated those same concerns and created versions of motherhood where the reconciliation of the ideal and the practical is poignantly impossible, and Puritan idealisation of the family influenced plays such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi* which explored the idea of perfect maternity characterised by suffering and spiritual triumph.

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I am grateful to Jan Montefiore for publishing a piece which became Chapter 4 of this thesis in *Paragraph*, Volume 21 and to Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton for including an earlier version of Chapter 2 in *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, Ashgate, 2000.

I would not have come through the crises of the last few years without colleagues who have also been dear friends, and I would like to thank, among others, Sue Wiseman for both her interest in my work and for the most astounding act of kindness when things looked bleak; Sheila Sweetinburgh and Penny Griffin for generous practical support in difficult times; Cathy Cundy, Jackie Belanger and Claire Bartram who helped me through one frightening illness, Helen Brown, Gearoid O'Flaherty and Gene McNulty through another. Lyn Innes and Malcolm Andrews were supportive heads of School while the turmoil lasted, and Thomas Docherty a long-suffering head of research. Jen Wyatt encouraged me to take the job that gave me the financial security to finish this thesis at last, was a truly supportive boss and is equally so as a colleague. Anastasia Valassopoulos and Robert Duggan have been true and generous friends throughout and Catherine Richardson and her husband Justin have been unstinting in their practical help, their kindness and their love.

I am lucky to have shared most of my life with a core group of wonderful friends whose support has been constant. There is not room to name them all here, but, especially I should mention Kirsten Cooke, John Gardner, Brian and Judy Langridge, Frank Holland, Jo Simes, Sue Ball, and Tim Walton, all of whom went to some trouble to pull me through the tough times. My sisters, Katie, Sarah, Charlotte and Caroline have been, as ever, stars.

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Introduction

The breaking of tradition does not at all mean the loss or devaluation of the past: it is, rather, likely that only now the past can reveal itself with a weight and an influence it never had before.

Giorgio Agamben¹

Preamble:

The significance of motherhood in early modern drama always resonated beyond the boundaries of any individual theatrical characterisation. Its potential dramatic power is evident in a subtle reference to a wife and mother in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*:

Shylock: Out upon her! Thou torturest me Tubal, it was my turquoise, I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys. (3.1.111-113)²

The mention of the hitherto unknown Leah at a crucial moment in the play becomes a significant and complicating factor in the audience's understanding of both Shylock and Jessica. The brief mention of a wife and mother in the context of the giving of a significant gift suggests a suppressed other world that works as a complex 'background' to the relationships enacted upon the stage. Motherhood here operates to suggest what Julia Kristeva calls 'a sacred beyond', for although Leah has little to do with the play, the fact that an audience is made to imagine her existence, and ponder the meanings of that existence, provokes some complex adjustments in their reading of Shylock and his daughter.³

Motherhood as a signifier has always been laden with meaning and burdened with expectation. Its significance has demonstrated remarkable consistency in western European culture, where its complicated emotional, social and political implications attest to continuities of meaning. Certain qualities (of selflessness, of unconditional love, for example) are traditionally associated with motherhood in such a way that they are understood as natural and as universal. This is borne out by a consideration of the paradigms through which the

¹Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 108.

²Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. W. Moelwyn Merchant, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985.

³Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. L. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 237.

concept has been read; from before Augustine to after Freud, assumptions are revealed which routinely dehistoricise and universalise motherhood as instinctive and natural, as a given. Such continuity of traditional ideas is, this thesis will argue, essential to the importance of the mother figure in the drama of the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, enabling her to provide a consistent emotional focus throughout the political, religious and social changes of the period. However, if motherhood operates as a relatively unchanging idea, it is also especially subject, in terms of the interpretation and presentation of that traditional idea, to the influences and constraints of culture, politics and society. During the period covered by this thesis, dramatists chose to emphasise different aspects of the meaning of motherhood according to the demands of genre and of theatre, but also according to the influence of political and social change, and shifts in ideology. This thesis argues for the crucial importance of the mother figure as an emblem and as a signifier in a drama which was self-consciously fashioning and re-fashioning itself in relation to the political and social concerns of the society from which it emerged.

The idea of the mother figure as emblematic is important throughout this thesis, where it is used to describe her function as a visual signifier of a complex set of ideas, the embodiment of conflicting discourses as spectacle. Francis Bacon's discussion of the emblem as a figure, which 'reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible', is helpful here. Michael Bath shows that the sixteenth-century emblem was already a synthesis of classical, humanist and scriptural *topoi*, a useful coincidence with the argument of this thesis that the mother figure drew her range of signification from a similar synthesis.⁴ The term 'emblem' can be problematic, though, in that it has both a general critical usage, as suggested in Martha Hester Fleische's analysis: 'an image is an emblem, in short, if it is devised and viewed with an emblematic eye', and the much more specific meaning exemplified in that offered by Geoffrey Whitney, 'the first serious exponent of the fashion [for emblems] in England' according to Rosemary Freeman, who defined the word as coming from the Greek 'to set in' or 'to put in'.⁵

Despite these complications, the concept of the emblem offers an appropriate way to describe the function of the mother figure in the period. The dramatised mother does work to elucidate complex meaning, though that meaning includes both continuity and change, and so

⁴See Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*, Longman, London and New York, 1994, pp. 2-3 and p. 48 for the quotation from Bacon.

⁵A concept of the emblem as theatrical can be traced back to 1569 when the emblem book *A Theatre for Worldlings* was translated from French and published in English. See Martha Hester Fleische, *Iconography of the English History Play*, Salzburg, Institut für Englische Sprache and Literatur, Universität, 1974, pp. 2-3 and the Introduction to Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books*, New York, Octagon Books, 1966.

the function and nature of the emblem alter. The link between motherhood and meaning structures the argument of the thesis, which insists upon the operation of motherhood to affect an audience's understanding of a narrative, to complicate, destabilise and to mediate. Shakespeare's assertion of Leah is a rhetorical rather than a visual image, but it nevertheless elicits a complex, difficult reaction, which further interrogates the moral structure of the play.

For much of the twentieth century, criticism of the representation of mothers in early modern drama, and Shakespearean drama in particular, tended to the conservative and the personal and to confuse Elizabethan 'interest' in maternity with the representation of a particular kind of mother figure appropriate to the critic's own perceptions of what motherhood should and should not mean. For example, Maynard Mack:

There is amazingly little interest in either mothers or mothering in most of Shakespeare, and the comparatively few mothers who are brought to our attention as mothers, though they include such exemplary mothers as the Countess of Roussillon, Lady Macduff, Virgilia and Hermione, include also Tamora, cruel Queen of the Goths in *Titus Andronicus*, Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Lady Macbeth (a mother at least by her own testimony), Volumnia in *Coriolanus* and the poisoning Queen in *Cymbeline*, mother of the clod Cloten. Not — one may perhaps reasonably conclude — a puff for radiant Elizabethan motherhood.⁶

The implication here appears to be that those characters who cannot be categorised as 'exemplary' are not really mothers at all. A more striking example is A.C. Bradley's famous account of the final cause of Hamlet's psychic disintegration — 'it was a moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true nature' — that similarly depends upon romantic, conventional assumptions about the nature of the mother-son relationship.⁷ This approach has occasionally driven critics to extreme lengths in order to accommodate early modern 'interest' in mothers of a less than exemplary nature. 'If differently placed, Lady Macbeth might not have been a bad mother', suggests one such.⁸ Such criticism has been attacked for its lack of rigour and for over sentimentality, but not necessarily for the

⁶Maynard Mack, *Rescuing Shakespeare*, Oxford, International Shakespeare Association at the University Press Oxford, 1979, p.7.

⁷A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 1904, edited by John Russell Brown, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986, p. 94.

⁸Sarup Singh, *Family Relationships in Shakespeare and the Restoration Comedy of Manners*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 198. There is no consistent evidence to suggest that Lady Macbeth was, or was not a bad mother, of course, though it is telling that she owns up to a terrifying fantasy of infanticide at a tense narrative moment in Shakespeare's play.

assumptions about the nature of motherhood that tend to inform it.⁹ Bradley and Mack, whatever the limits of their respective readings, raised questions about the complications and challenges of representing motherhood in early modern drama which are still not completely answered.

Representation of the dramatised mother, Maynard Mack implies, tends to be understood by critics with reference to a consistent set of ideas informed by notions of what a mother should be. Bradley's assertion of Gertrude's 'true nature' is telling here, suggesting a link between an understanding of good motherhood and what is 'natural'. The authority of this persistent tradition both in history and in contemporary historiography and criticism is acknowledged by the historian Elisabeth Badinter, even as she challenges it:

It is pointless to maintain that maternal behaviour is not grounded in instinct as long as people persist in regarding a mother's love for her child as so strong and as seemingly universal that it must somehow owe something to nature. Despite the change of vocabulary, the old notion endures, and it all becomes a question of semantics.¹⁰

Writing from another perspective, the psychoanalyst Rozsika Parker acknowledges 'the imperative that there is only one way to be a good mother' and observes that:

Our culture permits flexibility in other activities that involve intimacy, some heterogeneity, some diversity of style, but hardly any at all when it comes to mothering.¹¹

Parker acknowledges that the psychoanalytic paradigm itself tends to assume that 'mother' is ahistorical and is thus in danger of replicating that same traditional notion that motherhood is

⁹ See Bernard Shaw in *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. E. Wilson, London, Cassell, 1961, p. 142, '[Lady Macbeth] says things that will set people's imaginations to work in the right way: that is all.' Also L.C. Knights, *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?* Cambridge, Minority Press, 1933, who reserves his most furious criticisms for Bradley.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. Roger DeGaris, London, Souvenir Press, 1981, p. xxii. Another challenge to the tradition comes from Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, London, Virago, 1977.

¹¹ Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*, London, Virago, 1995, pp. 1-2.

linked to nature and instinct, a problem also acknowledged by the critic Karen Newman.¹² For Newman, writing about the representation of femininity in early modern drama from a new historicist perspective, this consistency has, in the plays, both a political function and political implications as a means by which patriarchy is constantly asserted and reaffirmed.¹³ Mary Beth Rose likewise reveals a ‘thematically determining omnipresence of patriarchalism’ in early modern drama, arguing that ‘feminist inquiries must involve a full scrutiny of the discourses distinctive to, and the options available in Renaissance England’ to understand the ideological context for dramatic texts.¹⁴ Rose discovers an entrenched conservatism in Shakespeare’s comedies which has ‘an evident structural analogue in the anachronistic discourses of Vives, and in his tragedies’, leading her to conclude that ‘the Shakespearean text comes down decidedly in the conservative camp, allying itself with more traditional discourses’ in the treatment of the mother figure.¹⁵ For Rose, the dramatic potential of the mother figure is — in Shakespeare’s plays at least — circumscribed by the weight of conservative, patriarchal, tradition.

This thesis explores the extent to which traditional notions of what motherhood means colour the representation of the mother figure in early modern English drama. It takes a different perspective from critics like Rose and Karen Newman, who have been concerned, in Newman’s words to ‘explore how the feminine subject is constructed’.¹⁶ Rather than consider the dramatised mother in terms of subjectivity, this thesis posits the dramatised mother as embodying the intersection of a varied cluster of ideas and references, traditional

¹² Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 62.

¹³ For an elegant, and still instructive, survey of the busiest period in recent critical thinking on gender and drama see the Introduction to Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, University of Chicago Press, 1991. A more recent survey of the historical evidence for the representation of maternity in the early modern period is offered by Naomi J. Miller in ‘Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period, in Miller, Naomi J., and Yavneh, Naomi, eds., *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the Early Modern period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 1-25.

¹⁴ Mary Beth Rose, ‘Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1991, pp. 295 and 291. Rose chooses as relevant discourses the works of John Knox and the Humanist Juan Luis Vives. Neither Knox nor Vives was a direct product of Early Modern England, though of course Knox’s work was readily available in print, and translations of Vives were available from 1529. See also Valerie Wayne, ‘Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs’ in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 64.

¹⁵ Rose, ‘Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare?’, pp. 304 and 313.

¹⁶ Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, p. xix.

and contemporary. Her operation in the plays will be considered in terms of the effect that this complex of meanings might bring to the dynamics of dramatic narrative and structure.

Psychoanalytic readings have described the mother figure as a locus of anxious fantasies of power, as in Janet Adelman's persuasive interpretation of Shakespeare's later tragedies, for example.¹⁷ Adelman discovers a patriarchal assumption that 'women must pay the price for the maternal powers invested in them.'¹⁸ Kathryn Schwarz, paraphrasing Newman, argues that, 'women's reproductive bodies become metonyms for the ways in which patriarchy works' in the early modern period, so that meaning is privileged over subjectivity in terms of representation.¹⁹ For Newman this figurative function of the maternal body ensures that 'the social is presented as natural and therefore unchangeable, substantiated, filled with presence'.²⁰ 'The ways in which patriarchy works' suggests, in its generality, unbounded possibilities for the mother figure, a limitless set of potential meanings. In another analysis, Julia Kristeva's assertion of 'motherhood's impossible syllogism' — 'it happens, but I'm not there' — attests to this, offering an analysis of the mother as a kind of cipher, offering out endless meaning but present only as an absence of self.²¹ In drama, this frees up meaning untrammelled by subjectivity: the mother has the potential to be read, as Susan McLoskey argues, as a 'cipher for all the play's main characters', and though this has often been interpreted by critics as a negative quality, symptomatic of a subjectivity to be recovered, it can also offer dramatists an opportunity to create complex narrative meaning.²²

The established and complex meanings offered by motherhood have the potential to work as a constellation of ideas and points of reference: consistent and enduring, certainly, but also in constant flux as the significance generated by those fixed meanings shifts in response to the influence of changing political, cultural and social circumstances. The

¹⁷ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 4.

¹⁸ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Kathryn Schwarz, 'Mother Love: Clichés and Amazons in Early Modern England' in Miller and Yavneh, *Maternal Measures*, p. 294.

²⁰ Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity*, p. 4.

²¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini.', p. 237. This concept of motherhood as a kind of meaningful absence is addressed another way by Susan Robin Suleiman quoting Helen Deutsch, who asserts that 'mothers don't write, they are written'. Susan Robin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' in *The Mother Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Medelon Sprengnether, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 356.

²² Susan McLoskey, quoted by Laurie A. Finke in 'Painting Women: Images of Femininity in Jacobean Tragedy', *Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 36, No. 3, October 1984, pp. 357-370.

established, traditional range of referents actually frees up the potential that motherhood offers the dramatist. The interplay between her fixed meanings and their shifting significance in response to cultural and political change, for example, allows the mother a set of complex representational functions which were well understood and exploited by those writing for the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.

It is perhaps this very complexity that accounts for the much-noted absence of the mother in early modern plays. The ‘amazingly little interest’ in mothering that Mack acknowledges has been addressed by Carol Thomas Neely who offers historical explanations for this problematic absence:

The rarity of mothers [in Shakespeare’s plays] may reflect or confirm demographic data showing that Renaissance women frequently died in childbirth. It may embody the social reality that patriarchal culture vested all authority in the main parent; making it both logical and fitting that he alone should represent that authority in the drama. It may derive ... from generic conventions: the uncommonness of mature women in the genres of comedy, history play and tragedy. Or it may result from a scarcity of boy actors capable of playing mature women in Shakespeare’s company.²³

Neely alerts us, importantly, to the possible dangers of focussing too closely upon ‘the phenomenon of absent mothers’ for evidence of the sort of misogyny (‘the best mother is an absent or dead mother’) that Mary Beth Rose discovers by offering the demands of theatrical convention and dramatic form as modifying possibilities.²⁴ Neely’s account remains rather open ended — ‘the nature and significance of this phenomenon and the relative significance of the factors accounting for it probably vary from genre to genre or even from play to play’ — nevertheless, her insistence upon the unique dynamic of each individual play is crucial to any discussion of the specificity of meaning with which the mother figure colours the texts which she inhabits.²⁵

By the sixteenth century, motherhood had become a complex and fluid notion, emerging in a variety of discourses for ends that are interestingly diverse. As a type, an emblematic device, a metaphor, and a symbol, the fluidity of the mother image was pervasive

²³Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 171-7.

²⁴Rose, ‘Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare?’, p. 301. Also see the introduction in Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1983, for a discussion of different critical perspectives on the representation of women in Elizabethan drama.

²⁵Neely, *Broken Nuptials*, p. 171.

and complicated. In Christian and classical tradition the mother figured the Church or the State or Nature, offering a variety of allegorical possibilities. Her significance as a metaphor on the grand scale coexisted unproblematically with the more commonplace and practical, so that, for example, Raynalde's standard obstetric manual *The Byrthe of Mankynde* routinely discusses female fertility in relation to the propagation of beans and corn, and suggests remedies for infertility and gynaecological problems based upon the use of germinating crop seeds either in the making of medicines and lotions or by virtue of sympathetic healing.²⁶ The womb is described, both in its physiological aspect and its generative potential as a 'purse', which encapsulates the currency of future generations. At the same time an individual freak baby, a 'monstrous birth', could be understood as having prophetic significance for the entire nation as in the dismal prognostications of the clergyman Stephen Batman, whose *The Doome Warning all men to the Iudgement* 'produced an extensive chronicle of every prodigy and monstrous birth in every book he had read'.²⁷

The qualities of motherhood might transcend gender as it had for much earlier devotional literature. St. Anselm had written of both St. Paul and Jesus in terms of their maternal qualities and there was an influential iconographic tradition that envisioned Christ the Nurse, described androgynously as a bridegroom with breasts.²⁸ The secular version of this drew on Plato whose argument that love and poetry have similar procreative functions had become a common conceit, deployed, for example, by Philip Sidney in his preface to *Astrophel and Stella*, where the mother's body becomes an exotic metaphor for literary creativity in a description of 'the labouring streames' of the womb which engenders his poetry.²⁹ Elizabeth Sacks quotes John Lyly's witty account of 'monosexual literary parenthood' in his preface to *Euphues and his England* (1580): 'the paine I sustained for him in travaile, hath made me past teeming, yet doe I think myself very fertile, in that I was not altogether barren.' Of his book's relationship with his previous publication he asserts,

²⁶J.W Ballantyne, 'The Byrthe of Mankynde' - the Text, in *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire*, Vol XII, 1907, pp. 269-271.

²⁷Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p. 109.

²⁸From *Jesus as Mother, Studies in the Spirituality of the Higher Middle Ages*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982.

²⁹Dorothy Connell, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker's Mind*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 46, quotes from Plato's *Symposium*: 'Those who are pregnant in the body only betake themselves to women and beget children - this is the character of their love ... but souls which are pregnant - for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies - conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain.'

Preface quoted in Sir Philip Sidney, Preface to *Astrophel and Stella*, 1591, cited in C. Gebert, *An Anthology of Elizabethan Dedications and Prefaces*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1966, p. 72.

'Twinnes they are not, but yet brothers, the one nothing resembling the other, and yet as all children are now-a-daies, resembling the father.'³⁰

Lyly's metaphor self-consciously combines the maternal and paternal experiences of labour and fatherhood respectively, in a metaphor which has an analogue in childbed scenes, for example in *A Chaste Maid on Cheapside*, where, as I discuss in Chapter 5, anxieties about paternity are raised in a scene where the childbed is a central image. Such scenes are predominantly populated by women figures, by boys playing women. The erotic potential of theatrical cross dressing seems likely to be suppressed in such plays in favour of the production of a kind of irony similar to that deployed by Lyly, the paternity joke gaining resonance from the impersonation of mature women by young men. Generally, though, in an interesting contrast to the quickening, groans, pangs and teemings that decorated so many written prefaces, the traumatic and frequent experience of real childbirth receives little attention in the Elizabethan theatre. Births, where they happen in the drama, tend to take place offstage with the usual commonplace references to labour pains as a matter of convention.

Discourses that placed the mother in relation to her husband and children tended to bring together practical knowledge, ideology and myth. Conventional obstetrics confirmed that the married mother was incubator of her husband's children, facilitating the development of his seed (her genetic contribution not being properly understood), 'reproducing' her husband through her maternity and thus providing emotional satisfaction, dynastic stability and some insurance for old age.³¹ Historians appear to disagree about the extent to which childlessness or infertility carried any social stigma for either parent, but childless women were perhaps incorporated into the social milieu associated with motherhood through attendance and support at confinements, as in the case of Lady Margaret Hoby, who, Elaine Hobby suggests, may have taken the gentlewomanly task of reading the relevant sections of childbirth manuals and advice books to those in her care, among other duties.³²

³⁰Elizabeth Sacks, *Shakespeare's Images of Pregnancy*, London, Macmillan, 1980, p. 8. Sacks offers several splendid examples of the genre.

³¹Although there was an ongoing discussion concerning conception and gestation described, for example, in Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, Croom Helm, 1982.

³² See *The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby*, ed. Dorothy M. Meads, Routledge, London, 1930. Lady Margaret records her attendance at several confinements (pp. 63, 191, 195) and clearly played an important part in that of an unknown 'wiffe' with whom, after arriving at 6am, she says 'I was busy till 1 a Cloke, about which time, She bing delivered and I having praised God, returned home' p.63. Lady Margaret did not find her childlessness a barrier to her offering advice to other parents either, on occasion offering advice to neighbours on 'divers nedful dutes to be knowne: as of parente Chousinge for their children'. Elaine Hobby, in her Introduction to the later midwife, Jane Sharp's *The Midwives*

The pregnant woman was understood to bear responsibility for her child, both in her own right and because her duty to her husband designated the obligation. This began at conception. Ideas were abundant and confusing regarding the baby in its mother's womb; there are common references to abortive pregnancy as a kind of divine punishment for parental (especially maternal) misdeeds, particularly sexual incontinence. Deformed babies might result from the mother's intercourse with beasts or devils, sex during menstruation or misbehaviour or fright during pregnancy.³³ Once a child was born, the nursing mother was traditionally considered ideal though breastfeeding was paradoxically also described as a demeaning and bestial practice. Despite Protestant emphasis upon the virtues and advantages of maternal nursing, women of the upper classes were less likely to feed their young than their poorer sisters, and their husbands seem to have been actively involved in their decision whether to nurse or not.³⁴ The problematic double significance of breastfeeding, the desirability of the mother's continued social, economic and sexual activity and the perceived need for large numbers of children at a time when most of them would probably die before the age of ten (breastfeeding is a contraceptive practice) contributed to a situation where many families who could afford it often resorted to the employment of a wet nurse. Dorothy Maclaren has shown how misguided such reasoning was, offering evidence that women who did nurse their babies probably had healthier children and the prospect of greater longevity.³⁵

The relationship between the idea of motherhood and Christianity has been well documented and it is interesting that although new — or at least new variants of old — ideas about motherhood emerged during the period after the Reformation, and continued to develop, they tended to add to, rather than change, the multiplicity of meanings that

Book, discusses the role of the gentlewoman reader at confinements. See Elaine Hobby (ed.) *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered: Jane Sharp*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. xv. Hobby offers a useful history of early modern obstetric manuals in her Introduction.

³³Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 106.

³⁴Dorothy Maclaren, 'Fertility, Infant Mortality and Breast Feeding in the Seventeenth Century', *Medical History* 22, 1978; and by the same author, 'Marital Fertility and Lactation', in *Women in English Society 1500 - 1800*, ed. M. Prior, Methuen, London 1983, pp. 211-32. Also Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; Alan MacFarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 85; Patricia Crawford, 'The Sucking Child' in *Continuity and Change* I, 1986, 23-54, pp. 83-84; and J.W. Ballantyne, 'The Byrthe of Mankynde - Its Authors and Editions', in *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire*, Vol X, Number 4, October 1906, Figure XV, in which it is shown how references to nursing begin to appear in later editions of Raynalde's *Byrthe of Mankynde*.

³⁵Dorothy Maclaren, 'Fertility, Infant Mortality and Breast Feeding'.

motherhood could offer.³⁶ Certain conventional notions and practices remained embedded in popular religious culture although their significance might be altered. The ‘churching’, or ritual purification of women after childbirth, for example, had been considered essential before a woman could be received back into her community. Keith Thomas refers to the popular belief that a woman who died in childbed before the rite had been performed should not have Christian burial.³⁷ By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Protestant Church was emphasising the celebratory aspect of the ceremony, playing down the purification. Puritans ridiculed the whole thing and most families seem to have used it mainly as the opportunity for a party.³⁸ Nevertheless the familiar paradox prevailed: childbirth was a blessing upon the family but at the same time despoiled the mother; motherhood was on one hand an elevated status to which women should aspire, exemplified by the mother of Jesus, while at the same time the bestial act of giving birth constituted an enactment of the punishment of Eve for whose sin all women bore guilt.

The challenge for this study is to disentangle the dramatic, circumstantial and ideological factors which intersect to produce the mother as a figure offering a complex system of signification simultaneously constant and always subject to reinterpretation. The mother figure was, in Barthes’ formulation, polysemous in early modern theatre, her meaning endlessly modified and challenged in response to the rapidly changing conditions of Elizabethan and Jacobean society and politics.³⁹ This study aims to rediscover the mother figure as a successful and dynamic dramatic construct, re-examining the ways in which she operated within narrative and dramatic structures, but also re-exploring the context in which she was placed, to discover what the idea ‘mother’ meant as s/he (the boy playing the woman) stepped on stage. The dramatised mother figure operates at the interface between audience and performance; between culturally and socially constructed notions of what motherhood is and the dynamics of dramaturgy and narrative; between what was already known about motherhood and what was actually seen and said during the course of performance.

The ways in which motherhood thus straddles the divide between moral, spiritual and concrete experience, and its tendency to focus a series of complicated and shifting meanings in a continuous process of development, transmission and appropriation, endows the image of

³⁶ See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 237, and Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Picador, 1995.

³⁷ See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 38.

³⁸ See Peter Clark, ‘The Alehouse and the Alternative Society’, in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, ed. Keith Thomas and Donald Pennington, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978. p. 63.

³⁹ Roland Barthes. ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ in *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, pp. 38-39. Barthes notes that ‘all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a “floating chain” of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.’

the mother with a powerful range of affective and intellectual potentialities. The title of this thesis emphasises the transformation of *tradition*. Tradition is taken here to refer to a set of meanings, which were ratified and developed through their usage over centuries, so that their significance and complexity was understood. But tradition also refers to the *process* of passing on, of conveyance, of delivery.⁴⁰ Both meanings are important in this thesis, which explores not only the significance which usage had donated to motherhood, up to and including the opening years of the sixteenth century, but also the transmission of that usage, what Giorgio Agamben has called ‘the living act of tradition’.⁴¹ The thesis attempts to describe and explore both the accumulation of ideas that made available a set of understood meanings for the idea ‘mother’, and the transmission (and transformation) of those meanings through figurations of that idea, during the political and cultural shifts leading to the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and the establishment of Protestant England.

The Chapters:

Chapter 1 seeks to demonstrate the importance of that tradition for the reformulation of ideology during the Reformation, and explores its operation in the political drama of the middle years of the sixteenth century. Focussing upon the mother figure in terms of dramatic *function* rather than subject, it argues that typology is crucial to her construction in drama, both as a rhetorical figure and as visually realised. The chapter traces the utility of motherhood as a dramatic trope, demonstrating its importance as a carrier of a complex and resonant typology, which emerges out of, and is enriched by, religious, political and cultural concerns as mediated by early popular theatre. The importance of motherhood as an emblem is demonstrated by reference to two polemical plays of the Reformation, the Protestant *Kyng Johan* and its Catholic rejoinder, *Respublica*. The appropriation and re-appropriation of the mother figure is demonstrated in these plays as a religious and political struggle to monopolise and to colonise the mother as emblem. This gained a new and important currency

⁴⁰ Indeed in ancient usage there is an implication that this passing on is also a kind of surrender, or even betrayal. My information comes from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, vol. XVIII, pp. 353-4. See also Howard Caygill, ‘Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition’ in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, London, Routledge, 1994, 1-31, esp. p. 12. Caygill recalls that the Latin *traditio* was a legal term which meant ‘delivery’, ‘conveyance’ or ‘surrender’ and he suggests that the sense of tradition as ‘handing down’ was adopted by the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment. It is clear, though, that both usages were operating in complicated tandem during the sixteenth century though the latter had become more usual by the last decade.

⁴¹ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p.107.

when a female monarch headed the State. Both Mary and Elizabeth made shrewd political use of the potential and diversity of ideas about motherhood and its meaning, establishing an inextricable link between those ideas and the promotion of monarch and State which inevitably has implications for the representation of the mother in the contemporary theatre.

Chapter 2 considers the influence of Classical drama. The English theatre had always combined entertainment with the transmission of moral, Christian and political ideas and had developed its conventions accordingly and adapted to the opportunities offered by new media.⁴² The advent of cheap printing made possible a mass distribution of texts and dissemination of ideas, which Elizabeth Eisenstein suggests, had a profound effect upon the drama.⁴³ New dramatic models, which addressed the mother in new ways, became available as the works of the Greek and Roman dramatists appeared in translation throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. Eisenstein argues that the effect was conservative — ‘during the past five centuries, broadcasting new messages had also entailed amplifying and reinforcing old ones’ — although such conservatism often meant in fact that old conventions of representation were retained but reworked to deploy new ideas.⁴⁴ The mother figure, whose significance in popular native drama was well established, was measured against her counterparts in other newly available narratives, notably the work of Seneca. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the popularity of newly available models (for example the figure of Medea) influenced and further complicated the potential of the mother type. Two plays, *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta*, show how the mother figure is enriched by a collision of early and classical dramatic forms. The mother’s dramatic potential is radically extended by attention to classical drama, though her meaning is always mediated through more local and contemporary religious, political and cultural preoccupations.

Chapter 2 continues this investigation through a focus upon the relationship between the ideology of motherhood and dramatic convention and reveals a crucial strand to the argument of this thesis, which is that violence is inevitably inscribed into the typology of

⁴² For a summary and discussion of the debate concerning the influences and implications of early modern print culture, see the introduction to Michael D. Bristol and Arthur F. Marotti, eds., *Print, Manuscript, Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2000, pp. 1-32. Bristol and Marotti go so far as to argue that the social significance of new theatres is ‘fully understood only against the background of printing.’, p. 11.

⁴³ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Vols I and II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979. The page references cited here refer to Vol. I. For an account of the advent of cheap printing which takes a less deterministic view, emphasising continuities as well as change, see, for example, Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁴⁴ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*, p. 126.

motherhood. In a discussion of the Latin play *Roxana*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, connections between maternity and the depiction of violence are traced. The emphasis of the argument remains upon typology and function, demonstrating how an assertion of the maternal, both in rhetoric and through dramatic spectacle, serves to emblemise both the causes and consequences of conflict and to elicit an affective response that invites reconsideration of the political in the light of the personal.

In Chapter 3, which focuses upon the history plays of the late sixteenth century, the typology adumbrated in the first two chapters is explored as a quality of *narrative*. Elizabethan chronicle history implies a teleology that offers a reading of history in terms of a grand scheme structured around causes and events. Here it is argued that motherhood in history plays operates against the dynamics of teleology to offer alternative, complicated readings of historical episodes. The typological meanings carried by the mother bisect chronology to assert a mythic and macrocosmic history, which insists upon an alternative context for the reading of the play as 'story'. Beginning with Dr. Legge's Latin play *Richardus Tertius*, followed by a discussion of Peele's *Edward I* and finally with an examination of the role of Queen Margaret in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, it is argued that the plot, the organisation of occurrences into narrative, is constructed so that the play offers simultaneous meanings from two temporal perspectives. The first depicts a chronology of incidents that are invested with political and moral meanings, which will be resolved at the end of the play. The second endows motherhood with significance in a way that Paul Ricoeur calls *transhistorical*.⁴⁵ Motherhood works, it is argued, as a narrative *event*, plotted as an intervention in the iteration of chronologically organised occurrences to complicate the dramatic representation, and thus the political and moral implications of history.

Chapter 4 shifts the discussion to a focus upon what the audience sees, or, perhaps more importantly, thinks it sees. The emphasis here is upon the materiality of the maternal body. Maternity is signified in the drama by drawing attention to the physical specialness of that body. The dramatised mother differentiates herself from other female types as she signals and invites consideration of her pregnant or lactating condition both verbally and often by drawing attention to what the audience should 'see'. During the period covered by this chapter, the physical functions of maternity were simultaneously being explored in the newly available obstetric manuals, which enjoyed a remarkable popularity and which invited a consideration of motherhood in terms of its physiological operation, and thus its sexual and

⁴⁵Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 15.

bestial qualities.⁴⁶ Taking two plays about Patient Griselda written forty years apart (by Phillip and Dekker) and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, this chapter argues that the body of the mother was exposed to an increasingly voyeuristic public scrutiny not only on the stage within the world of the play, but in contemporary culture and practice, as maternity was increasingly exposed and controlled through State legislation and the processes of commodification. The chapter argues that discursive tensions created by an ambivalent appreciation of motherhood are contained through performance, absorbed and transformed by the mediating body of the boy actor who could not be a real mother. Spectators were thus free to take pleasure in the spectacle of the maternal body and of its scrutiny and control.

Chapter 5 focuses upon the representation of domesticity in the domestic tragedies, which turn upon the dangerous potential of motherhood in an uncertain Protestant world, and the city comedies, which farcically expose the tensions, and hypocrisies of that world. In the domestic tragedies of the 1590s motherhood is linked to concerns about social and economic stability. The dramatic re-presentations of celebrated contemporary domestic crimes attests to increasing interest in the concept of the household and in the idea of the family, perhaps as a consequence of Protestant polemic. Motherhood here becomes important in terms of its situation within a world in which social and economic considerations are shown to predominate. Maternity is still constructed out of social and moral principles but such principles allude to maternity as a fundamentally *social* function which is important in ensuring stability in the wider world represented by the play. The complex social structures in such a world are clearly adumbrated in *A Warning for Fair Women*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *A Chaste Maid at Cheapside*, with the family as the smallest unit of an integrated society based upon the importance of geographic locality and economic interdependence.

This realised social world has at its centre a private household where the main events of each play are situated, signified both by its material furniture and by the people within it: the families, servants and visitors who serve to link it to the world within which it exists and which impinges upon it.⁴⁷ The wider world exists as both threat and control; the potentially

⁴⁶Print, Eisenstein argues, had a democratising effect, enabling those who were not scholars to write and instruct. Thus, 'the French midwife, Louise Bourgeoise ... wrote on her art believing herself the first woman to do so. Her wide practice, she claimed, would show up the mistakes of physicians and surgeons, even of Master Galen himself.' Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*, p. 242. Whilst the democratising effect of the printing press, in the sense of who was able to publish, is still controversial, the new availability of certain texts is significant.

⁴⁷ The separation and interdependence of the private and the public is seen by Roger Chartier as 'a product of the modern state' and it can be argued that these plays engage with the emerging distinctions between various kinds of real and figurative spaces. See Roger Chartier's introduction to *A History of*

disruptive dangers of the outside exist alongside the comforts offered by a supportive social network which functions to restore stability when that network is threatened. Rather than maternity being the locus of a potential threat — something I will have argued for in previous chapters — these plays demonstrate maternity itself as vulnerable and undermined, and with it, the fragile stability of the social structures that depend upon it.

Chapter 6 discovers a similar vulnerability explored in high tragedy through close readings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*. Bearing in mind Jonathan Dollimore's important discussion of Jacobean tragedy as exhibiting a move from what he calls 'idealist mimesis' to a mimetic drama which was essentially 'realist', both plays, in their complex dealings with a son's relationship to his mother, demonstrate a reworking of typology to take account of shifting ideological preoccupations in drama.⁴⁸ Both plays interrogate the relations between mothers and sons in the context of an increasing contemporary emphasis upon the domestic responsibilities of the mother, and a shift away from the association of the mother figure with the idea of the State. In both plays, the mother's public and political role is seen as extremely dangerous to the son, the mothers operate in their public role to increase masculine vulnerability in a fragile social and political world. The mother as characterised may be sympathetic, but her maternity is destabilising, associated with violence and a disturbance of family structure. The mother figure is no longer a pathetic signifier of the personal consequences of political action, rather, she infects the political and creates danger through an unhappy collision between her personal desires and matters of State.

Chapter 7 argues that later Jacobean drama depicts the mother figure in relation to the Protestant family ideal that is celebrated in contemporary advice literature and conduct books. The chapter engages with those critics who have argued for an increasing affirmation of the affective family in the dramatisation of motherhood over the Elizabethan and early Jacobean period, arguing that the model of the ideal mother is informed by a religious and political ideal rather than by a new attention to affective family relations.⁴⁹ Focussing upon Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the argument of the thesis returns to the focus upon motherhood and meaning treated in the first chapter. The crucial difference here is in the nature and scope of that meaning. Both plays explore, and present, a version of perfect motherhood; their emphases are primarily upon the evocation of a domestic ideal. In these later plays, the flexibility that characterised sixteenth-century

Private Life III: Passions of the Renaissance, ed. Roger Chartier, Cambridge, Mass. and London, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989. p.16.

⁴⁸ Dollimore, Jonathan, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, Brighton, Harvester, 1989.

⁴⁹ In, for example, Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the loss of Eden: the construction of family values in Early Modern culture*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999.

representation of the mother is subordinated to the need to produce an unambiguous icon. The typology that proved so adaptable in Elizabethan drama hardens into cliché in Jacobean popular drama, where perfect mothers are represented as statues, or memorialised as tomb sculptures.

This study is, therefore, an attempt to describe the operation and to assess the significance of the mother in English drama of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It shows how the mother became more complicated and her range of meanings broadened during the period, in response to pressures from both within and beyond the drama itself. Considering both chronology and genre, the thesis demonstrates that representations of the mother figure changed over the early modern period. From a traditional typological and allegorical function, the operation of the dramatised mother shifted towards a more complex representation that engaged with contemporary experience and culture. What Patrick Collinson has termed the 'turning inward' of later Protestantism, has its analogy in later changes in the meaning of the mother on the stage, so that she returns eventually to a role that is primarily symbolic.⁵⁰ In place of the traditional and familiar publicly consumed typology of the sixteenth century the drama of the Jacobean period offers a mother whose meaning is especially relevant in terms of private experience, an icon and an exemplum.

⁵⁰ See Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia* (Stenton Lecture, 1985), Reading, University of Reading, 1986; *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, London, Macmillan, 1988; 'The Elizabethan Church and the New Religion' in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. Christopher Haigh, London, Macmillan, 1987.

Chapter 1: The Transformation of Tradition in the Sixteenth Century

li: *Motherhood and meaning*

This fine and lovely word Mother is so sweet and so much its own that it cannot properly be used of any but Him, and of her who is his own true Mother — and ours. In essence, motherhood means love and kindness, wisdom, knowledge, goodness. Julian of Norwich.¹

Julian of Norwich was one of many Christian mystics in the late medieval period who used maternity as a complicated and flexible concept, informed by a tradition of exegesis which allowed her to describe spiritual experience that was both deeply affective and intellectually sound. The aim of this chapter is first to explore the operation and significance of this ‘fine and lovely’ word ‘mother’ in the expression of popular and affective piety in pre-Reformation England, and then, to show that during the sixteenth century, the multiplicity of meanings carried by the concept ensured that motherhood became a crucial trope in the polemical strategies of religious and political reform in England. The consequent dramatic deployment of the mother figure in Catholic theatre and its appropriation by Protestant propagandists attests to its central function in a battle to assert a political and religious ideology which appealed on the bases of both intellectual rigour and emotional satisfaction.

The processes of reform engendered an awareness of tradition, which was fundamental in the construction and representation of proto-Protestant and, later, Reformation ideology. For early reformers such as Wycliffe, ‘veyn tradicioun’ referred to an outmoded and morally dubious system of belief.² Under pressure from both this use of the term to derogate, and reformist pressure for Biblical evidence to support ecclesiastical ‘tradition,’ the term was, according to Alister McGrath, later understood to refer also to ‘a separate, distinct source of revelation, in addition to scripture.’ Such revelation was in a continuous process of transmission, ‘a stream of unwritten tradition, going back to the apostles themselves [which] was passed down from one generation to the next within the Church.’³ Tradition, then, and the means of its transmission, was both contested and crucial

¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Trans. C. Wolters, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966. This is taken from her meditation on Jesus as Mother, Chapter 60, p. 169.

² *OED*, p. 354, paragraph 6.

³ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Second edition), London, Blackwell, 1993, p. 136.

before and during the Reformation.⁴ And meanings and representations of motherhood were central in this, a traditional site of religious and political meaning, alienated, ironised and challenged by reformers, yet simultaneously appropriated to promulgate an alternative ideology.⁵

Julian's meditation on the word 'mother', which heads this section, indicates its potential to carry a multiplicity of meanings. But at the same time the word denotes its 'actual' meaning — the personification, the mother figure, so that 'mother' is always signifier as much as signified — 'mother' asserts a human figure as much as a metaphysical idea. These qualities combined to inform an allegorical tradition which allowed the concept 'mother' to focus and to represent a complicated and shifting set of meanings. Christian veneration of the mother of Christ had led to a celebration of the Holy Virgin as a maternal archetype, whose meanings and their ramifications have been thoroughly explored by Marina Warner.⁶ From this, as Warner and others have shown, a typology of divine maternity developed that embraced Mary's incarnations as Virgin, Bride and Mother into one flexible whole which was, as Ann Astell says, 'primarily maternal in orientation.'⁷ Mary's body,

⁴ Heiko Oberman, in *Masters of the Reformation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, discusses the importance, and the ambiguous status, of tradition during the European Reformation. See especially p. 196. In the Introduction, Oberman describes the problem by using a quotation from George Bernard Shaw's 1911 preface to *Fanny's First Play*, where Shaw refers to 'the substitution of custom for conscience', p.x. 'Custom', a concept closely allied to that of 'tradition', was similarly interrogated as part of the Reformation agenda: the necessity of substitution of new customs (with a play on 'costume') for old promoted, for example, in the Interlude *New Custom*. See J.S. Farmer, ed, *Anonymous plays, comprising Jack Juggler, King Darius, Gammer Gurton's needle, New custom, Trial of treasure*, Guildford, Charles W. Traylen, 1966. See also *OED*, vol. IV, p. 167.

⁵ Giorgio Agamben makes the distinction between a 'traditional system' where 'an absolute identity exists between that act of transmission and the thing transmitted', and 'non-traditional societies' which are characterised by 'the accumulation of culture.' Agamben, Giorgio, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 107. This chapter argues that the Reformation can be seen as the point of transformation from one to the other, as footnote 3 to this chapter also implies.

⁶ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Picador, 1995.

⁷ Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 46. Astell shows, importantly, how this is the consequence of what she calls 'the fusion of two histories': that of the evangelical biography of Mary, and the literal meaning in the *Song of Songs*, leading to the construction of a figure where the literal bleeds into the allegorical, enhancing her affective power (42-5). Astell shows how in twelfth-century exegesis Mary was the garden where God sowed the seed that bore Jesus as fruit (p. 46). She was also described as the holy fleece soaked with dew from heaven at

which had housed Christ, figured the Church, a concept which informed the personification Ecclesia, the bride of Christ. Warner describes fourteenth-century Hildegard of Bingen's vision of the mother Church as 'the "image of a woman" of large size, as big as a great city, with a crown on her head and splendour falling from her arms like sleeves'; a fascinating version of the trope which imagines the Mother of God in terms of a flourishing city, an image which accommodates secular, as well as religious, power.⁸ Cycle play dramatisations of the story of Noah make use of a similar flexibility of meaning. For example, in the Chester *Noah's Flood* the Ark, with its raised mast and its boundless capacity, is clearly an image of Mother Church, but it is also the image which dominates the celebration of a secular community of townsfolk who, ideally, work together towards both material prosperity and spiritual salvation.⁹

As Christ's bride, Mary is also the Queen of Heaven, a status which endows her with powers of intercession and mediation and especially with the authority to be what Astell calls a 'maternal *informatio*',¹⁰ a good and reliable guide. In the Chester *Purification* play, for example, it is Mary who instructs Joseph that Jesus must be taken to the temple because 'I wote well that it is Godes will ...' and who determines the subsequent action.¹¹ Such typology operates in the poem *Piers Plowman* where, in the narrator's apocalyptic dream vision, Lady Holy Church descends from a castle dressed in white linen to address him as her 'sone' and to teach him about charity and truth, in a powerful combination of bride,

the moment of the Conception. For more on this apparently popular trope, see B.H. Smith, *Traditional Images of Charity in Piers Plowman*, Mouton, The Hague, 1996, p. 26.

⁸ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, London, Picador, 1985, p. 194. C.W. Bynum, in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the Higher Middle Ages*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, discusses thirteenth-century women mystics' development of the trope in her final chapter.

⁹ A.C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, London, Dent, 1990, pp. 35-49. The community is shown, literally, working together in mime, they 'make signs of working with different tools' and even boast about their efficiency in terms of their status in Chester, 'An axe I have, by my crown/As sharp as any in this town'. The allegory of Church as mother is enhanced also by the presence of the comic antitype, Noah's wife, who works against both God and community by refusing to enter the Ark in favour of the alternative society of drunken gossips.

¹⁰ Astell, p. 46.

¹¹ Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, p. 323, line 126. See also Kinservik's discussion of Mary in the *N-town* 'Trial of Mary and Joseph' as '*mater mediatrix*, an active agent of the new law', Matthew J. Kinservik, 'The Struggle over Mary's Body: Theological and Dramatic Resolution in the N-Town Assumption Play', *Journal of English and German Philology* 95, 1996, 190-203, p. 195.

instructress and mother.¹² But another quality is also present in the mother here. The world of Will's dream is turned upside-down in both political and religious terms, and Holy Church is under attack.¹³ Maternity is thus associated not only with power, but, paradoxically, with vulnerability; the mother figure acts as protectress but is also in need of protection for herself and for her children. The meaning of 'mother' insists upon literal humanity as well as metaphysical transcendence, so that the mother figures frailty as much as authority. The paradox is dramatised at the end of the Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Pageant* where, following Mary's authoritative exposition of the Nativity to the visitors, one shepherd notices how Jesus 'lies full cold', in anticipation of the Passion and Mary's bereavement.¹⁴ The pageant of *Herod the Great* in the same cycle demonstrates maternal vulnerability most clearly when the desperate and brave defence of the mothers of the Innocents is ineffectual against the policy and the might of Herod's men.¹⁵ Here, the mothers' humanity is shown to be inadequate in their physical inability to fend off attack. This exposes the crucial aspect of maternal frailty: the mother is vulnerable because she is always human, because 'mother', whatever else it signifies, always also refers to the physicality and vulnerability of the maternal body. The mediating influence of the mother is here as important dramatically as it is in terms of religion, reformulating the consequences of evil and of public conflict in terms of private and personal experience and grief.

¹² In the A and B texts of the poem, her first word to Will (Passus I, line 5) is 'Sone', though in the C text the narrator is addressed by name. See A.V.C. Schmidt (ed.), *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*, London, Dent, 1978, and Derek Pearsall, ed., *William Langland: Piers Plowman, The C text*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1994. Robertson and Huppé show how this scene represents traditional homiletic exposition of the Apocalypse which combines Christ, the Church and the Bride of the Lamb. M. Teresa Tavormina draws attention to the importance of the trinity which is present not only in the three qualities of Holy Church which I describe above, but in the 'loving Unity' of 'Christ and Christendom and Holy Church the mother.' See Robertson and Huppé, *Piers Plowman and the Scriptural Tradition*, Octagon, New York, 1969, p. 37 and M. Teresa Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude: Marriage and Family in Piers Plowman*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 163. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker sees the female teacher, in particular, as offering learning by imitation of an exemplary figure. See Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker. 'The Metamorphosis of Women: Transmission of Knowledge and the Problem of Gender' in *Gender and History*, Vol. 12, No. 3, November 2000.

¹³ The nature of this attack is, of course made clear in Passus II with the introduction of her antitype Lady Meed, symbolically dressed in red and gold. Both editors draw attention to Langland's use of the convention in their Introductions. (Schmidt, p. xxv, Pearsall, p. 42).

¹⁴ Cawley, *Everyman*, p. 108. Line 748.

¹⁵ See Cawley, *Everyman*, especially p. 122 lines 350-60.

The limits (and the complexity) of this paradox are clear in the need to emphasise the extraordinariness of Mary's maternity, particularly in relation to those aspects of the maternal body which offer a troubling reminder of Original Sin. In the *N-Town* Nativity a version of the apocryphal story of the Doubting Midwife makes explicit and significant the gap between the blessed human flesh of the Virgin and that of all other mothers.¹⁶ Jesus is born 'withouten spot or any pollution.' And yet Mary's milk – another indication of her humanity – is associated with her cleanliness and purity, both of which offer related expressions of her holiness and her important difference:

Behold the breastes of this clean maid
 Full of fair milk how they be,
 And her child clean as I first said;
 As others are, not foul arrayed,
 But clean and pure both mother and child.¹⁷

Mary's body is shown to be absolutely material (the midwives are able to undertake an intimate investigation, in full view of the audience) but simultaneously mystifying; she is, and is not, like 'others':

Zelomy:
 with hand let me now touch and feel
 If you have need of medicine.
 I shall you comfort and help right well
 As other women if you have pine.

Maria:
 Of this fair birth that here is mine
 Pain nor grieving feel I right none.
 I am clean maid and pure virgin -
 Taste with your hand yourself alone.

¹⁶ In this tale, the Virgin is attended by two midwives, one of whom insists upon a detailed physical examination of the post-parturante Virgin because she does not believe in the immaculate birth. She is inflicted with a withered hand when she touches Mary's body to investigate. Her immediate repentance is rewarded by the arrival of a new hand, brought down from heaven by an angel.

¹⁷ In Peter Happé, ed., *English Mystery Plays*, 'The Nativity', p. 239, stanza 38.

Hic palpat Zelomy Beatam Mariam Virginem.

The second midwife's challenge to Mary's proclamation of her purity draws attention to the gap between what the midwife understands motherhood to mean, and what Mary is:

Salome:

I shall never trow it but I it prove,
 With hand touching, but I assay,
 In my conscience it may never cleave
 That she has child and is a may.

Maria:

You for to put clean out of doubt,
 Touch with your hand and well assay,
 Wisely ransack and try the truth out
 Whether I be fouled or a clean may.

Hic tangit Salome Mariam et cum arescerit manus eius ululando et quasi flendo dicit.

Salome:

Alas! Alas! and welaway!
 For my great doubt and false belief
 my hand is dead and dry as clay.¹⁸

The tension in this, and other versions of the Nativity in this genre, is structurally generated by the juxtaposition of a kind of comic realism alongside explicit symbolism, setting the mythic against the material (and one aspect of the maternal body in contest with another). The universalising significance of the event is placed in tension with the dangerous ignorance of the midwife who cannot distinguish between the fact of the blood, leakage and mess of human childbirth, and the symbolism of this mother's full breasts.¹⁹ Mary's body becomes the site of both a promise of eternity and a premise of tragedy, highlighting the gap between

¹⁸ R.T. Davies, *The Corpus Christi plays of the Middle Ages*, London, Faber, 1972, pp. 167-8.

¹⁹ The midwife is of course associated typologically with other comic female challengers to God's authority, from Noah's wife in all existing versions of the Flood pageant, to the alewife who remains in Hell after the Harrowing in the Chester pageant. See Cawley, *Everyman*, pp. 167-9. These figures will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

human understanding and the ways of God, emphasised by the typology which read the Nativity as a prefiguration of the Passion. The Virgin's lactating body figured God's mercy by reference to Christ's blood, her function was thus to symbolise both the power of an omnipresent Father-God and the sacrifice of his Son; the ultimate objectives of such representations.²⁰

The corporeal qualities of motherhood are celebrated in another way in the early fourteenth-century *Romance of the Rose* by Jean de Meun, where Dame Nature represents, according to Warner, 'the biological necessity of the race to reproduce, the carnality and consequent inferiority of females as members of the species.'²¹ Warner is arguing here that the carnality which caused the Fall informs a concept of the maternal (as an aspect of postlapsarian sexualised femininity) as inevitably flawed. Motherhood thus always signified mortality, and the relation between maternity and nature required careful adumbration if the 'natural', that is, fleshly and human, qualities that constitute part of the mother's meaning, suggested humankind's physical and spiritual frailty and failure. In an essay which discusses the personification of Nature in the *Romance of the Rose*, Sarah Kay suggests that the idea of motherhood as this 'natural' state was conditioned by an acknowledgement that nature required the moderating influence of patriarchal reason if its qualities were to contribute to spiritual satisfaction.²² Kay shows how Nature 'constantly invokes the need for the interpretation and control of her own gifts by the operation of reason.' Kay's essay confirms that patriarchal interventions are crucial adjuncts to the assertion of 'nature', a term that, like the concept of maternity with which it is so closely allied, can be benevolent or malignant depending upon the rational, patriarchal controls that are brought to bear upon it.

Such control is apparent in medieval clerical exegesis, which both explains and appropriates some 'natural' qualities of the maternal. St. Bernard's famous exploration of the

²⁰ The figure of Joseph is sometimes excluded from, or silent in such representations, so that there is an exclusive focus upon the holy infant with his mother. There are, for example, extant medieval pictures of Mary, accompanied by midwives and angels, entering the cave where the Birth will take place, while Joseph remains outside, holding the donkey. Such an exclusive representation was associated with an iconographic tradition which depicted the nursing of Christ, so that the familiar icon of the *Madonna lactans* was in a sense double-edged: it celebrated both the power of the Father and the redundancy of the man.

See R.T. Davies, *The Corpus Christi Plays of the Middle Ages*, 1972, p. 166.

²¹ Warner, *Monuments* p. 202.

²² See Sarah Kay, 'Women's body of knowledge: epistemology and misogyny in the *Romance of the Rose*' in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, pp. 211-235.

Song of Songs discovers a discourse upon the motherly aspects of Jesus, explaining references to breasts and milk in the *Song* in relation to the nurturing relationship between Christ and the individual soul and also to the administrative relationship between an abbot and his monks.²³ Bernard habitually brings together images of the yearning bride, the caring mother, the nurturing Christ and the caring abbot, as an excerpt discussed by Caroline Bynum demonstrates:

Take not however that she [the bride] yearns for one thing and receives another. In spite of her longing for the repose of contemplation she is burdened with the task of preaching; and despite her desire to bask in the bridegroom's presence she is entrusted with cares of begetting and rearing children. [Just as once before, she is reminded that] she [is] a mother, that her duty [is] to suckle her babes, to provide food for her children ... we learn from this that only too often we must interrupt the sweet kisses to feed the needy with the milk of doctrine.²⁴

Bernard's assertion of maternity was safely displaced on to the male body of Jesus, or, indeed, of himself, so that its 'natural' corporeal manifestations are appropriated safely into a mystical signifier of the paradox of the Incarnation.²⁵ And St. Anselm carefully differentiated between spiritual and corporeal maternity: 'Do, mother of my soul what the mother of my flesh would do.'²⁶ For Bernard and Anselm there is a celebratory emphasis upon the material

²³ Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the Higher Middle Ages*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, pp. 129-30. As Bynum shows, this link between Christ and maternity was complicated from the eleventh century onwards, by what she characterises as an 'increasing preference for analogies taken from human relationships'. She also cites 'a growing sense of God as loving and accessible, a general tendency toward fulsome language, and a more accepting reaction to all natural things, including the physical body.' Such an 'accepting reaction' had its limits, as I have shown.

²⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 129-30.

²⁵ B.H. Smith points out that the Incarnation was essentially a paradox: 'an event resulting in both the virgin-mother and the god-man.' This informed an influential iconographic tradition which envisioned Christ the Nurse who was described androgynously as a bridegroom with breasts. See Bynum, p. 115 and B.H. Smith, *Traditional images of Charity in Piers Plowman*, Mouton, The Hague, 1996, p. 33.

²⁶ St. Anselm quoted from *Jesus as Mother*. Anselm also describes St. Paul as 'a nurse who not only cares for her children but also gives birth to them a second time by the solicitude of her marvellous love', pp. 113-4. Bernard of Clairvaux describes Christ the Nurse; he also seems to have wanted to describe himself, as Abbot, in terms of unfailing love and nurture through suckling, as above, pp. 115-122.

and emotional qualities of motherhood once brought under male control. 'Mother' here operates to bring together concepts of spiritual perfection and natural bounty by reference to perfect maternity, and thus offers a metaphor for exemplary union between the body and the soul.

Anselm and Bernard were both likely influences upon female visionaries such as Julian of Norwich,²⁷ who devotes a long meditation to the mystery of 'our sweet, kind and ever-loving Mother Jesus; Jesus, our true Mother, feeds us not with milk but with himself, opening his side to us and calling out all our love.'²⁸ For Julian, Jesus is 'our Mother in nature, working by his grace in our lower part for the sake of the higher.'²⁹ The traditional vulnerabilities of the female are thus reformulated by Julian as necessary conditions for piety.³⁰ Julian's reformulation finds eloquent expression in the devotions of Margery Kempe who, upon revealing her religious experiences to her confessor, was told that she was 'sucking even at Christ's breast' and who imagined herself as an intimate assistant to St. Anne at the birth of the Virgin and to the Virgin at the birth of Christ.³¹ In this, Kempe draws

²⁷ Caroline Bynum tells of St. Anselm's description of Jesus 'as a hen gathering her chicks under her wing' and shows how he 'suggests that mother Jesus revives the soul at her breast'. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 113. See the Introduction to *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 34, for reference to the likely influence of the writings of Anselm and Bernard upon Julian of Norwich.

²⁸ Chapter 60, p. 169.

²⁹ Chapter 60, p. 171.

³⁰ This is a concept which Chaucer wittily incorporated into his 'Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale', where her spirited attack upon clerical antifeminism, '... no womman of no clerk is preyed', is part of her vigorous argument for recognition of the qualities that femininity should be allowed to bring to the demands of a spiritually satisfying life. See Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. A.C. Cawley, London, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978, 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', line 706, p. 176

³¹ See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B.A. Windeatt, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, Chapter 5, p. 52. Her meditations are coloured by a paradoxical lifelong desire for celibacy, despite the fact that she bore another thirteen children. Kempe's visit to Julian of Norwich seems to have affirmed for her the link between her own chastity and Christ's potential as a mother. Christ's interest in Margery's own maternity was crucial to her. He told her when she was subsequently with child (p.84), and after the birth of one of her later children, to have no more and instead to visit the anchoress Julian for guidance. (Windeatt, p. 73). Michel Foucault discusses in more general terms, this 'transformation of sex into discourse' through the practice of confession in terms of power relations and the construction of 'truth', a transformation which, in the case of Margery Kempe, is coloured by its transmission through a woman whose sexual and maternal experiences tend to reformulate connections between piety and the activities of reproduction. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, pp. 61-3.

upon her own understanding of maternity to imagine both herself and Christ in terms of the maternal.³² Her account is especially interesting because her initial visions seem to have been precipitated by her first experience of maternity. The illnesses that she endured through pregnancy, and the trauma of childbirth, were followed by a series of revelations that affected the rest of her life, informing the nature of her mystical experiences. This reformulating of concrete sexual and maternal experience into affective piety turned attention back to the materiality of motherhood, in terms of Mary's humanity. For example, Kempe envisioned herself feeding the grieving Virgin with caudle, a food used specifically for people who were sick, or, especially, for women in childbed. And however such an act might be read symbolically, Gail MacMurray Gibson is right to say that Kempe's inclusion of the recipe for her caudle (gruel and spiced wine)³³ attests to a shrinking of the gap between human experience, and the imagination of ideal maternity.³⁴ She also refers to Kempe's fascinating story of the Christ-child doll which was presented to women to be petted and kissed.³⁵ Gibson shows how close piety comes here to sympathetic magic, what she later describes as 'a very narrow line between religious icon and reassuring talisman.'³⁶ It is, however, as important to note the difference between the Christ-doll ritual and magic, as it is to note the similarities here; the doll is imbued with meaning which makes it an appropriate object for devotion – it concretises the numinous for those who engage with it, and allows them, too, to experience, however imperfectly, the motherhood (in both senses) of Christ.

The diversification of the mother figure into the allegorical personae of expository texts such as *Piers Plowman* thus developed alongside both the 'commemorative reconstruction' of Biblical tradition in the Mystery plays, and the appropriation of tropes of maternity into the discourses of affective piety.³⁷ Later fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-

³² See Sarah Beckwith's discussion of this in *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 83-88.

³³ Kempe, chapter 81, p. 236.

³⁴ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 51.

³⁵ Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 51. Also see Kempe, chapter 30, p. 113.

³⁶ Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, pp. 63 and 105 Gibson discovers this in the *Digby* 'Killing of the Children' where the massacre of the Innocents is juxtaposed with the 'broad slapstick comedy' of the mothers' attack upon the clownish Watkyn. Gibson links this to the local annual 'celebration of St. Distaff' — a game of the battle of the sexes — suggesting that the mothers in the play operate as 'a defining ritual that reveals the local, social "play" to be an integral part of salvation history' (p. 44).

³⁷ Marion Jones, 'Early Moral Plays and the Earliest Secular Drama' in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, Vol. I, ed. Lois Potter, London, Methuen, 1983, 213-274, p. 215.

century moral drama extended the figure's potential range of meanings in plays 'designed to convey and comment upon a selection of doctrine, and to recommend certain patterns of choice and action.'³⁸ *Wisdom* (c.1469) represents the soul, Anima, in terms of the mother/bride familiar from exegesis of the *Song of Songs* and combines this potential with the vulnerability of the mothers of the Innocents. The play celebrates the relation between Christ (figured in the play as Wisdom) and the soul of man in terms of explicit sexual passion: 'how amyable/to be halsyde and kyssyde of Mankynde' in an allegory which demonstrates, as Happé, shows, 'that Anima, the human soul, may find salvation by accepting a role as the Bride of Christ.'³⁹ But it also exposes human, fleshly, frailty in the figure of Anima,⁴⁰ whose potential perfection, signified by her white dress is compromised by the 'derke schadow I bere of humanyte', emblematised by a black mantle.⁴¹ Pamela King sees this costume as confirming that, '*Wisdom* represents the essential duality of Christ as God and man imperfectly mirrored in the soul,'⁴² here represented as his bride. But Anima's frailty is most strongly associated with maternity. Her vulnerability to infection by evil is demonstrated by seven small demons who run out from under her skirt and then back under it. The little devils who colonise Anima's body like bad children (and they would of course have been played by small children) affirm a typological opposition between the perfect mother/bride, who is the Virgin through the *Song of Songs*, and the inadequate, corrupted

³⁸ Jones, 'Early Moral Plays', p. 215.

³⁹ Clifford Davidson discusses the closeness of the sexual and the spiritual in this allegory, 'the secular equivalent of divine love and attraction is human arousal to sexual stimulation.' See Clifford Davidson, *Visualising the Moral Life*, AMS Press, New York, 1989, pp. 90-91 and Peter Happé, *English Drama before Shakespeare*, Longman, London, 1999, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Pamela King draws attention to the play's debt to St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* which refers to *John 1:4*, 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us.' See Pamela M. King, 'Morality Plays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 240-264, p. 252.

⁴¹ Lois Potter describes this (in a way that catches the visual effect of the costume) as 'the cloud which the body casts over the soul' in 'The Plays and Playwrights', *The Revels History of Drama in English*, Vol. II 1500-1570, London, Methuen, 1980, pp. 141-283, p. 149. W.A. Davenport links Anima's costume, interestingly, to the medieval idea of the 'sensible' soul as distinct from the 'rational' soul, a concept which he traces back to Aristotle, and one which further enriches the tension between meanings embodied by Anima here. See W.A. Davenport, *Fifteenth-century English Drama*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1984, pp. 79-80.

⁴² See King, 'Morality Plays', 240-264, p. 252.

mother/prostitute Mary Magdalene, accommodating both type and antitype.⁴³ This typology may have been emphasised in performance if David Bevington's analysis of the doubling of roles is correct in his suggestion that the actor who plays Christ/Wisdom would, significantly, double as Lucifer, externalising the psychomachia which informs the play. But only one actor would play Anima, who embodies and interiorises the oppositions that centre upon her.⁴⁴

Peter Happé shows how *Wisdom* operates by dramatising a conflict between Reason and Sensuality at the heart of humanity.⁴⁵ Henry Medwall's *Nature* treats the same opposition. His eponymous heroine associates herself with the material, natural, fleshly world, but, like Dame Nature in the *Romance of the Rose*, emphasises the controlling operation of God's providence upon even the most sensual aspects of her activities.⁴⁶ Both plays emphasise the value of a life lived in the world, where the demands of the soul and of the body compete; a conflict accommodated painfully in *Wisdom*, or more benignly in *Nature*, in the figure of the mother.⁴⁷

The concept of motherhood thus straddled divisions between moral, spiritual and concrete experience in late medieval and early Tudor culture. It offered a focus for a series of complicated and shifting meanings, which were always in a continuous process of development, transmission and appropriation. Its utility as a figure was enhanced by the ability of the maternal to indicate the physical, real and human — the mother figure literally *embodies* complex and conflicting ideas, donating form, mediating meaning. She offers visual significance, spectacularly bringing together the figurative and the corporeal; the symbolic and real human experience. This endows the stage mother with powerful affective

⁴³ Davidson points out that there is also a typological link between Anima and Mary Magdalene here, p. 105. Darryll Grantley has also drawn attention to the close correspondence between the Digby *Mary Magdalene* and plays of the Assumption of the Virgin, a link all the more interesting because of the likely common geographical origin of both plays. Darryll Grantley, 'Saints' Plays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 265-289, p. 280.

⁴⁴ See David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, pp. 124-127.

⁴⁵ Happé, *English Drama*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ See Alan H. Nelson, ed., *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, Cambridge, D.S.Brewer, 1980. The word itself refers of course to both the material world and to what is essential. See the *OED* 2nd ed., Vol. X pp.240-50.

⁴⁷ W. Farnham links this to St. Thomas Aquinas's analysis of the link between God and Nature in creating humanity. See W. Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1970, p. 199. For Peter Happé, the traditional Catholicism which informs that play makes it a likely product of 'the political/religious controversy surrounding Henry VIII's divorce.' Happé, *English Drama*, p. 111.

and intellectual potential, as is shown in the next section of this chapter, which argues for the importance of the mother figure in the reformulation of ideology during the Reformation, and explores its operation in the political drama of the middle years of the sixteenth century.

iii: *The Reformation and the appropriation of tradition*

Following the Act of Supremacy the politicians and clerics who masterminded the Reformation in England were faced with the task of restructuring a sense of national unity which had been fragmented by conflict and speedy and radical change. Reformers were faced with the problem of 'traditions' that no longer suited the new political and religious circumstances, which were seen as threatening to the fragile new establishment. Marina Warner has noted that, 'in Britain, the conflict between Protestants and Catholics inspired a struggle to monopolise the rhetorical image',⁴⁸ and it is clear that an awareness of the value and power of traditional concepts led to a determined policy of reformulation. Familiar images were endowed with a new significance which was driven home by a concerted propaganda effort. The appropriation and extension of the allegorical potential of the mother was central to that effort, both in contemporary political rhetoric and in the drama which was produced to support it. The iconography and ideology of motherhood was re-presented to promote the idea of the mother-nation, a reworking of the allegory which was intended to excite an affective, as well as reasoned, response.⁴⁹

This policy was one of containment as much as of propaganda. The mother was a dangerous figure to remain hanging in ideological mid-air, particularly because of her inevitable identity with that most Catholic icon, the Mother of Christ, and her consequent ability to articulate and to demonstrate the effects of political evil (in Biblical terms, the machinations of Herod, or Caiaphas and Annas) in terms of personal pain and loss. Her subversive potential in drama seems to have been real enough during the Reformation, particularly because, according to Seymour Baker House, street drama had become an important location for 'debate over religious issues involving politics at the highest level' in the early sixteenth century.⁵⁰ Gail McMurray Gibson suggests, for example, that there was 'furious debate' over plays depicting the Assumption of the Virgin Mary during the

⁴⁸ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 318. Warner notes that Mary I's motto, *Veritas Filia Temporis* was quickly reappropriated through the performance of a tableau soon after Elizabeth's succession.

⁴⁹ This reformulation was effective as an appropriation of the paradox of the Incarnation

⁵⁰ Seymour Baker House, 'Literature, Drama and Politics' in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy and Piety*, ed. Diarmaid MacCulloch, London, Macmillan, 1995, Chapter 8, p. 181. Baker House sees this as 'an appeal to the non-literate majority of the population', p. 186.

Reformation, an event which she singles out as crucially important in late medieval Christian piety.⁵¹ The debate is indicated by, she says:

The missing initial page of the 'Last Judgement' in the Wakefield cycle — evidently lost when a censored Assumption play was removed from the play register; by the York purification play that was hastily inserted at the end of the manuscript, out of proper sequence; by the missing play of Mary's Assumption performed by the town wives of Chester, and probably by the Assumption play written on different paper and by a different hand that was added to the N-town manuscript.⁵²

The N-town play is an example of the potential for subversion contained in this form of drama. The play is one of a potentially controversial series of dramatisations from the life of Mary which begins, according to Matthew Kinservik, with episodes which focus 'upon [Mary's] obviously pregnant body which contains the conflict of Mosaic law with the new Word'.⁵³ The potential danger of the Assumption play to the Henrician reformers is clear. Mary is shown to be dangerous to the State, condemned by devilish bishops and princes for inciting rebellion, 'thorow here fayre speche oure lawes they steyn'.⁵⁴ The interests of the Virgin and her supporters are contested by a bishop and three princes who are acutely aware

⁵¹ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 166-7

⁵² Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 168. Peter Happé also speculates that the Townley version might have been torn from the original manuscript 'as an act of Reformation zeal'. See Peter Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, p. 625. Halliwell, who edited the N-town plays in the nineteenth century, suggests that a contemporary performance of the N-town 'Death, Funeral, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin' might have sparked a riot in the midlands at the time of Henry's rejection of Queen Katharine of Aragon, though this argument is less persuasive since the original location of the cycle has been reconsidered. See J.O. Halliwell, ed., *Ludus Coventriae: a collection of Mysteries, formerly represented at Coventry on the feast of Corpus Christi*, London, The Shakespeare Society, 1841, p. 385.

⁵³ See Matthew J Kinservik, 'The Struggle over Mary's Body: Theological and Dramatic Resolution in the N-Town Assumption Play', *Journal of English and German Philology* 95, 1996, 190-203, p. 194.

⁵⁴ Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play*, Vols. I and II, Early English Texts Society, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, Vol. I, p. 389, line 71. Spector also draws attention to the play as 'an interpolation – not mentioned in the Proclamation and different in prosody, style and orthography', Vol. II, p. 527.

of her subversive potential: 'Yif we slewe hem, it wolde cause the comownys to ryse'.⁵⁵ The possible connection between the circumstances of this play and the situation of the immensely popular Katharine of Aragon,⁵⁶ both before and after her death suggests that the play, new or not, had the potential to transform the familiar religious iconography of the final days of the Holy Virgin through an emotional appeal to public opinion.⁵⁷

The figurative and dramatic use of the qualities of ideal motherhood which were adumbrated in the figure of the Virgin was at the centre of a struggle between Catholic and Protestant factions as they competed to regain the religious and moral high ground. The Catholic iconography of the Virgin, and the doctrine that it promulgated, was appropriated and transformed into a new version of transcendent maternity. Jacqueline A. Vanhoutte has shown how Thomas Cromwell's chief propagandist, Richard Morison, attempted to reformulate a national identity for Protestant England by re-presenting the mother as a description of England in published tracts which depend upon affective appeals to nationalism as much as to an attempt to convince by rational argument. Vanhoutte sees Morison as the primary force behind a concerted drive to construct a new nationalist ideology from, she says, existing notions of 'community, religion, family, honour and sexuality'.⁵⁸ Motherhood, inscribed at some level in each of these concepts, thereby became crucial.

⁵⁵ Spector, Vol II, p. 390, line 81. Also see J.O. Halliwell (ed.), *Ludus Coventriae: a collection of Mysteries, formerly represented at Coventry on the feast of Corpus Christi*, London, The Shakespeare Society, 1841, p. 385.

⁵⁶ Biblical allegory appears to have been popular with Katharine's sympathisers. See David Bevington's discussion of *Godly Queen Hester* which he surmises 'was written specifically for the Queen's own chapel.' See David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 88-94.

⁵⁷ This emotional appeal may well have been heightened by Mary's position in Christian history. As the means by which God was, briefly, flesh, she not only facilitated the closest moment of physical proximity between God and humankind, but her life represented a point of transition from a past looking back to the Fall to a future looking forward to redemption in the Christian schema. The collision of this historical meaning and the upheaval of the Reformation must have heightened her emotional potential. Kinservik discusses 'The Assumption' as 'the logical end of historical time in the salvation story' (p. 190). H.C. Gardiner links the disappearance of plays about Mary specifically to the Dissolution, adding weight to David Bevington's assertion that the suppression of such plays was perhaps due to 'the hazards of political analogy.' See H.C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation into the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage*, Hamden, Connecticut, Archon Books (reprint), 1967, p. 54, and David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 95.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline A. Vanhoutte, 'Engendering England: the restructuring of allegiance in the writings of Richard Morison and John Bale' *Renaissance and Reformation*, 1996, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 49-77.

Morison extended the connection between mother and state, writes Vanhoutte, to embrace the traditional connection between the maternal and nature, an analogy that enabled him to stress an emotional relation between the nation and her people: ‘the country had “nourished” the English and ... therefore they are bound to love it.’⁵⁹

The figure of the mother nation thus became central to polemical strategies, most notably in the political drama which was a central part of Cromwell’s drive to consolidate his reforms despite the unwillingness of what Christopher Haigh characterises as ‘a reluctant majority.’⁶⁰ Morison employed Foxe’s great friend John Bale throughout the 1530s as a propagandist specialising in the production of drama, and funded Bale’s own company of actors.⁶¹ Bale followed and developed Morison’s strategy in focussing upon the representation of the nation as mother in his most influential play, the interlude *Kyng Johan*.

The play was originally performed before Archbishop Cranmer’s court during Christmas 1539.⁶² Written at a point in the English Reformation when Henry VIII appeared to be losing his enthusiasm for reform, *Kyng Johan* brings together the concerns of God and King in a polemical play which seeks to represent the twelfth century English monarch as a hero and martyr to the Protestant cause. Quarrels between the historical John and the Pope had led to an interdict over England, and Bale dramatises the historical confrontation between Church and State as a moral play in which an embattled English king struggles against an evil Catholic empire, ultimately suffering a martyr’s death, murdered by a monk. The play is structured according to the conventions of traditional morality drama so reflexively draws attention to itself as both a continuation of the kind of drama that in the

⁵⁹ Vanhoutte, ‘Engendering England’, p. 57. Vanhoutte quotes Morison: ‘Nature teacheth brute beasts to love them that gave them life, that nourished them.’

⁶⁰ See Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 222.

⁶¹ This, alongside the closely related concept of Mother Church, was appropriated by English reformers and enjoined to the Protestant cause, for example by John Foxe who used the figure in his later play *Christus Triumphans* (pub. 1556). In this play, Foxe depicts the persecution of its heroine, Ecclesia, by the Roman emperors and later by the Antichrist in the person of the Pope. She triumphs at the end of the play dressed as the Bride of Christ, in an interesting adaptation of an important Catholic trope. Particularly interesting in relation to this thesis is Foxe’s opening scene in which the two maternal archetypes, Eve and the Virgin Mary, lament together over their lost children. Lois Potter discusses this further in *The Revels History in Drama in English* Vol. II, 1500-1576, London, Methuen, 1980, p. 183.

⁶² Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 98, offers evidence for this.

All references to *Kyng Johan* are taken from Peter Happé, ed., *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, Vol. I, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1985.

past had promoted the interests of the traditional Church, and as a break from it, in its reworking of old tropes in terms of a new ideology.⁶³

In *Kyng Johan*, England is figured by Bale as a mother abused by her subject-children and bereaved by the wickedness of the Pope.⁶⁴ This embodiment of the nation as mother enables the dramatist to pattern bereaved Widow Englande upon a dramatic typology which associates her thematically and visually with the vulnerable mothers of the mystery plays. By emphasising continuities with the structures of traditional Catholic drama, Bale is able to transfer the affective function of earlier maternal types on to the body of the nation as figured by his heroine.⁶⁵ Bale's abused Widow Englande is constructed to promote what Vanhoutte calls a 'shift in ways of imagining community' in her capacity to embody the spiritual and civic qualities of a combined Church and State, set against a demonised version of Catholicism led by a bestial Pope.⁶⁶ Like her Catholic precursor, Ecclesia, Englande is ideally unified with God, for, as she tells the King, her true husband is 'God hym selfe', cruelly estranged from her by the machinations of the clergy.⁶⁷ The underlying assumption is clearly that a nation once whole has been divided, that a 'natural' configuration of father, mother and children is undermined by the operation of 'unnaturall' evil, evoking nostalgia for

⁶³ Bale's interest in turning the old structures of popular religious drama to the new demands of Protestant reform informs all his plays. It is evident most notably in his attempt to write a new, Protestant play cycle, *God's Promises*, a performance of which he organised when he was Bishop of Ossory, at the market cross in Kilkenny, 'to the small contentacion of the Prestes and other Papistes there', he says. Quoted in E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, Vol. II, p. 374. See also, G. Wickham, *Early English Stages*, Vol. II, part I, London, Routledge, p. 36, for a discussion of Bale's interest in appropriating the structures of Miracle plays, particularly with reference to *Kyng Johan*.

⁶⁴ And so operating in the same tradition as the morality figure Anima, in *Wisdom*.

⁶⁵ Both the structure of the cycle plays and that of the moralities facilitated an affective engagement with their stories, by, as Peter Happé explains, 'allowing the plot[s] to isolate emotional moments.' Happé, *English Drama*, p. 84.

⁶⁶ See Vanhoutte, *Engendering England*, p. 51. In associating the traditional Church with bestiality Bale is following the conventions of the anti-Catholic propaganda which had been arriving through the ports of Eastern England since the beginnings of the European Reformation. Bale began his career as a Carmelite monk in East Anglia, and was particularly well placed to have been influenced by such polemic, which is scatological and vigorously anticlerical in its efforts to demonise the established Church. It was a technique that he embraced with some enthusiasm, thus earning the nickname 'Bilious Bale' from his detractors.

⁶⁷ *King Johan*, p. 32, line 109.

a mythic healthy and unified England.⁶⁸ It is an assumption shared by Foxe, whose later descriptions of the Marian martyrs tend to emphasise the vicious disruption of godly Protestant families by persecution. John Rogers, for example, is said by Foxe to have expressed fear at the last for his wife and eleven children, ‘all my little souls’, after previous attempts to ensure their security while he was under house arrest which had involved sending his pregnant wife ‘many times’ to plead with Bishop Stephen Gardiner.⁶⁹ In this, and other examples, the Catholic authorities are repeatedly depicted, as D. Andrew Penny says, as ‘both anti-scriptural and anti-family.’⁷⁰ At the level of nation, as at that of the family, the reformers sought to demonstrate how evil operates to disrupt what is ‘natural’, to the point where the flesh and the spirit are divided against each other, both within the consciences of individual martyrs (Foxe quotes Rawlins White confessing to ‘a great fighting between flesh and spirit’ before his death) and within the nation.⁷¹

The spectacular quality of the opening scene of Bale’s play endorses visually the recent transformation of John’s realm from health to disease in the debilitated figure of Englande, who enters ragged and physically weak. King John, a well-meaning but bewildered protagonist, barely recognises her in her shockingly diminished condition: “I mervyll ryght

⁶⁸ See Vanhoutte, *Engendering England*, p. 55, who argues that the device of projecting ‘a duality on a nation which is always already one’ can be seen in the theatricality of State executions for heresy. She cites the example of Friar Forest whose protracted torture and death, she argues, was staged to make self-evident the divisive nature of betrayal. A scaffold bristling with officials of the State and reformist clergy emblematising the united nation served to visually circumscribe the central event, the annihilation of the divisive Catholic traitor. Vanhoutte gives the telling detail that ‘to emphasise the self-consuming nature of the act of treason the friar was burned with the wood provided by a famous Welsh Catholic image, the Darvell Gatheren.’ In *Kyng Johan*, ‘a joynt of Darvell Gathyron’ is included in a list of relics offered by the Vice to seduce Clergy and Civyle Order (II, line 108).

⁶⁹ See D. Andrew Penny, ‘Family Matters and Foxe’s Acts and Monuments’ in *Historical Journal* 1996, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 602-3. Penny also recounts, among many sad stories, that of Laurence Sanders, whose wife was not allowed to visit him in prison. When she appeared at the jail with his small child, however, the keeper was so moved that he, says Foxe, ‘take the little babe out of her armes, and brought him unto his father.’ (p. 605)

⁷⁰ Penny, ‘Family Matters’, p. 603.

⁷¹ Foxe is quoted in this case by John R. Knott, in ‘John Foxe and the Joy of Suffering: Characterising Protestant Martyrs and their Experience in *Acts and Monuments*’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 1996, Vol. 27, No. 3, p. 730. This example shows how the need for the mastery of the flesh by the spirit, a staple of Catholic sermons and dramatised, for example, in the late fifteenth century moral play *Mankynd*, was appropriated and reworked by Protestant polemicists.

sore how thow commyst chaunged thus'.⁷² The suggestion that her transformation has been recent and sudden works well in the context of the rapid changes and polarising of allegiances that the Reformation brought about in the 1530s, and the need for Cromwell's increasingly beleaguered faction to show this to be the consequence of the disturbing effects of Catholic treachery rather than Protestant change. This is achieved by an immediate identification of Englande as mother through an account of her relationship with her 'children', some of whom she rejects, accusing them of abuse:

King Johan:

They are thy chylderne; thow oughtest to say them good.

Englande:

Nay, bastardes they are, unnaturall by the rood!

Sens ther begynnyng they ware never good to me.⁷³

The dramatisation of the familiar allegorical scheme which posits a benevolent but vulnerable maternity in opposition to the forces of evil allows the dramatist to promote a terror of Catholic sedition in Englande's denial of her children as 'bastards'. The implication that the mother has been raped by a tyrannical power allows treason to be figured as the worst kind of personal, as well as political, violation. Intimacy between mother and child here operates to figure the proper relationship between subject and State; that between husband and wife is that between the nation and God. Such relationships are shown to be 'natural', playing upon that word's meaning as 'legitimate', alongside an appeal to complex traditional allegorical links between nature and maternity. Intimacy, then, is recast through metaphor as a 'natural' loyalty to the nation, and intimacy has been violated here by the criminal introduction of seditious 'children' into the very body of the realm.⁷⁴ The allegory

⁷² *Kyng Johan*, p. 31, line 42. This reworks the convention of non-recognition deployed previously by Langland, for example, whose narrator cannot recognise Lady Holy Church when she first approaches him. Just as Englande reprimands John here, Holy Church reprimands Will, 'thou oughtest me to know.' See the C text, ed. Pearsall, p. 45.

⁷³ *King Johan*, p. 31, lines 68-70.

⁷⁴ The affective potential of such emotionally charged discourse, once harnessed to the politics of the sixteenth century, remained at the heart of State propaganda and continued to operate during Elizabeth's reign, in such homilies as the injunction *Against Wilful Rebellion* which makes an emotional plea for the loyalty of the subject to a loving monarch which is closely allied to loyalty to God (*Against Wilful Rebellion*, Church of England, 1562, p. 616): 'Wherefore, good people, let us as the children of

is followed through to its furthest dramatic potential in the generic figure of blind Commynalte, England's faithful but unseeing child, who is terrorised by the Catholic Church in the person of Pandwlfus, a Cardinal, into a position where the child is in conflict with his mother. Nation and Church fight out a kind of psychomachia for the soul of the common man, a confrontation here figured through the representation of the forces of evil tearing a mother and child apart:

Englande:

If thow leve thy kyng take me never for thy mother

Cardinall:

Tush, care not for that, I shal provyd the another.⁷⁵

The rupture of the relationship between mother and child is something the Cardinal connives at, ready with his own manufactured alternative to what is 'naturall'. The disintegration of the bond between mother and child figured in this way thus becomes an especially apt motif for the production of an affective response in an audience who must be engaged emotionally if the serious matter of the drama is to be appropriately received.

Vanhoutte's research shows how Bale echoes Morison's polemic strategy, quoting Morison's tract *A Lamentation in Which is Showed what Ruin and Destruction Cometh of Seditious Rebellion*, in which a personified England bemoans the rupture that treason has wrought:

I am one, why do you make me twain? Ye are all mine; how can any of you, where none ought so to do, seek the destruction of me Thus England might say, and much more, which I will say for her.⁷⁶

obedience, fear the dreadful execution of God and live in quiet obedience to be the children of everlasting salvation.' The assumption, as in Bale's play, is that the laws of God and those of the State are in fact the same thing. Bale reworked his play, developing this theme, when Elizabeth came to the throne.

⁷⁵ *Kyng Johan*, p. 71, lines 1610-1.

⁷⁶ Vanhoutte, p. 55, quoting Richard Morison, *A Lamentation in Which is Showed what Ruin and Destruction Cometh of Seditious Rebellion* (1536) which she finds in David Sandler Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship and Public Order: Two Tracts Against the Pilgrimage of Grace by Sir Richard Morison*, Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, 1984, p. 88.

Anti-Catholic polemic is therefore expressed in terms of the mother's personal agony, in an appropriation of familiar, Catholic, tropes, so that the mother figure is able to promote partisan notions through a direct and emotional appeal to the audience. Bale makes Englande the site where problems of both religious and civic allegiance are articulated, asserting the mother figure as an emblem through which emotional responses generated by both might be mediated. Her reality as a dramatic figure, her engaging vitality, even though expressed through her despair, preserves and promotes Bale's message. As Vanhoutte observes, 'The struggle to represent England is ... for Bale, a struggle to find a common ground which will allow for a re-unification of the intensely divided body politic', a struggle which is played out, in *Kyng Johan*, upon, and by, the mother.⁷⁷

iii. Mary I and the Royal Body Natural

On the first of February 1554, in the face of Wyatt's revolt at her prospective marriage to the Catholic Philip of Spain, Queen Mary Tudor addressed the Lord Mayor of London and the Aldermen at the Guildhall, promising that the liaison would not take precedence over her loyalty to her realm. Her words were recorded by John Foxe:

I am your Queen, to whom at my coronation, when I was wedded to the realm and laws of the same (the spousal ring whereof I have on my finger, which never hitherto was, nor hereafter shall be, left off), you promised your allegiance and obedience unto me ... And I say to you, on the word of a Prince, I cannot tell how naturally a mother loveth the child, for I was never the mother of any; but certainly, if a Prince and Governor may as naturally and earnestly love her subjects as the mother doth love the child, then assure yourselves that I, being your lady and mistress, do as earnestly love and favour you. And I, thus loving you, cannot but think that ye as heartily and faithfully love me; and then I doubt not but we shall give these rebels a short and speedy overthrow.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Vanhoutte, p. 50.

⁷⁸ From John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Vol VI, London, Seely, Burnside and Seeley, 1846, p. 415, quoted in J.G. Ridley, *The Life and Times of Mary Tudor*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973, p. 146. Versions of Mary's oration were also recorded by Machyn, *The Diary of Henry Machyn of London 1550 to 1563* ed. John Gough Nichols, London, Camcen Society, 1848, p. 53, and by the Catholic propagandist (and according to Robert Tittler, a government propagandist) Procter, in *The History of Wyatt's Rebellion*, p. 77. See Robert Tittler, *The Reign of Mary I*, London, Longman, 1983, p. 19.

Even Foxe, the Protestant polemicist, acknowledges her oration to be a political success.⁷⁹ It emphasised Mary's authority as a monarch while at the same time taking advantage of her gender to assert an emotional relationship between the Queen and her subjects, to great effect. By making herself mother of her nation, Queen Mary deftly placed herself within a familiar literary and iconographic tradition which described an allegorical relationship between the figure of the mother and the imagination of those power structures that were most dominant: the Church and the State. Such intelligent handling of familiar ideas was crucial at a moment when both were perceived to be under threat. Queen Mary and her advisers had developed a rhetoric suited to the circumstances of female monarchy, allying the power of the Queen's position to conventional allegorical practices which associated the mother figure with the representation of both religious and secular authority.⁸⁰ Queen Mary's speech at the Guildhall promoted her as a mother to her people, engaging head-on with the propaganda of the Protestant reformers who had preceded her reign.

Mary's ability to assert her gender to reclaim the mother trope for her own political advantage was initially a propaganda success to which even her Christian name contributed. On his return from exile in 1554, Cardinal Pole publicly and pointedly saluted Mary at Whitehall with the words of the *Ave Maria*, 'Hail Mary full of grace', neatly combining the familiar Catholic trope, the status of the English Queen and the notion of idealised

⁷⁹ See Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, in which he also wryly compliments Mary upon her performance: 'she seemed to have perfectly conned [her speech] without book.' The primary importance of Mary's marriage to her realm was developed as part of the political rhetoric deployed to counter the rebellion: Ann Weikel says that days earlier a message had been sent to Wyatt insisting that, 'the Queen would hear his petition if he believed that the marriage implied a divorce between her and her first Spouse: the Crown of England.' See Ann Weikel, 'The Marian Council Revisited' in *The Mid-Tudor Polity c.1540-1560*, ed. J. Loach and R. Tittler, London, Macmillan, 1980, p. 62.

⁸⁰ It is difficult to ascertain how much input Mary had into the composition of this speech, and how much of it was written for her by the men who made up her council of advisers at this politically dangerous moment. Loades observes that she took pains to present a united political front, 'declaring that her marriage was undertaken "with consent and advisement of the whole council"'. See David Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, London, Longman, 1991, p. 214. Weikel, 'The Marian Council Revisited', suggests that 'the court prevailed upon the Queen to make her famous speech'. Weikel gains this impression from the *Calender of State Papers, Spanish, xi-xii*, ed. Royal Tyler, London 1916, p. 54, though there appears to be no evidence to show how far their advice extended to writing her words for her. In any case, as I show later in this chapter, Mary is utilising, and developing, a familiar metaphor here.

motherhood in an emphatic celebration of her religious and political triumph.⁸¹ At this early and optimistic moment in her reign, the Queen, on the eve of her marriage, was potentially a biological mother too, something which, cleverly, she obliquely and coyly refers to in her speech at the Guildhall, offering through her physical body the welcome possibility of political and religious stability through an established succession.

With a young, Catholic, Queen on the throne the concept of motherhood acquired a new political potential. The powerful allegorical mother-queen exploited by Morison and Bale, locating the mother as a central point of stability to be simultaneously defended and depended upon, was re-appropriated by the Catholic faction and shown to be, in a sense, real; personified and exemplified by Mary. The figure offered a coincidence of ideology and actuality which offered unprecedented opportunities for propaganda and which also, according to one biographer, seems to have appealed to Mary's own rather romantic model of her role as Queen.⁸² This model was perhaps encouraged by her court. For example, in the year of her accession she was presented with what is now known as the *Queen Mary Psalter*, a medieval text notable for its celebration of motherhood, which, as Anne Rudloff Stanton shows, promotes an appreciation of mothers, including both the Biblical Bathsheba, and the mother of St. Thomas Becket, who are shown to 'actively protect and champion their children.'⁸³ The entangled political and personal value of such a text to the new Queen is touchingly evident in the choice of binding which displays the pomegranate badge which Mary adopted upon accession from her own mother Katharine.⁸⁴ This gift, with its detailed depiction of the life of Becket, whose tomb at Canterbury had been famously desecrated by

⁸¹ J.G. Ridley, *The Life and Times of Mary Tudor*, pp. 161-2. Pole exploited the association to the full. W. Schenk tells how earlier, on hearing of Mary's accession to the English throne, he had written to tell her that she '...could now like the Blessed Virgin, sing the *Magnificat*, and particularly the verse: "He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble."' The metaphor was not lost upon sympathetic spectators, whose accounts often perpetuate the rhetorical focus upon the Queen as mother. When Pole arrived in England, Mary's welcome was described by an Italian courtier as that of a 'mother towards her son whom she had long given up as lost.' See W. Schenk, *Reginald Pole: Cardinal of England*, London, Longman, 1950, p.124.

⁸² Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 119. David Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, London, Longman, 1991, p. 336, discusses Mary's relation with her subjects, also David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 327.

⁸³ Anne Rudloff Stanton, 'From Eve to Bathsheba and Beyond: Motherhood in the *Queen Mary Psalter*' in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, eds. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 172.

⁸⁴ John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 185. King notes that the book seems to have been a personal possession of the Queen's and not part of the royal library.

her father's reformers, offered the Queen a potent symbol which brought together her own personal, and her realm's political, past and future.⁸⁵ The mothers it depicted were shown to be active agents of change for the better⁸⁶ and the text can be seen as an encouragement to Mary to act, as mother to her people, as a potential mother to heirs, and in celebration of her own mother, to fulfil what is here demonstrated to be part of a divine pattern.⁸⁷

The writer of the Interlude *Respublica* — anonymous, but probably Nicholas Udall — which was put on at court during the Christmas celebrations of 1553, took full advantage of the new significance of the allegory of motherhood, and of Mary's personal investment in its value.⁸⁸ The play was performed at a politically difficult time, with Mary's betrothal to Phillip causing widespread anxiety, and news of Wyatt's intended rebellion coming through, and it was important to settle nerves at court. The play, despite its self-confessed function as political allegory, displays an awareness of its royal audience which clearly influences the structure of the drama.⁸⁹ From the opening Prologue — which combines the argument of the play with a thanksgiving that Mary, who figures as 'oure most wise / and most worthie Nemesis' (Prologue, 53) has now arrived to put the country right — to the closing celebration of a potentially long and successful reign, the play is built around figurative models which associate the idea of the mother, that of the nation, the Catholic church and, only a little more

⁸⁵ Stanton, 'From Eve to Bathsheba and Beyond', p.184. Becket's life is illustrated in a sequence of 22 scenes, including an image of his birth. Stanton shows how the narrative slots the life of Becket's mother into Biblical typology by demonstrating a parallel with the events told in the Old Testament story of Ruth.

⁸⁶ Stanton, 'From Eve to Bathsheba and Beyond', p. 185.

⁸⁷ Stanton tentatively suggests that this Psalter was originally a gift to Isabella, wife of Edward II, to encourage her in her 'drastic action in the interests of her son.' 'From Eve to Bathsheba and Beyond', p. 186.

⁸⁸ Udall's authorship is thought likely by David Bevington, F.S. Boas and others. Boas points to a close personal connection between Udall and Mary, and shows by documentary evidence that the writer was certainly in charge of the Christmas Revels of the following year, 1554. See David Bevington, *From Mankynd to Marlowe*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962, pp. 27-8, and F.S. Boas, *An Introduction to Tudor Drama*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933, p 27.

⁸⁹ The play is listed in Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, p. 460 as existing in a sixteenth-century manuscript entitled 'A Merye enterlude entitled *Respublica*, made in the year of our Lorde, 1553.' There are two twentieth-century editions, that of J. S. Farmer for the Early English Drama Society, originally produced in 1907 somewhat dodgily prefaced 'A Drama of Real Life in the Early Days of Queen Mary' and reprinted in *Recently Recovered 'Lost' Tudor Plays, With Some Others*, Guildford, Charles Traylen, 1966. The edition that I am using for this thesis, however, is W. W. Greg (ed.), *Respublica*, London, Early English Texts Society, 1952. The quotation comes from lines 1822.

subtly than Cardinal Pole, the person of Mary herself. In many ways it reads as a direct response to *King Johan* (though I can find no historical evidence for a direct link between the two), for it utilises a similar structure which is based upon an allegorical mother-nation figure whose distress at an unnatural rupture in her relationship with her children/subjects can only be resolved by firm religious and political guidance from the reigning monarch. In Bale's play, though, the monarch is present as a character upon the stage, presenting King John as the historical model for a Protestant monarch. Though the play was seen by persons of influence, there is no record that Henry actually saw it, and it is sufficient that its effect lies in its promotion of a particular blueprint for Kingship. In a fascinating extension of this operation of theatre as polemic, however, *Respublica* depends for effect upon the presence, in the audience, of Queen Mary.

The political message of *Respublica* works in two directions, both in terms of ideology and, linked to this, structure, as Glynn Wickham⁹⁰ says:

The distinct religious moral of *Everyman* and the equally distinct political and social moral of *Fulgens and Lucrece* were now wholly merged into one another in both *Respublica* and *Kyng Johan*. This blurring of the centre of focus, itself a product of the times, [was] calculated to heighten both tensions and tempers in the mid sixteenth century ...⁹¹

David Bevington has shown how 'the playwright's specific delicate task is to reconcile Mary's courtiers to her program of reform, and at the same time to caution the Queen gently about extremism in punishing or disenfranchising minor offenders', so that the play must necessarily display a great deal of tact if it is to succeed.⁹² By making the heroine a mother and so drawing upon the multi-determined nature of such a figure, the dramatist seems to score a political success comparable to Mary's achievement at the Guildhall. The combination of benign authority and nurture that is suggested by ideal motherhood is exploited through a series of appeals to the emotional power that is inevitably invested in the mother figure.

⁹⁰ Wickham attempted to revive both plays in the nineteen-sixties and was disappointed that they 'fell flat on their faces' due to, he argues, the historical specificity of the argument and the structural complications generated by that specificity that he describes above. Wickham's revival was at Bristol in 1964. Glynn Wickham, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage: Collected Studies in Mediaeval, Tudor and Shakespearean Drama*, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 37.

⁹¹ Wickham, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage*, p. 36

⁹² Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 115.

As in Bale's play, the mother's deviant children plot to damage her in a shocking subversion of the ideal relationship between mother and child. Their sinful greed — 'Respublica shall feed the tyll thowe wilt saie hoo'(1.3.300) — acknowledges the ideal mother's capacity for boundless giving but also emphasises her feminine fragility, as an unprotected and thus vulnerable woman.⁹³ Such cynical exploitation of this, 'Respublica hath enough to fill all oure lappes' (1.3.321), shows that the mother's lap, seat of plenty, has been appropriated by children whose greed will render her unable to sustain all those to whom she is parent (1.3.321). The distressing implications of this, though, are modified by the balancing assertion of an alternative kind of mother-child relationship in the generic figure, People ('we Ignoram people whom itche doe perzente') who first appears in the play at the beginning of the third Act (3.3.648). People clings to 'Rice puddingcake' (3.3.636) until forcibly separated from her, a childlike and vulnerable figure which, for Bevington, to be designed to tap into Mary's own understanding of the commons in terms of 'paternalistic (or maternalistic) fondness ... of endearing concern for a populace that is supposed to know its place and respond with affectionate concern to a strong, compassionate leadership.'⁹⁴ The deceived Respublica's rejection of the advice that this good child offers, 'we ignoram people beeth not zo blinde', (3.3.665) and the resulting violent rupture of their relationship by her enemies are made doubly upsetting because of the way in which the image resonates both at the level of ideology of the family and at that of the state. Its effect upon Mary, who had personally experienced such rejection, and upon a court audience which was well aware of her personal history, and conscious of their place in political history, must have been powerful. When the two are reunited in a short scene which focusses exclusively upon their reconciliation, Respublica's language is that of a mother comforting a hurt child, 'Shrinke not backe from me, but drawe to me my deare frend. And how ys it with you now? better than it was?' (5.7.1595) in an emotional reconciliation between mother and children and Queen and country. Mary, as Nemesis who will 'reforme thabuses which hithertoo hath been' (Prologue, 50) is finally welcomed by Veritas onto the stage to embrace Respublica in a satisfyingly emblematic finale which must have been quite moving (5.10.1814).⁹⁵ In its assertion of the personal as the political, and the person of the Queen as the figure of the nation, the embrace

⁹³ This emphasis upon her vulnerability is reminiscent of the language deployed by the martyrologists of the Reformation, who take pains to stress the economic, social and spiritual danger that was likely to afflict the wives and children of those executed, something which was presented as further proof of the evil and cruelty of the persecutors. See my earlier discussion of Foxe.

⁹⁴ Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p.119.

⁹⁵ This, of course, plays upon Mary's chosen motto, *Filia Temporis Veritas*.

which concludes *Respublica* celebrates the joyful coming together of monarch, nation, and true faith as an event full of promise.

John Proctor, writing to promote Mary's reforms, similarly linked the return of Catholicism to national prosperity by reference to an allegorised maternal body:

Come, come lovinge countree men, For the passion of Christ, make haste and come
... Beholde your lovinge mothers armes are open to receive you, her busom unlashed,
her brestes bare to feede you with the sweete milke of trye knowledge, although ye
have ungentle delte with her in forsakinge her.⁹⁶

The importance of the Queen's body, both material and symbolic, as demonstrated in the union of the physical body of the Queen and the figure of Lady Respublica, has its echoes in the legal theory of the Constitution that was being developed during the period. The notion that the monarchy in fact constituted two bodies, the 'body natural' and the 'body politic', was developed, says Marie Axton, by primarily Catholic lawyers in response to the problems of succession which bedevilled the English Crown.⁹⁷

The body politic was supposed to be contained within the natural body of the Queen. When lawyers spoke of this body politic they referred to a specific quality: the essence of corporate perpetuity. The Queen's natural body was subject to infancy, infirmity, error and old age; her body politic, created out of a combination of faith, ingenuity and practical expediency, was held to be unerring and immortal.⁹⁸

The theatrical union of Mary and Respublica, then, represents the monarchy at its most complete, the unification of the political and personal, as the body natural of the reigning Queen contains the actor figuring the nation's politic within her arms.

The highly affective tenor of much of the polemic of the early years of Mary's reign was crucial to its initial successes, as Mary's Guildhall speech, quoted above, indicates. At court it is evident in entertainments like *Respublica*, but also in ceremonial occasions designed to provoke a public show of powerful personal feeling. Christopher Haigh describes, for example, the celebrations for the return of Cardinal Pole, a few months after

⁹⁶ John N. King, p. 218.

⁹⁷ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1977, p.17.

⁹⁸ Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 12.

Respublica was performed: ‘on 30th November, at Whitehall, Pole absolved the members of both Houses, “with the whole realm and dominions thereof, from all heresy and schism”; the absolution was received with great emotion, and hard bitten politicians wept as they called “Amen! Amen!”’⁹⁹ In scenes such as these, political and personal aspirations are depicted as unified as all those taking part seek to demonstrate their pleasure at political and religious change through a massed public exhibition of individual emotional experience. In terms of the rhetoric shared and fought over by agents of both Reformation and Counter-reformation, what has been wickedly divided has now been made whole again.

The potential of the Queen’s body natural to contain and to express her body politic outside the allegorising world of the drama, though, resided in the possibility of a pregnancy which would secure a Catholic succession. The image of maternity continued at the centre of the political battles of the 1550s, focussed upon the body of the Queen herself. Mary was aware that the greatest chance she had for the continuation of her policies was to produce a child, and certainly, when rumours of a pregnancy began to circulate in September 1554 they seem to have had a ‘calming and beneficial effect’, according to Loades, both in Spain and London.¹⁰⁰ The unpopularity of the Spanish marriage was contained, perhaps, by publicity which accounted for Mary’s intentions in terms of pure patriotism and religious duty, as in Cardinal Pole’s oration:

Thou Lorde ... thou knowest that thy servant never lusted after man, never gave her selfe to wanton company, nor made her selfe partaker with them that walke in lightnes: but she consented to take an husbände with thy feare, and not with her luste. Thou knowest that thy servant toke an husband, not for carnall pleasure, but only for the desired love of posteritie, wherein thy name may be blessed for ever and ever. Give therefore unto thy servauntes, a male issue.¹⁰¹

A parallel polemical strategy revealed Mary’s supposed pregnancy as the result of divine intervention, ensuring an explicit association with the life of the Virgin. John N. King tells of Dr. Chadsey’s sermon which compared the Queen’s condition with the Annunciation, ‘in a sermon on the *Vulgate* text “*Ne timeas Maria, invenisti enim gratiam apud Deum*” (Luke 1-

⁹⁹ See Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁰ David Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 1991, p. 165.

¹⁰¹ Cardinal Pole, as rendered by Foxe, quoted in Judith M Richards, “‘To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule’: talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England’ *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, 1997, p. 114.

30)' after which 'A *Te Deum* was sung and a solemn procession was made.'¹⁰² The event was similarly celebrated at a secular level in the circulation of ballads which joyfully link the promise of political stability with the return of the Catholic faith, through a focus upon Mary's expectant body:

Now singe, nowe springe, oure care is exil'd
Oure vertuous Quene is quickened with child.¹⁰³

By the beginning of the following year, Mary's physical appearance seemed to confirm her expected confinement, and by May there were a number of false reports of the birth of a son, as well as darker rumours concerning a substitution plot. By July it was 'being tacitly acknowledged [that] Mary had been the victim of sickness and her own desires.'¹⁰⁴ Mary thought herself pregnant again at the beginning of 1558, eight months after she had last seen her husband, though her news was greeted with some private derision, and was soon proved to be false.¹⁰⁵ She died in November of that year, acknowledging her mistake in a codicil to her will, 'I then thought myself to be with child [and] did devise and dispose the Imperial Crown ... unto the heir issues and fruits of my body begotten' before bequeathing the throne to her Protestant younger sister.¹⁰⁶ The skilful propagandist manipulation of the Queen's potential maternity which had characterised the optimistic early years of her reign had been impossible to sustain as it became increasingly obvious that the Queen could not produce a Catholic heir. Propaganda appears to have been quietly abandoned in favour of a pragmatic approach which characterised a gradual recognition of the Protestant Elizabeth's claim by the Court, despite some resistance from Mary herself.¹⁰⁷

The beginning of Elizabeth's reign, too, demonstrates the development of a propaganda strategy which takes as its central focus the gender of the new monarch, this time characterised by a determined retreat from the celebration of the potential 'natural' maternity offered in the body of the female monarch, which had informed the propaganda of her sister's

¹⁰² King, John N., *Tudor Royal Iconography*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 218.

¹⁰³ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, 164. Loades demonstrates that not all Mary's subjects welcomed the news, however. See pp. 164-5.

¹⁰⁴ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, pp. 165-6.

¹⁰⁵ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, p. 332.

¹⁰⁶ R. Tittler, *The Reign of Mary I*, London, 1978, quoting Folger MS X.d. 471.

¹⁰⁷ The gradual adjustment of propaganda, as discovered in changes to editions of contemporary chronicles, is thoroughly explored by Marcia Lee Metzger, in 'Controversy and "Correctness": English Chronicles and the Chroniclers', 1553-1568, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, 1996, 437-51.

reign. The association with the Holy Virgin lingered on, enhanced by two fortunate coincidences of date: first that Elizabeth's Accession took place two days before the feast of St. Elizabeth, the Virgin's mother; secondly that the Queen's own birthday fell on the eve of the birth of Jesus's mother.¹⁰⁸ Allison Heisch shows how both occasions developed as festivals as Elizabeth's reign progressed, a fact which, she says:

disturbed both some Catholics, who felt that the Accession Day and the Queen's birthday were being taken more seriously than the official holy days, and some members of the Protestant right wing, who viewed the ceremonies as idolatrous. Yet despite Elizabeth's capacity to enrage both extremes of the Christian spectrum, the celebrations continued and the Queen's birthday became part of the church calendar.¹⁰⁹

The fact that, despite misgivings on both sides, these celebrations became absorbed into the Elizabethan calendar without too much trouble indicates a subtle shift in the appropriation of the paradigm of Holy motherhood by State propagandists. These celebrations appear to have been essentially civic, playing down the Marian desire to identify the monarch with the Virgin, and promoting the idea of Elizabeth as mother to the State. In other words, Elizabethan propaganda appropriated the iconic qualities of holy maternity that had been deployed by the previous administration, but turned them to political and civic ends. I have already argued that, from the Reformation, motherhood was deployed to signify both civic and spiritual qualities, of course. The difference in Elizabeth's reign is one of a slide of emphasis which incorporates the significance of the religious paradigm, but redirects it towards a vision of Elizabeth as mother to her subjects, promoting what Heisch characterises as 'a kind of collective maternity.'¹¹⁰ The implications of such an analogous relationship between family and State were spelled out, for example, in the homilies written for reading in Church, first published in 1562, as in this extract from 'Against Willful Rebellion':

¹⁰⁸ The crucial study of Elizabeth's association with the Virgin is, of course, Helen Hackett's important book *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Macmillan, 1995.

¹⁰⁹ Allison Heisch, 'Queen Elizabeth and the Persistence of Patriarchy', *Feminist Review* 4, 1980, p. 46

¹¹⁰ Heisch, 'Queen Elizabeth', p. 50. She quotes a song from John Downland's *Second Book of Aires* (1600):

When other sing Venite exultimus! / Stand by and turn to Noli emulari!

... for first, the rebels do not only dishonour their Prince, the parent of their country, but also do dishonour and shame their natural parents, if they have any, do shame their kindred and friends, do disinherit and undo forever their children and heirs.¹¹¹

In a totally different approach from that of her sister, Elizabeth and her supporters deflected attention from the reproductive potential of the Queen's natural body towards a celebration of the body politic of which she was the temporary custodian. Marie Axton has shown how this led to the Queen and her Parliament negotiating through a complicated game of metaphor. Elizabeth's determined emphasis upon her function as a governer — 'I am but one bodye naturallye considered though by his [God's] permission a bodye politique to governe' — allowed her to divert attention from the sexual and maternal potential of her biology and to subordinate the meanings of her body natural (the provision of a Succession) to the promotion of her incarnation as body politic.¹¹²

I am already bound to an Husband, which is the Kingdome of England, and that may suffice you: and this, (quoth shee) makes mee wonder, that you forget yourselues, the pledge of this alliance which I have made with my Kingdome. (And therewithall, stretching out her hand, shee shewed them the Ring with which shee was giuen in marriage, and inaugurated to her Kingdome in expresse and solemne terms.) And reproch mee no more (quoth shee) that I haue no children: for euery one of you, and as many as are English, are my Children, and Kinsfolkes.¹¹³

The political success of this ploy depended upon the Queen promoting herself as a mother of her collective subjects as an alternative to marriage:

And so I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more naturall mother than I mean to be unto you all¹¹⁴

so that the allegory of the mother is appropriated into a rhetoric which is reproduced at every level of propaganda. Prayers authorised by the Church ask that Elizabeth should be a 'true nourisher and nurse': a 'mother', a nurse 'to thine afflicted flock'; a prayer written by Foxe

¹¹¹ Quoted in *Church of England Homilies*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1908, p. 611.

¹¹² Quoted in Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 38.

¹¹³ William Camden, *Annales*, London, 1625, quoted in Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 39.

¹¹⁴ J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments*, Volume 1, London, 1953, p. 109.

(still determinedly deploying the metaphor) describes her as ‘a Queen so calm, so patient, so merciful, more like a natural mother than a princess’.¹¹⁵

Helen Hackett shows how this construction of Elizabeth as mother owed much to a Protestant reading of Isaiah 49.23, which she calls ‘a key Biblical text for the Protestant reformers.’¹¹⁶ The verse, in the Geneva Bible, runs ‘And Kings shalbe thy nourcing fathers, and Quenes shalbe thy nources’, and is glossed, notes Hackett, ‘meaning that Kings shalbe converted to the gospel and bestow their power and autoritie for the preservation of the Church.’¹¹⁷ This reading offered an alternative, satisfyingly Protestant, point of reference for the mother metaphor, one based, moreover, upon text rather than iconography. Hackett demonstrates the political and religious importance of this alternative, which offered a reconciling motif to satisfy both Calvinist pressures and ‘to encourage Protestant loyalty to the new Queen.’¹¹⁸ Further, Hackett shows, it allowed Elizabeth’s propagandists to underscore a crucial difference between the new Queen and her Catholic sister. John Aylmer, Bishop of London, said that Elizabeth ‘commeth in ... lyke a mother, and not lyke a stepdam’ and followed this with a neat reworking of typology to associate Mary with what he suggests is the nation’s fall from grace:

...as for thys losse we haue nowe, I doubte not, but as the olde fathers are wonte to saye, that as by a woman came death: so by a woman was broughte fourthe life. In like manner as bi a womans (whether negligence, or misfortune, I wote not) we have taken this wound, so by a nothers diligence and felicitie, we shal have it againe healed.¹¹⁹

Any intimation that such an analogue might refer to the maternal potential of the Queen’s physical person here (and in 1559 Aylmer may have intended such a reading, if obliquely) is undercut at the end of the text, where emphasis is firmly replaced upon the metaphor. Elizabeth is associated with ‘Mother England’ — in a reassertion of the trope of Morison’s Henrician polemic (and an appropriation of the rhetoric of *Respublica*) — who claims that ‘Out of my wombe ... [came] Ihon Wyclefe, who begate Husse, who begat Luther, who begat

¹¹⁵ From the Church of England collection, *Private Prayers put forth by Authority during the Time of Queen Elizabeth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1851, pp. 461 and 480.

¹¹⁶ Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 4

¹¹⁷ Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 4

¹¹⁸ Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, pp. 49-50.

¹¹⁹ From John Aylmer, Bishop of London’s reply to John Knox, *An Harborowe for faithfull and trewe subiecte*, quoted in Hackett, p. 50.

Truth.’¹²⁰ The difference is that this mother is no longer under attack. What is formulated here is a forward-looking propaganda which celebrates England and Elizabeth in terms of maternal bounty — ‘I will fill your busoms and your mouthes, your wyves and your children, with plentie’ — thus maintaining a focus upon the public monarch and away from the potential of the private woman.¹²¹

Throughout the sixteenth century, then, the dramatised mother figured energetic and sustained political and religious debate, though the emphasis of that debate shifted from Reformation to Succession. The mother’s dramatic power was enhanced by the encompassing qualities of the mother figure — at a time when ‘religious opinion was political opinion’ her ability to signify both, and to embody their attendant conflicts and crises, attests to her importance.¹²² The mother figure offered dramatists the opportunity to organise and to configure the representation of conflict. By depicting her anguish, redolent of both love and grief, the mother is the focus of an emotional account of political concerns, provoking in audiences an affective response which is designed to incite an active engagement with the topical matter at the centre of the drama.¹²³

¹²⁰ Aylmer, quoted by Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p.51.

¹²¹ Aylmer, quoted in Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 51. This distinction, while convenient for Elizabeth’s personal plans, had been developed in Calvinist readings of Isaiah 49.23 that distinguish, says Hackett, between the ‘nursing queen and the private woman’ and which, she argues ‘prepared the ground for panegyrists of Elizabeth, in searching for a new iconography of female rule’. See Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 40.

¹²² Charlotte Kohler, quoted by Betty Travitsky in *The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 169.

¹²³ Recent anthropological accounts stress the connection between the experience of emotion and the incentive to action (Paul Heelas, ‘Emotion talk across Cultures’ in Rom Har , and Gerrod Parrott, W. (eds.), *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*, London, Sage, 1996, 171-199). Heelas states that the main point of emotion is the focussing of attention, quoting, for example, Lutz’s assertion that ‘emotions are culturally constructed concepts which point to clusters of situations typically calling for some kind of action.’

Chapter 2: Motherhood and the Classical Tradition

*Seing my fleshe and bloude,
Against itselpe to Levie thretning armes*¹

II.i. *University plays and politics*

In the second half of the sixteenth century renewed interest in classical drama made available new models for dramatising motherhood. Figures such as Medea and Jocasta, for example, who wrecked whole dynasties by either passion, or sexual misalliance, offered novel and alarming possibilities for the operation of motherhood in dramatic narratives. This chapter shows how such models contributed to potential meaning, especially in making figurative links between the mother's body and the condition of the nation. The focus here is first on political drama, this time in relation to the Elizabethan Succession, arguing that classical narratives, which so often detailed the collapse of royal families, offered ideal models for persuading the Queen of the need for a secure future. The second half of the chapter argues that the allegorical possibilities inscribed in the figure of the mother operated alongside a focus upon the mother's physical body as a site of both love and suffering in an alliance of violence and pathos that gained resonance from the influences of classical drama. This combination of violence and motherhood produced a particular kind of dramatic pleasure, in which the satisfaction of seeing a moral tale properly worked through is enhanced by (perhaps even subordinate to) the 'delight', to use Sidney's term, induced by an affective response to the mother's plight.²

The successful accommodation of pagan myth within the framework of mainstream Christian culture had, of course, been facilitated over centuries.³ But subjects considered suitable for dramatisation became increasingly diverse as the grammar schools taught rhetoric through the study of ancient drama, and a variety of potential printed source materials became available. In 1581 a collected works of Seneca in translation was published, reflecting the

¹ George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmarsh, *Jocasta*, in *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne* Vol. I, edited by J.W. Cunliffe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1907, 1.1.8-9. All subsequent references to this play are taken from this edition.

² See Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary*, London, Duckworth, 1987, and McLeish, K., *Aristotle's Poetics*, London, Duckworth, 1998. Aristotle's *Poetics* (which, of course, informed Sidney's analysis), describes the cathartic effect of the fear and pity as something which is translated by Halliwell as 'pleasure' and by McLeish as 'satisfaction.'

³ Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, p. 84 where he argues that, in fact, the European tradition of reinterpreting Classical mythology went back at least to the Stoics.

interest in ancient drama which was already evident from the many performances given over to it in the Universities, a drama which might now reach a wider readership, including those with ‘small Latin and less Greek’.⁴ Writing in the Senecan style, which was so highly commended by critics such as Sidney, meant not only imitating Latin rhetoric (‘stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca’s style’), but also using drama for purposes of pleasurable moral instruction.⁵ Commentators like Sidney appreciated what they perceived to be the didacticism and morality inscribed in the narrative of these pagan plays, so that they seemed to lend themselves, by a familiar pattern of exegesis, to an exposition of contemporary political preoccupations, as Marie Axton has shown.⁶

Any direct attempt by Elizabeth’s Parliament to cut through her carefully constructed metaphor of the body politic and place the dynastic potential of her body natural on the agenda, was doomed to fail. In 1563 Lord Rich wrote to the Queen of his hope for ‘heirs of your most royal body’ and was not answered until the closing of Parliament when Elizabeth offered to address the issues of marriage and succession, ‘of which two’, she said, ‘I think best the last to be touched, and of the other a silent thought may serve’ in a speech noted by J.E. Neale for its strategy of evasion.⁷ It is unsurprising, therefore, that those who believed a peaceful succession depended upon the Queen producing children turned to marginally less direct ways of putting pressure upon her. As Marie Axton shows, the Inns of Court and to a lesser extent, the Universities were responsible for mounting a number of dramatic productions which pressed the Queen to consider the implications for the nation of her refusal to fulfil the maternal potential of her body natural.⁸ Significantly, these are plays in which the narrative is classical in its references, and constructed around a central mother who figures the controversy.

These ‘succession plays’, informed by the amateur status, the classical training and interests of their authors, are constructed with reference to the moral interlude as well as classical drama. As I have shown, *Respublica* and *Kyng Johan* took the morality play as their model, a genre which was informed by an appreciation of drama as a vehicle of religious and moral instruction, and which routinely used allegory as a means of fulfilling those aims. Classical plays were understood to perform a similar allegorising function and were glossed,

⁴Seneca, *His Tenne Tragedies* was edited by Thomas Newton in 1581. See also A. Harbage ed., *Annals of English Drama 975 - 1700*, London, Methuen, 1964. Also T.W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare’s Small Latin and Less Greek*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1944, Vol. 2.

⁵ Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. Van Dorsten, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, 65.

⁶ Marie Axton, *The Queen’s TwoBodies*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1977.

⁷ John Ernest Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, London, Cape, 1953, pp. 110 and 128.

⁸ Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies*, pp. 38-60 *passim*.

as appropriate, in order to accommodate the dynamics of pagan narratives with the demands of Christian culture.

Sackville and Norton first presented *Gorboduc* at the Inns of Court at Christmas, 1561, a performance which seems to have been well received.⁹ The play was taken to court by Lord Robert Dudley as part of a series of entertainments including a masque of Pallas, Perseus and Andromeda which pressed the Queen to marry, and drew attention to the Earl's own suit to the Queen. In similar vein, *Gorboduc* describes the disastrous consequences of an uncertain succession, a fact apparently recognised by Elizabeth at a Whitehall performance.¹⁰ Written in the same spirit of political didacticism as *Kyng Johan* and *Respublica*, the playwrights, like Bale, select their subject from chronicled English history but re-write it as classical tragedy, so that the analogues available in ancient accounts, such as that of Thebes, are made obvious.

Gorboduc represents, in fact, an attempt to structure the matter of the political morality play into what was perceived as Classical form, particularly in its use of the protagonist's infanticidal Queen, Videna. Her representation is complicated by the play's evident debt to Seneca's *Medea*, a play which was glossed, in Elizabethan translations, in terms of its potential as political allegory, so that there is an emphasis upon Jason's duplicity, and from which came the play's significance, as a 'Mirrour' for princes.¹¹ In the final Act of Studeley's 1566 translation, for example, the Chorus spells out the consequences of Medea's actions:

All things are topsy turvy turnde,
and wasted cleane to nought.
To passing great calamity
our Kingdome State is brought. (5.1.1-4)

The verse is one of a number of additions by the translator. Here the emphasis is placed upon the condition of the State, the consequence of Medea's insanity, which is described by reference to the vernacular and medieval polemical notion of the apocalyptic 'world turned

⁹ I.B. Cauthen (ed.), *'Gorboduc' by Sackville and Naughton*, London, Arnold, 1970, introduction p. xii.

¹⁰ See Axton, p. 40.

¹¹ See Richard Studeley, 'Medea', in *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*, edited by Thomas Newton, 1581, New York, Spencer Society, 1887 and 1967, p. 248, 'Chorus altered by Translator'. Subsequent quotations are from this edition of the play.

Who hath not wist that windy words be vayne,
And that in talke of trust is not the ground,
Heere in a mirrour may hee see it playne ... (.11.1-3).

upside down'. Seneca's play was thus read with an understanding of Medea's activities as symptomatic of a wider political uncertainty. Other Roman plays made available similarly frightening versions of the mother — Seneca had already reworked Aeschylus' terrifying Clytemnestra as an impassioned and uncontrolled figure in the thrall of her politically ambitious lover, for example. The Classical model thus offered the possibility of making connections between a mad and dangerous mother figure and problems of State, and, indeed, formalised, for Elizabethan dramatists, the means by which those connections could be expressed.

This reading of Classical models also opened up the possibility of the dramatised mother's active participation in the causation and demonstration of political disorder. The constraints of their allegorical roles had rendered *Widowe Englande* and *Respublica* essentially passive figures whose dramatic purpose was essentially one of response to the activities of other characters. The grief-induced passion, which provoked Medea and Clytemnestra to act, may have been read as merely a reaction to the political activities of their men, but, in narrative terms, it precipitated these women into action, offering new dramatic possibilities for the representation of the mother in drama.

However, there was a potential problem with reading such Classical figures with reference to exegetical practices which are alien to the culture in which the plays were originally produced. Ideas that work at the level of debate can pull against the obvious dynamic of the drama when it is acted, so that there were problems for the writers of *Gorboduc*, in subordinating traditional morality matter, informed by the contemporary Christian ethic, to the strictures of what was perceived as Classical form. For example, Videna's 'jealous' condition traditionally identifies her as dangerous, and is emphasised by her resort to pagan ritual activities which takes her outside the patriarchal society which seeks to determine the succession by reasoned debate:

The end the gods do know, whose alters I
Full oft have made in vain of cattle slain
To send the sacred smoke to Heaven's throne
For thee, my son, if things do so succeed,
As now my jealous mind misdeemeth sore. (1.1.35-9)

The Christian reading of uncontrollable woman would insist that Videna is excluded from the sort of active participation in debate which is an essential feature of the dramatic structure of Classical plays, and Videna's son, whom she champions, is shown to resist her interference in morality mode; 'Madam, leave care and careful plaint for me' (1.1.40). Seneca's Medea is, classically, constructed out of a series of rhetorical exchanges between the protagonist and her

Nurse or her husband, for example. His Phaedra works similarly. But Videna is excluded from the debate and is thus bereft of a structural role in the Sackville and Norton play. She does not appear after the first scene, until she laments the death of her son at the beginning of Act 4. Instead, her 'tormented' condition (1.1.9) is associated with the constitutional instability which she describes, and the disruption which she prophesies, in terms which are intended to be as significant politically to the Elizabethan audience as they are pertinent within the world of the play:

... it is wont to be
 When lords and trusted rulers under kings,
 To please the present fancy of the prince,
 With wrong transpose the course of governance,
 Murders, mischief, or civil sword at length,
 Or mutual treason or a just revenge,
 When right succeeding line returns again,
 By Jove's just judgement and deserved wrath,
 Brings them to cruel and reproachful death
 And roots their names and kindreds from the earth. (1.1.59-67)

Videna veers between pathos and destructiveness, suggesting that the potential of the classical mother figure in this play is always in tension with a desire to retain the dynamics of moral drama. The problems associated with this synthesis of the two versions of the mother figure are evident in Act 4 of the play, where Videna is given a long speech in which she laments the murder of her favourite son and resolves to kill the other. Wolfgang Clemen has detailed the dramatists' obligation to a Renaissance understanding of Classical models with reference to rhetorical form here, but, again, there is a simultaneous and competing dependence upon familiar allegorical tradition which used the notion of a rupture of the relationship between mother and child as symbolic of a breakdown of relations within the State.¹² There is a gesture towards this use of the family metaphor in the directions for the preceding dumb show, which consists of a procession of mythical classical figures who have killed their children, being driven by furies:

¹² Wolfgang Clemen, *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare*, London, Methuen, 1967, Chapter 2 and *passim*.

Hereby was signified the unnatural murders to follow; that is to say, Porrex slain by his own mother, and of King Gorboduc and Queen Videna, killed by their own subjects.

The lament which follows does not suggest that Videna is torn between fury-induced madness and mother-love, in the manner of Seneca's Medea, for example, although the implications of the dumb show, and the form of her speech ensure that the association with such dramatic precedents remains potent in this scene. The Queen describes no Classical dilemma in her desire to avenge her younger son's murder of his brother. The significance of his act for the realm is suggested by use of the notion of betrayal:

Traitor to kin and kind, to sire and me,
To thine own flesh, and traitor to thyself (4.1.31-2)

Instead there is an attempt to account for Videna's decision to kill her son in terms of the corruption of 'natural' relations between mother and son. Videna is shown to repudiate her child by reference to the same convention as was used by Bale in *Kyng Johan*, which allows a mother to depict a deviant child as a monster of unnatural provenience:

Never, O wretch, this womb conceived thee,
Nor never bore I painful throes for thee.
Changeling to me thou art, and not my child,
Nor to no wight that spark of pity knew.
Ruthless, unkind, monster of nature's work,
Thou never sucked the milk of woman's breast
But from thy birth, the cruel tiger's teats
Have nursed thee; nor yet of flesh and blood
Formed is thy heart, but of hard iron wrought
And wild and desert woods bore thee to life. (4.1.71-80)

Here, and in the messenger speech which in the following scene reports Videna's killing of her son (4.2.169 ff.) Sackville is drawing upon traditional dramatic and literary typological connections between the mother's body, the family and the State, which enable the dramatist to emblematised the condition of the nation by reference to the physical body of their fictional Queen. The dramatists emphasise the connection in the fifth Act, where more explicit use is made of the metaphor:

... help to salve the well-near helpless sore;
 which ye shall do, if ye yourselves withhold
 The slaying knife from your own mother's throat;
 Her shall you save, and you, and yours in her. (5.2.150-3)

Such conventional stuff is perhaps to be expected in a play which advertises both its didactic, nationalistic intention and its aspirations as a neoclassical piece. Evidently well received by those contemporaries who appreciated the dramatists' intentions, *Gorboduc's* success probably lay in approval of its rhetoric by an audience already confident in a 'glossed' version of the Classical drama which appeared to address contemporary preoccupations. In such a context it presumably seemed entirely appropriate that Queen Videna, despite her formal presentation as a Classical figure, should nevertheless also be burdened with qualities which owed as much to the traditions of native English drama.

On a similar theme, but reworking a classical tale, *Jocasta* was written by George Gascoigne and his Gray's Inn colleague Francis Kinwelmarsh for presentation at Court in 1566. The dramatists advertised the play as 'A Tragedie written in Greeke by Euripides, translated and digested into Acte', though in fact the play was closely based on an Italian version of Euripides' *Phoenissae* by Ludovico Dolce which already contained elaborations of and additions to the original.¹³ Gascoigne also freely added to and adapted his source to emphasise the play's engagement with contemporary political concerns.¹⁴

The political point of the play is reinforced by a dumb show preceding the 'argument' of each act, and further enhanced, at least for the reader, by the addition of marginal glosses alongside some of the lines. These frequently rephrase certain verses in terms of the sort of sententious remark that the Elizabethans seem to have enjoyed discovering in Classical writing, but they also seek to 'explain' the text, offering an interpretation of the Greek original that is compatible with the preoccupations of early modern Christian culture, and with the requirements of the conventional dramatic model. In this way, Gascoigne and Kinwelmarsh confirm that their play addresses the consequences of an unseemly overreaching for power (a familiar Elizabethan concern) in such 'glosses' as 'Ambition doth destroye al: equalytie doth maynteyne al things' (p. 272) in the second Act, or 'A mirrour for Magistrates' (p.324) alongside Oedipus' valedictory speech in the fifth. The point is made

¹³ Gascoigne, *Jocasta*, p. 244.

¹⁴ Roger Ascham believed that the Greek dramatists were superior to 'our Seneca' in tragedies, offering 'the goodliest argument of all ... for the vse either of a learned preacher, or a civill Ientleman', citing an ideal combination of 'the trewe touch of Aristotles precepts and Euripides examples.' See W. Aldis Wright ed., *English Works of Roger Ascham*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pub. 1904, reprinted 1970, pp. 276 and 284.

dramatically (for such addenda would not be immediately available to an audience) by following Dolce in making the mother Jocasta the eponymous heroine of the piece.

Like Videna, Jocasta is cast in terms of the conventional mother/nation figure familiar from political morality plays.¹⁵ But Gascoigne and Kinwelmarsh develop a rhetoric which shifts from a focus upon the mother as an emblem of the State towards a reading of the mother as a material embodiment of the nation, her physical predicament a microcosmic version of her nation, threatened with material destruction. This is clear in the way that the condition of Thebes is associated with the mother's body in Jocasta's opening speech:

... a Queene but barely bearing name.
 Seyng this towne, seing my fleshe and bloude,
 Against itselke to Levie threatning armes,
 (Whereof to talke my heart it renders in twaine) (1.1.7-10)

For Gascoigne's Jocasta the experience of watching her family divided against itself is also the literal experience of heartbreak. She figures the divided nation, and its analogue the divided family, through the emblem of her broken body, her heart cleft in two. Marie Axton has shown that, despite the play's pretensions as a Classical piece, 'Jocasta often speaks as the morality figure Lady Respublica', which is true to a point, but her representation goes further.¹⁶ Jocasta herself draws attention to her dual function as a *narrator* of brutal conflict, 'whereof to talke...' (establishing her plight as an allegory of State) and as its material *signifier*, the incarnation of the strife she describes; her broken heart is an emblem suggestive of a bittersweet mix of mother's love and mother's pain.¹⁷

¹⁵ C.T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne*, New York, Blom, 1942, pp. 154-5: 'The Italian "O misere Giocasta" becomes "O Jocasta, miserable mother".' The messenger has just told of the Queen's suicide over the slain bodies of her sons, and Gascoigne's version suggests the whole tragedy of incest and fraternal war when he emphasises Jocasta the mother.

¹⁶ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 54.

¹⁷ This function of the mother figure as the *embodiment* of emotion (facilitating an affective audience response) is usefully read alongside the work of contemporary sociologists who argue for emotion 'as existentially embodied modes of being which involve an *active* engagement with the world and an intimate engagement with both culture and self' (Gillian Bendelow and Simon J. Williams, eds., *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, London, Routledge, 1998., xvi). Bendelow and Williams go on to argue that 'embodiment' of emotion, in their terms, does not only refer to material or conceptual representations of the body. Rather, they suggest that it 'lies ambiguously' across a series of fundamental dualisms such as mind/body; nature/culture; public/private. Taking this analysis to a study of *Jocasta* allows a fuller appreciation of her dual

Jocasta refers to division of her body, her family and her nation simultaneously, presenting her own condition as emblematic of that of the nation, which she already represents as its Queen. As the play develops, scenes between the wretched mother and her children alternate with choric commentaries which remind the audience that the pain she suffers originates from ‘greedie lust of mans ambitious eye’ (1.1 Final Chorus). The old story thus acquired a contemporary significance in a Christian neoclassical version, which makes Jocasta both the main narrator and the central emblem of a play in which her bodily sufferings, like those of Widow England, serve to demonstrate the consequences of the inappropriate aspirations of her warring children. Marie Axton notes that the adaptation also allows the protagonist to figure the queen’s two bodies:

the translators are concerned to show a ‘blind’ Elizabeth the dangers of her metaphorical marriage with the realm and by implication to urge a real marriage, producing her own children not unnatural heirs. In the union polemic of the early seventeenth century both Jocasta and Gorboduc’s Queen Videna explicitly represent the strife-torn realm.¹⁸

The dangers of resorting to metaphor, then, are described with reference to the material, to the literal breaking up of the mother’s body by her unnatural progeny, while a figurative analogy is retained between that maternal body and the State. Unlike the uneasy alliance of classical motif and moral tradition that characterises the representation of the mother in *Gorboduc*, however, *Jocasta* succeeds in making the two work fruitfully together. Despite the changes and additions which had been foisted upon the original play, *Jocasta* remains in spirit a translation, with Gascoigne, through Dolce, expressing a firm commitment to Euripides’ original. This leads to productive structural tensions, in that while *Jocasta* operates as an emblematic figure in the tradition of the moral play, the Gascoigne/Kinwelmarsh version still retains enough of the dynamic of Euripides’ original to suggest that, when acted, the intended implications of the glosses and addenda will be suppressed in favour of an emotional dynamic which focuses attention upon the play as family tragedy as much as political allegory, and so offers a complex and affective account of its implications for the Elizabethan State.

function in the play, offering a reformulation of its subject in terms of personal suffering. In this, the mother operates as Bendelow and Williams argue that emotion does, to ‘provide the “missing link” between “personal troubles” and “public issues” of social structure’, p. xvii.

¹⁸ Marie Axton, *The Queen’s two Bodies*, p. 54.

II.ii: Motherhood, violence and dramatic pleasure

Philip Sidney, whose appreciation of Seneca's plays is well documented in his *Poetics*, associates 'delight' with both the satisfactions of well constructed rhetoric and the gratification of a properly worked out moral, arguing that the pleasure engendered by these things endows instruction with the power to move and thus to provoke action.¹⁹ The complex significance of the mother figure makes her the locus of both affective and cognitive meanings — in particular, pity and pleasure are aroused by a specific association of the mother's body with violence. This association was recognised by dramatists of the late sixteenth century, in plays which tested and explored its dramatic potential. Three of the four plays discussed in this section — Alabaster's *Roxana*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* — make clear their dues to Senecan drama. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, however, wittily interrogates the convention itself, creating a mother untouched by suffering, whose very perfection makes her dangerous.

William Alabaster's adaptation of Grotto's *La Dalida*, the Latin play *Roxana*,²⁰ was performed at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1592. The effectiveness of the performance, in a

¹⁹ An assertion usefully read alongside the modern anthropological view of the function of emotion. See Paul Heelas, 'Emotion talk across Cultures' in *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*, ed. Rom Haré and W. Gerrod Parrott, London, Sage, 1996., pp. 171-199. For an elucidation of Sidney's discussion see the Introduction to Stephen Halliwell's edition of the *Poetics*, p. 46. Sidney reworks Aristotle's association of pleasure with both imitation and learning, coming close to a version of catharsis (with a Christian gloss) in his account of how 'stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainties of this world', see J.A. Van Dorsten, ed., *A Defence of Poetry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966, p. 65. Relatively recent and controversial readings of Aristotle, for example in *Poetics*, trans. Leon Golden, New York, Prentice Hall, 1968, argue for catharsis as meaning 'clarification of incident', so referring to the point or place at which things fearful and pitiful are justified. Taken together, these readings offer a way into appreciating the notoriously vague concept of catharsis, offering an account of both its affective and cognitive functions. Certainly, in terms of my discussion the mother both provokes an affective response by operating as an emblem, and offers clarification through her narrative/moral function. For a discussion of traditional and modern readings of catharsis see Timothy J. Wiles, *The Theatre Event: Modern Theories of Performance*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 4-5 and 126. See also McLeish, p. 18.

²⁰ This play demonstrates allegiance both to its Senecan tragic model and what Robert Ornstein calls a 'robust Elizabethan fascination with Italianate decadence.' See Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1960, p. 61. At this time elite performances, where classical scholarship was exhibited, continued, alongside an enthusiasm for reworking Italian adaptations of classical narratives. Jean Seznec goes so far as to argue that the English got their classical mythology mostly from Italian sources. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 312.

play which the author asks 'to be delivered in a ranting manner' is recorded, perhaps with some irony intended, by Thomas Fuller:

[Alabaster's] tragedy of *Roxana* admirably acted in college, and so pathetically that a gentlewoman present thereat (Reader, I had it from an authour whose credit it is sin with me to suspect) at the hearing of the last words thereof, Sequar, Sequar, so hideously pronounced, fell distracted, and never after fully recovered her senses.²¹

Whether or not the story is true, it suggests that the performance was a success, deemed admirable and pathetic and thrilling enough to cause collapse in its female audience. Certainly it is a violent play. Its climax involves a messenger speech which describes the protracted torture of a mistress by a wife. The messenger recounts at length and explicitly how the victim was bound and flogged before having a sword placed between her hands and being forced to kill her own children who are later served up as a meal to their errant father. The messenger speech is punctuated by the appearance of the ghost of the primary avenger, the victim's father (killed by her lover) who exclaims with delight at what he is hearing.²²

The mother in this play operates as the embodiment of a series of tensions and contradictions. Her tortured body generates a response in which the revulsion that allegedly precipitated the gentlewoman's collapse in Fuller's anecdote, competes with a fascination with the processes of torture, a dynamic which here operates through a rhetorically constructed focus upon the abuse of the mother's body. This culminates in what amounts to an absolute repudiation of Roxana's motherhood, which is symbolically obliterated by the ingestion of her children's flesh into the body of the father from whence they originally came, so that she is both mother and non-mother. The plot itself is set up in such a way that Roxana's body inevitably becomes the carrier of a series of irreconcilable positions: she cannot be a good daughter and the mistress of her father's murderer; she is a mistress, outside

²¹ Thomas Fuller, in *Worthies of England*, quoted by J.W. Binns in C.D.N. Costa, ed., *Seneca*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 211. Binns also quotes the author's instructions concerning the delivery of the play here. Fuller was perhaps quite aware of the need to be cautious about the veracity of such tales. The dramatist Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio had already told a version of the story of the fainting woman in his account of the first performance of *Orbecce*. See Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, "'She Never Recovered Her Senses": Roxana and Dramatic Representations of Women at Oxbridge in the Elizabethan Age' in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 242. Heywood famously deploys a version of the tale in his *Apology for Actors*; see K. Sturgess, *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969, p. 15.

²² J.W. Binns, 'Seneca and Neo-Latin Tragedy in England', in *Seneca*, ed. C.D.N. Costa, p. 208.

the social and hierarchical structures which are the norms emphasised in the play; she is a mother who commits infanticide, compelled though that may be. Encompassing all these contradictions, the mother operates as an intersection between incompatible narratives; the classical/Italian revenge tale in which conflict between two men is figured horribly and deliciously through the persecution of one woman by another (Atossa boasts that she has outdone Medea in her crime, and, indeed, tortures Roxana in a room decorated with images of Medean atrocities), and the traditional moral narrative which insists that women who upset or threaten conventional hierarchy should rightly and properly be punished.²³ The almost unbearable but at the same time exquisite climax (for the avenging ghost as well as for the audience), where motherhood, with all its potential meanings so clearly adumbrated in the text, is repudiated with appalling violence seems to be offered up in this play not as metaphor but as analogue; a link between political and sexual corruption is here emblematised by the punishment of the mother who becomes a kind of scapegoat, the embodiment of both.

It is of course possible to read into this, as Lisa Jardine does, anxieties about the status of women in marriage and paternity,²⁴ or as Elizabeth Richmond-Garza suggests, an indictment of ‘thorough English inflexibility and atavism on the matter of marriage.’²⁵ Both readings seem somehow inadequate, though, in the face of the ferocity of the violence that is recounted. It is perhaps more satisfying to extend such analysis with a reading which recognises the mother figure here as the object of fetish, the source of both disgust and pleasure.²⁶ The contradictions inscribed on Roxana’s tortured body signal maternity simultaneously emphasised and denied, both ‘the symbol of something and its negation’.²⁷

²³ Binns, ‘Seneca’, p. 218.

²⁴ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, Brighton, Harvester, 1983, p. 96.

²⁵ Richmond-Garza, “‘She Never Recovered Her Senses’”, p. 240.

²⁶ Emily Apter discusses the problems associated with this concept in her first chapter, recalling Jean Baudrillard’s comment that the term fetishism has almost ‘a life of its own.’ Emily Apter, *Feminising the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 2. Here I follow Apter’s suggestion that, as a theory, fetishism functions to simultaneously critique and implicate the very phenomena that it seeks to expose. *Roxana* demonstrates both a repudiation of maternity and a celebration of good motherhood of it, similarly the play rejects violence at the same time as it offers a description of torture in delicious detail. As Apter says, ‘the fetishist does indeed refuse to look, but in refusing to look, he *stares*. It is a “not looking” sustained paradoxically through visual fixation’, p. xiii.

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 34. Juliet Mitchell likewise writes that fetishists ‘... have their cake and eat it: they both recognise that women are castrated and deny it, so the fetish is treated with affection and hostility, it represents the *absence* of the phallus and in itself,

The maternal body thus functions metonymically to demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling the conflicting demands of social, moral, mythic and literary narratives and so is obliterated both physically and figuratively.²⁸ As a play which is perhaps concerned with representing matters of State, but clearly also with academic matters associated with the development of and appropriation of a variety of literary and dramatic narratives, *Roxana* demonstrates the functionality of the mother as a figure whose complexities and contradictions offer a unique pleasure: a pleasure which is produced by the pathos located at the disjunction between the meanings which Roxana here embodies. The potential for containing contradiction always present in representations of maternity is turned to dramatic advantage through a resort to fetishism, where the irreconcilability of the multiple meanings carried by the mother in this play functions to produce both pity and pleasure.

Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* centre upon protagonists who are also fathers, men who are forced to take their revenge outside of the structures of the State with which they are closely associated. In both plays the State is shown to undermine the man — both plays are about disconcerted masculinity, perhaps — so that he resorts to crime and, in both cases, feigned or actual madness, as the narrative unfolds. Their madness, however, is always controlled and has a logic to it, unlike the extraordinary and destructive power of unbridled maternal emotion. Lisa Jardine links Alabaster's Atossa to Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, seeing both as part of a tradition which 'is careless of verisimilitude in the interests of the *frisson* of horror to be derived from such representations of threatening womanhood.' For Jardine, figures like Atossa and Tamora offer a theatrical pleasure specifically to men:

Off stage, the male member of the audience recognises the representation of perennially threatening women (perennial source of horror) ... and recognises equally its absurd excessiveness. No woman of *his* will ever get this out of hand, and hence the representation is equally a source of delight.²⁹

Jardine is right to associate the excessiveness of the representation of these figures with the generation of pleasure, although perhaps that excess operates as part of a rather more complex dramatic strategy than she allows. In *Titus Andronicus*, the maternal, as a metaphor for the

by its very existence, asserts the *presence* of it.' Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990, p. 85.

²⁸ See Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 32, for a full discussion of potential connections between fetish and metonymy.

²⁹ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 97.

State and as figured in Tamora, contributes to a problematising of political ideology both within the dramatic narrative and, following Jonathan Bate's contention that 'Shakespeare is interrogating Rome, asking what kind of an example it provides for Elizabethan England', in terms of Elizabethan anxieties about the failure of established law, particularly in view of an anticipated crisis of Succession.³⁰ At the core of Rome is a thirst for blood that brings the nation to the point of collapse, a thirst linked to, and emblematised by, a dangerous and pervasive maternity at its heart.

Bate emphasises a thematic opposition between Titus Andronicus and Tamora, something which he finds reproduced in Henry Peachum's well-known drawing of a scene from the play.³¹ Taking this opposition together with Jardine's point about the pleasures of excess, it is clear that in *Titus Andronicus*, these pleasures are provoked by a tantalising threat to the established order of things from an overabundant and aggressive maternity: the thrilling spectre of unbridled maternal desire. This threat is figured in the first scene, which depicts the ritual burial of Titus's sons. The funeral procession culminates in a speech from Titus which opens with a salutation to a personified, female State, 'Hail Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds' and ends with a specific site, the family tomb:

O sacred receptacle of my Joys,
 Sweet cell of virtue and nobility,
 How many sons hast thou of mine in store,
 That thou wilt never render to me more! (1.1.92-5)

Titus addresses the tomb as a wife, a lover, the container of his children. The symbolic implications of this have been explored most notably by David Willbern, who suggests that Saturninus's address to Rome at the beginning of the scene voices a similar address to a city which is overwhelmingly maternal: 'Rome, be as just and gracious unto me / As I am confident and kind to thee. / Open the gates and let me in.' (*Titus* Ii 60-3) In this reading, Saturninus' address 'implicitly voices a desire for maternal affection and acceptance. Willburn continues, 'the wished-for opening of the gates is latently sexual and highly ambivalent: entry into the mother's body, in both genital and oral terms, is unconsciously as terrifying as it may be pleasurable.'³² In this analysis, the open gates of Rome, like the gaping

³⁰ Bate, J., ed., Shakespeare, W. *Titus Andronicus*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 17 and 27.

³¹ Bate contends that 'The opposed gestures of Titus and Tamora are also the central gestures of the play: Authoritative command against supplication on knees with hands in a gesture of pleading', p. 42.

³² David Willbern, 'Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*, in *English Literary Renaissance* 8, 1978, 159-82, 161.

tomb of the Andronici, function, like the body of Roxana in Alabaster's play, as the point of intersection between discordant discourses, but here the mother is not victim but predator. A disturbing and deliciously threatening predominance of the maternal resonates ironically at moments where masculine, martial victory are most celebrated. The tomb works metonymically to suggest the monuments of the 'Capitol', thus emblematising the success of the martial State, but a State in service to a feminine mother Rome. It is at the same time a greedy maternal receptacle, a sweet 'cell' which is also an earthly grave, an image of civic statuary which combines with the fecund earth to receive the corpses of the hero's children.³³ Rome, and the tomb operate as ambivalent concepts, signifying both the personal sacrifice that is part of an understanding of the successful, masculine, martial and politic, and, simultaneously, a subversive, earthy, greedy maternity that has reclaimed the bodies of twenty-one of Titus's offspring.³⁴

This maternity is actualised in the stage figure of Tamora, at first presented as a pitiable mother who pleads for the life of her eldest son but later a vengeful Medea figure bent upon terrible revenge. Despite the fact that she spends most of the play in the second role, one of the play's earliest spectators recorded in a drawing of a scene from the play an apparently dignified and supplicant Tamora. As Marion Wynne-Davies has asked, 'why did Peacham choose to depict Tamora as royal and sympathetic?'³⁵ For Wynne-Davies the answer is in 'the

³³ Marion Wynne-Davies pays particular attention to the importance of the image of the earth, 'The womb of the ultimate female body' in the play. Though her argument is rather different from mine, in that she seeks to contrast a patriarchal, imperial Rome with 'the all-consuming mouth of the feminine earth', nevertheless her contention that the womb is important as 'one of the corporeal symbols of the play' and her suggestion that the play 'slides into unexpected similarities and contrasts which compel a reworking of expected and perhaps accepted gender identities' and later her reference to the play's 'series of almost unacceptable collusions' have been helpful in alerting me to the tensions that I wish to argue structure the production of theatrical pleasure in *Titus*. Marion Wynne-Davies, "'The Swallowing Womb": Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*', in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp. 135-139.

³⁴ Wynne-Davies, 'The Swallowing Womb', pp. 135-9. Also Willbern, p. 162, who asserts that 'the equation of womb and tomb is central to the unconscious action of *Titus Andronicus*'. The idea that the womb was mobile (taken originally from Plato) and 'greedy' is now commonly asserted as dominant in Early Modern physiology (Eccles, 1982, 82-3) The demand from mother earth for blood is, as many critics have noted, made visually explicit not only in the spectacle of the tomb, but in the description of the hole in the ground into which Bassanius is later thrown before Lavinia is raped, so that both civic and pastoral Rome are shown in spectacle and rhetoric to be pervaded by a rapacious and devouring maternity. (See *Titus* Iiii 198-200).

³⁵ Wynne-Davies, 'The Swallowing Womb', p. 34.

play's rejection of the common stereotyping of women into virgins and whores', as she argues that, 'instead, it appears both to enact and to confuse these treatments of women: feminine power and female sexuality are inextricably linked, simultaneously provoking and repressed.'³⁶ This is, of course, not entirely a move away from the certainties of straightforward typology, relying as it does upon a familiar link between femininity, madness, and the disintegration of the State.³⁷ Titus's refusal of clemency, despite Tamora's desperate resistance to the Roman rituals which require the life of her son, provokes the release of a furious and rapacious maternity which is analogous to that signified by the tomb in its drive towards real degeneration and chaos. Tamora's plea to Titus to 'stain not thy tomb with blood' is also a kind of threat, imagining as it does the defacement of the Roman monument by the heathen blood of her son. (*Titus* II, 119) Articulated by the frantic mother, this cry of, and for, blood, associates that blood with maternity, and with the threatening potential of the maternal body.

Bate's point about the opposition of Tamora and Titus is significant here. As Peacham draws it, the Queen of the Goths kneels royal but supplicant, her regal status demonstrating her potential power just as her physical position indicates her present powerlessness. Behind her, her children and her foreign lover attest to the havoc that the uncontrollable forces of maternal revenge and female sexual desire will wreak upon the Roman and his conventionally dressed companions. The Peacham picture demonstrates a confrontation between the certainties of the civilised State and the unleashed threat emblematised by Queen Tamora and her train.³⁸ The first scene of the play similarly sets up an opposition in which Titus, ostensibly in control, is in fact placed at the mercy of an abundant, consuming maternity that is already in the process of bringing about his destruction. The figure of Tamora offers a spectacular and sustained realisation of the excess of maternity that characterises the corruption of Rome. Maternity infects her role as

³⁶ Wynne-Davies, 'The Swallowing Womb', p. 34.

³⁷ *Roxana* offers one such example in the figure of Atossa, *Jocasta* another. A closer analogue to Tamora, however, might be Queen Videna, the, literally, infuriated mother in Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*, whose madness both figures and is induced by the civil war fought between her sons. See Cauthen's edition of *Gorboduc*: I.B. Cauthen Jnr., ed., *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex*, by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970. In Studeley's translation of Seneca's *Medea*, the translator freely admits his alterations, which work to reformulate the story to depict the breakdown of State. In her first speech Medea declares herself to be in the thrall of uncontrolled passion: 'passions rack me too strong to endure delay; flames are burning my very marrow and my heart; here fear blent with anguish plies the spur', p. 31.

³⁸ If this is true, there are interesting implications in terms of the ways in which the production that Peacham saw drew out particular meanings from the text.

Saturninus' wife, 'A loving nurse, a mother to his youth'; she produces a foreign bastard child instead of a Roman heir. (*Titus* Ii 333) Maternity inflects the language in which she expresses even her sexual desires: 'hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds / Be unto us as is a nurse's song / Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep.' (IIIii 27-9) This pervasive maternity that Tamora represents exists, moreover, outside the parameters of the dramatic action, (Rome is already greedy for blood, Tamora is already a mother, when the narrative begins) and so beyond the control of the Romans who struggle against it. David Willbern situates Lavinia as the symbolic opposite to this, representing an alternative Rome, the 'pure and virtuous mother' who is under attack.³⁹ Certainly, it is Lavinia's *potential* as the locus of a non-threatening, controllable maternity, and thus a suitable vehicle for the continuation of patriarchy that is set against Tamora's fearsome maternal status, a status forged in an unfamiliar time and place beyond the scope of the play. It is not femininity but *maternity* which infects Rome. It is thus appropriate that the emblem of this poisonous and pervasive motherhood should be annihilated at the end of the play, which closes with the image of her body being thrown 'to beasts and birds of prey' (VIII 198) to be devoured.⁴⁰

In *Titus*, it is the impossibility of containing the maternal that provides the primary dynamic of the play. In Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the potential for violence implicit in the maternal is instead turned upon itself in a world dominated by policy which is impervious to either the threats or the pleas of the mother. In this play it is the vulnerability of maternity which is emphasised, offering a pathetic testament to the immorality of the political machinations that constitute the main plot. Isabella, wife of the avenging hero Hieronimo, has no narrative function other than to appear at three crucial points in the play to emblematised first through grief for her murdered son, then consequent madness, and finally suicide, the drive towards revenge which structures the play. She operates in this pseudo-Senecan drama as a familiar combination of fury and mother, articulating the need for revenge while at the same time signifying this necessity through the excesses of her grief stricken state. Michael Hattaway has described the way in which this play operates as a sequence of scenes, 'a sequence of performed actions',⁴¹ and Isabella's part fits well with his analogy with opera, three brief appearances which work like arias to offer a kind of immediate emotional and

³⁹ 'Both Lavinia and Tamora may be seen as symbolic personifications of the female Rome. They enact contrasting aspects: the pure and virtuous mother, threatened with attack and invasion, who needs protection and rescue; and the dangerous, seductive, threatening mother, *from* whom one needs protection'. See Willbern, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Janet Adelman develops the link between motherhood and feeding in Shakespeare's later plays, but acknowledges in her Introduction 'the horrific devouring mother in *Titus Andronicus*' in whose presence all identity and all family bonds dissolve'. See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Michael, Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, London, Routledge, 1982, p. 106.

dramatic satisfaction as well as to push the dynamic of the play forward to its inevitable denouement.

Kate McLuskie has drawn attention to the importance of Isabella's role in 'making revenge an emotional as well as a plot necessity, adding to the play's dramatic power', a point that I wish to take further here.⁴² Isabella's first appearance is to join her husband in a lament before the hanging body of their murdered son.⁴³ Her function is not more than conventional, a kind of choric support for Hieronimo's calls for revenge, emblematising and articulating the grief which is essential to the revenge motif, but nevertheless her part is crucial. The evocative spectacle of the mourning mother looking up at her son's corpse clearly links into the traditions of iconography that link motherhood with loss which were discussed in the opening chapter. Michael Hattaway takes for granted the emotional appeal of Kyd's reworking of this convention, writing that 'these images need no comment: they are the stuff of popular ballads but also of high art.'⁴⁴ His point can perhaps be developed to describe this scene as combining the pious sympathy elicited by visual reference to Christian iconography with the voyeurism more usually expressed in popular commercial literature where the intimate experience of personal grief becomes, for the observer, a source of prurient pleasure. The mother here is at once venerable and ridiculous, more so when she next appears, 'running lunatic' and, in a futile gesture, cutting down the arbour where her son was hanged. (III viii) Hattaway draws attention, again, to the importance of spectacle when he explains how 'Isabella's rich court robes would have been replaced by a loose and torn smock, her tied-up hair and headpiece replaced by a long flowing wig, the conventional stage symbol of distraction.'⁴⁵ The familiar image of the distracted mother, conventionally emblematic of public and private breakdown, is here part of a process of transformation which ends with Isabella's subsequent suicide where, in a pathetic combination of the Christian icon of grief and a classical avenging fury, she opts for a Senecan death, calling for revenge and stabbing herself in 'the hapless breast that gave Horatio suck'. (IV ii 37)

There is a tension between the classical idea of honourable suicide and the Christian sin of Despair here, which is both complicated and elucidated by the mother's reference to her own body which becomes the point of articulation between those conflicting meanings. The breast, a site of both shame and honour, emblem of both humankind's bestiality, and idealised

⁴² Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 131-2. McLuskie here argues for a 'functional' aspect of women's roles in theatre, which serves to act upon narratives in which the female character may have no obvious determining role.

⁴³ I am using Philip Edwards's edition of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Revels Plays series, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1977.

⁴⁴ Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 122.

⁴⁵ Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 124.

maternity; and her suicide, simultaneously courageous and cowardly, enable the revenge motif to refer both to Christian guilt and Classical shame. Revenge in this narrative is desirable for the reputation of the public person and yet requires punishment for the good of the same person's spiritual self. Overburdened with meaning like Roxana, Isabella denotes both the political and personal implications of 'policy' while emblematising their irreconcilability. Hattaway says that descriptions of the play 'do not imply a single hero but see the tragedy as that of a family or dynasty, and suggest that what would sell the play would be a reminder of those great *scenes* in the play that had caught the imagination of the audience.'⁴⁶ The focus upon the mother's body here is exactly what allows this interplay of concepts of private family and public dynasty, the two brought together by the bittersweet and contradictory pleasures induced by the spectacle of the victimised mother, first tortured by madness and then stabbed through her breast, dead upon the stage.⁴⁷

The mother's body, both alive and dead, is similarly and spectacularly utilised by Christopher Marlowe in the first and second plays of *Tamburlaine*.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that these are two of the most violent plays in the Elizabethan theatre, Zenocrate (uniquely in the plays addressed in this chapter) transcends any association with violence; she is responsible for no deaths and herself dies of natural causes. But it is her apparent disconnection from the carnage that surrounds her that is interesting here. In the first play an important contrast is made between Zabina, the wife of Bajazeth, *Tamburlaine's* conquered enemy, and Zenocrate, the hero's prospective bride, in which a eulogy to Zabina's success as a mother of 'three brave boys' is set alongside what Simon Shepherd calls a 'fetishising' of Zenocrate's glacial

⁴⁶ Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Both Hattaway, p. 126, and Edwards refer to the problem of getting the body off the stage; there are no stage directions to indicate when this might be done. The interesting thing is that she has to be shifted somehow, and that the practicalities of this have implications for the way an audience responds to her death and its implications. The effect of a staged death is interesting. Unless the body is immediately removed (in which case the nature of her removal will create its own effect; comic, pathetic, tragic, or whatever) the audience, who will have been absorbed in watching the death enacted will bear the responsibility of deciding when to break the link: when to look away from the body. This ensures their continued involvement in an affective response to what is being enacted. This operates as a clear strategy, of course, in depictions of the Crucifixion in the Mystery Plays, where the dying Christ insists that the audience 'take tent' of the processes and significance of his death and, at the close of the play, there is a pause in which the audience must decide whether to keep looking, when it is appropriate to look away. See A.C. Cawley, ed., *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, London, Dent, 1990.

⁴⁸ All references to the play are from *Tamburlaine the Great*, in *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by C.F. Tucker Brooke, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910.

beauty and chastity.⁴⁹ Before the battle in which Bajazeth will be defeated, both he and Tamburlaine celebrate their women:

Zabina, mother of three brauer boies,
 Than *Hercules*, that in his infancie
 Did pash the iawes of Serpents venemous:
 Whose hands are made to gripe a warlike Launce,
 Their shoulders broad, for complet armour fit,
 Their lims more large and of a bigger size
 Than all the brats ysprong from *Typhons* loins:
 Who, when they come vnto their fathers age,
 Will batter Turrets with their manly fists.
 Sit here vpon this royal chaire of state,
 And on thy head weare my Emperiall crowne. (*Tamb. I*, 1201-11)

Bajazeth's rhetoric, coloured by references to classical mythology which emphasise the solidity and power of the dynastic heritage he describes, enhances the visual significance of his crowned and enthroned queen whose motherhood is central to her meaning. The effect of this emphasis upon Zabina's personal success as a mother of children who reproduce their father's warlike disposition, and, because of this, her political success as a queen, is to make her the emblem of the established, apparently unassailable, political structures that the upstart Tamburlaine repeatedly challenges. Tamburlaine's retort is to place his princess beside Zabina, 'adorned with my Crowne, / As if thou wert the Empresse of the world.' (1222-3) Zenocrate, in contrast to Zabina, has no sexual history. It is her *potential* as a future wife, queen and mother, which Tamburlaine celebrates here. Marlowe brings together two paradigms of femininity and allows a play of irony between them; the older mother and the pale girl are placed together as if to show up one another's deficiencies, rather than as icons of female qualities. The dramatic rhetoric draws attention to the differences between them as first the men compete in language over the importance of their women and then the women bicker about the superiority of their men. This verbal competition tends to undermine the iconic value of the spectacle of the two female types, so setting up an ironic resonance

⁴⁹ Simon Shepherd sees the women here as objects in what he characterises as a male competition. If this is true, such an objectification of the female (particularly when, as in this scene, such attention is drawn to their visual significance) serves to heighten the meanings of the female body in terms of the perpetuation of patriarchy through their capacity to reproduce the dynastic line. Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-century Drama*, Brighton, Harvester, 1981, p. 183.

between them. Zenocrate's peculiar status here, not quite wife, not yet mother, indicates both her implication in Tamburlaine's future success, and foreshadows her detachment from it.

After Bajazeth's defeat and subsequent suicide, Zabina, like Isabella in Kyd's play, runs lunatic and kills herself. Her mad speech, in prose which stands out from the blank verse of the rest of the scene, offers up an evocative cluster of images which offer an obvious typological link between her particular circumstance as Tamburlaine's victim and the timeless suffering of maternal grief:

O Baiazet, O Turk, O emperor, giue him his liquor? Not I, bring milk and fire, and my blood I bring him againe, teare me in peeces, give me the sworde with a ball of wildefire vpon it. Downe with him, downe with him. Goe to my child, away, away, away. Ah, saue that Infant, saue him, saue him. (2090-5)

The spectacle of the mad mother, together with the chaotic images in this speech, operate to dismantle the concept of successful maternity and Queenliness that Bajazeth set up so thoroughly in his celebration of Zabina quoted above. Against the solidity of the Classical mythology invoked by the Emperor to celebrate his queen, is set one of the most chaotic and pathetic episodes of the Christian story of the massacre of the Innocents. The milk and the blood of maternity are set against images of fire and sword and shown to be inadequate. Zabina's final cry before she dies, 'Hel, death, Tamburlain, Hell, make ready my Coch, my chaire, my iewels, I come, I come, I come', reinforces pathetically a sense of the futility of all that was celebrated by her husband, as neither her function as mother, nor the trappings of wealth and royalty have any currency in the face of the new power structures that Tamburlaine is setting in place.⁵⁰

Motherhood's crucial function in maintaining patriarchy, articulated by Bajazeth and undermined by Tamburlaine's triumphs in the first play of the pair, recurs as a concern in *Tamburlaine II*. Like Zabina, Zenocrate has produced three sons, but, ironically, sons who are reproductions of their mother rather than their father. Marlowe constructs a witty play upon the conventional dramatic rhetoric of patriarchy which asserts a physical resemblance between father and son as a way of reinforcing the strength of the dynastic line, by making the womanish appearance of the hero's children a source of anxiety, undermining Tamburlaine's dynastic ambitions. Tamburlaine himself articulates this anxiety when he and his family first

⁵⁰ Blood and milk were associated through contemporary medical theory, of course, something which resonated with the conventional typologies that linked motherhood and grief. See G.K. Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, Ch.2.

appear in the second play in a scene where the hero arranges his family into what Judith Weil characterises as ‘a portrait group’, an emblem, we might think, of his triumphant progress and dynastic success.⁵¹ Despite the confirmation of these things offered by the family tableau, Tamburlaine’s words reveal a crucial instability at its heart:

But yet me thinks their looks are amorous,
 Not martiall as the sons of *Tamburlaine*.
 Water and ayre being simbolisde in one
 Argue their want of courage and of wit,
 Their haire as white as milke and soft as Downe,
 Which should be like the quills of Porcupines,
 As black as Ieat, and hard as Iron or steel,
 Bewraies they are too dainty for the wars.
 Their fingers made to quauer on a Lute,
 Their armes to hang about a Ladies necke:
 Their legs to dance and caper in the aire:
 Would make me thinke them Bastards, not my sons,
 But that I know they issued from thy wombe,
 That neuer look’d on man but *Tamburlaine*. (*Tamb. II*, 2590-2603)

Patriarchy here has been struck where it is most vulnerable, the incubation of the child within its mother’s body, where a bastard might be sustained, or a monstrous prodigy might be nurtured before entering the world to upset the established order.⁵² Marlowe uses this to set up an ironic reconsideration of his hero’s achievements, so spectacular and yet ultimately so precarious. While Bajazeth’s son, Calapine, exhibits his father’s qualities in a daredevil escape from captivity, Tamburlaine’s eldest boy, Calyphas, disdains his father’s triumphs, preferring the company of his mother:

But while my brothers follow armes my lord
 Let me accompany my gracious mother,
 They are enough to conquer all the world
 And you have won enough for me to keep. (*Tamb. II*, 2634-7)

⁵¹ Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe, Merlin’s Prophet*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 134.

⁵² This idea is significant, for example, in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, and is set out in the soliloquy which opens that play.

This speech again depends upon its visual context for effect. The spectacular impact of son and mother, so physically alike, together on the stage creates a link between them which challenges the play's — and the hero's — construction of masculinity as martial, active and aggressive. The transmission to her sons of Zenocrate's womanishness problematises the dynastic ambitions that are implicit in martial endeavour, so that maternity, essential for the continuation of the patriarchal line, is shown to be also its greatest liability. After Zenocrate's death, the antipathy between father and son spills over into infanticide, when Tamburlaine kills Calyphas for staying in his tent during a battle and refusing to fight. (3794) This is the point where, says D.J. Palmer, Tamburlaine 'has turned upon Nature'.⁵³ Nature nevertheless triumphs through the mediation of the body of the ostensibly powerless captive girl who mothered his offspring. Just as Zabina, in *Tamburlaine I*, died in a way that emphasised the futility of dynastic ambition, so the death of this son, so like his mother, demonstrates the limits of the hero's aspirations. Serene and supportive as a wife, beautiful beyond compare as a lover, Zenocrate is in the end the unwitting agent of public and private disaster on a grand scale, the collapse of both family and empire. Motherhood is as vicious for Tamburlaine as it was for Titus, and Roxana, and Isabella.⁵⁴ Tamburlaine, who asserted power over even those universal concepts that are traditionally gendered feminine — 'I hold the Fates bound fast in yron chaines, / And with my hand turn Fortunes wheel about' (*Tamb. I* 369-70) — in the first play, discovers the inadequacy of such claims in the second, an inadequacy which is emblematised by a pervasive and infectious femininity, transmitted through the conquered princess whose body bore, and left her mother's mark upon, his children.⁵⁵

Each of the plays discussed in this chapter uses the traditional link between maternity and violence to address conventional narratives of English religious and political drama in

⁵³ D.J. Palmer, 'Marlowe's Naturalism' in Brian Morris (ed.) *Christopher Marlowe*, Mermaid Critical Commentaries series, London, Ernest Benn, 1968, p. 77.

⁵⁴ Doris Feldman discusses this from another perspective, alleging that 'Tamburlaine attempts to make the feminine function as an extension of the masculine principle.' She draws attention to the way in which Tamburlaine exercises control over Zenocrate's body 'by first taking it captive, then aestheticising and idealising and finally embalming it' but comes to the same conclusion as this thesis, that the enduring power is Zenocrate's. See Doris Feldman, 'Gendered Bodies in Marlowe's Plays' in *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Douglas Cole sees this in terms of a reversal of norms; 'Bravery in the son and love in the parent have been converted to cowardice in the son and hate in the parent.' If this is so, then it is Zenocrate who has been the catalyst for this conversion. See Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1962, pp. 118-9.

which maternal suffering supplies an affective focus for public action, and where the mother is crucial to the representation of the State. In *Roxana* the physical suffering which characterised Elizabethan versions of classical drama is inflicted upon a mother, creating a narrative in which tension between cruelty and pathos is tested to the point where it can only be received through an audience's disengagement from its implications: that is, by consenting to a fetishising of the mother, or by fainting! In *Titus Andronicus* the violence is maternal and pervasive, drawing upon narratives of politically dangerous maternity from classical drama, visually realised and characterised by the destructive Tamora, figuratively constructed in the metaphor of a devouring mother nation. Kyd forces together classical and Christian notions of maternal sacrifice to create a series of specific and symbolic moments in *The Spanish Tragedy* which posit the mother as an emblem of State corruption, and Marlowe turns the convention upon itself, creating a mother who is not at all frightening, and yet who is the source of complete dynastic destruction. In all these plays, the reconsideration of traditional representations of maternity has contributed to the creation of radical narratives which relish their new usage of the mother figure to shock or to disturb, and thus to engage her audience in an active consideration of the substance of the drama. It is this potential to challenge, even as she signifies, matters of State which makes the typology of the mother so useful to the dramatic depiction of the nation, as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 3: Motherhood and history

'This our noble island, in the bowels whereof, as in the womb of my mother, I was both bred and bor.'
Philip Stubbes, *A Motive to Good Workes. Or Rather, to True Christianitie Indeede* (1593)¹

III.i. Motherhood and the narration of history

The previous chapter has shown how developments in tradition and dramatic convention made available a typological link between mother and State which had the potential to be turned to radical purposes. This chapter considers the operation of that typology in Elizabethan history plays, and argues for the fundamental narrative importance of motherhood as a trope by which the dramatisation of State conflict acquires validity and complexity. Critics such as Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin have, of course, produced a thorough feminist reading of Shakespeare's history plays, but their discussion of the operation of the maternal is a small part of a wider analysis, and necessarily focussed upon one dramatist.² For Howard and Rackin, history plays permitted an opportunity to 'reclaim the endangered masculinity of the men in the theatre audiences, unlike tragedy which 'was likely to inspire womanly emotion in its spectators'.³ But Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Marlowe's *Edward II* were advertised as 'tragedies' in view of their emphasis upon the hero's fate, and consequent efforts to construct an interiority for each protagonist which allowed him to be tragic in the Aristotelian mode. Shakespeare, in *Henry IV* parts 1 and 2, and in *Henry V*, made use of the conventions of comedy and epic narratives to assert a sense of nationhood, while retaining the dramatic focus clearly upon the personal and political crises of Henry V. There is more than one way to re-shape old stories, to reconfigure their meaning, and although, as Howard and Rackin note, there are 'relatively few and often sketchy' images of women offered in the histories of Shakespeare (and the comment could be extended to cover Elizabethan history plays in general), the function of those women is fundamental to the texts in which they appear.

When the mother figure is deployed in historical narratives her effect is to divert the dramatic focus towards the condition of the State and away from the subjectivity of the individual monarch. She

¹ Quoted in Patrick Collinson, 'The Elizabethan Church and the New Religion' in *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. Christopher Haigh, London, Macmillan, 1987, p. 169.

² Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Reading of Shakespeare's English Histories*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997.

³ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 101.

functions as a component of the narrative structure, so that ‘what is most important about these plays from a feminist standpoint’ is not only ‘the impact the plays have had on the ways we imagine gender and sexual difference, the institution of marriage and the gulf between “public” and “private” life’, as Howard and Rackin contend, crucial though these things are. Rather, the operation of motherhood in these plays can be shown to fundamentally inform the dynamics of the dramatic representation of national history.⁴ True to typological tradition, motherhood functions to construct an idea of nationhood but simultaneously offer other meanings, working to complicate familiar tales of politics and war by figuring a contrasting perspective, suggesting alternative histories.⁵ In this way, the mother figure can be instrumental in inviting an audience to reconsider history and its meaning for the present.

In her argument that Shakespeare’s history plays display a politically risky perspectivism, Paola Pugliatti suggests that by inserting invented characters (or characters ‘invented’ in the sense that their dramatic representation bears no, or partial, relation to their description in the source material) into history plays, Shakespeare was able to create narrative complexity:

The inclusion of invented characters in historical plots allows the conflation of heterogeneous components and points of view; and the orchestration of diversity in discourses, genres, conventions and languages, highlights discrepancies and conflicts of interest, introducing differences (social, linguistic and other) as relevant data of historical experience and thus foregrounding the concurring systems of a multiplicity of ‘histories.’⁶

To extend this analysis beyond just a consideration of Shakespeare’s work, it can be argued that motherhood contributes to the complex dramatisation of history precisely because of its ideological position. This potential is clear from the discussion of *Kyng Johan* in the previous chapter. Although Bale subordinated the presentation of chronicle history to the demands of religious propaganda, history remained crucial to the dramatic success of his play. Widow Englande’s polemical power is achieved through a fusion of moral play and history which allowed the mother to signify religious and political principles and ideas purportedly greater and more permanent than the deeds and lives of men (or kings).

⁴ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 20.

⁵ The argument uses ‘story’ in the sense that ‘a *story* is the signified of a narrative text’. See the Introduction to Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction*, Harlow, Longman, 1996, p. 6.

⁶ Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996, p. 72

The effectiveness of the mother figure in later Elizabethan drama drew resonance from the ways in which motherhood was presented in other available discourses, including, especially, the chronicles. The period saw a shift of emphasis from theology to teleology, impelled in part by the changing preoccupations of an audience no longer so exercised by religious conflict except in so far as it affected the much more pressing and worrying issues associated with the Succession, and in part by the reliance of dramatists like Peele, Marlowe and Shakespeare upon Holinshed and Hall, for example, as sources for their history. Religious concerns had not disappeared from chronicle history but they were inscribed within a Protestant reading of the past which brought together 'God's Law and the King's'⁷ and tended to discover elements of Catholicism in political subversion. Such readings depended for effect upon a teleological, causal construction of history that directed its aims towards the celebration of a better present. The chronicles necessarily promoted a dynastic reading of history, and have been read as an 'exercise of conformist political ethics' which favoured the Tudor cause.⁸ However, in her reading of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Annabel Patterson argues for a deliberate multivocality in that text, a resistance on the part of the editors of both editions to the idea of a grand narrative in favour of the recording of diverse discourses which offer a complex version of events in which accounts are frequently in competition or even conflict. Patterson cites Holinshed's 'Preface to the Reader' to support her contention:

I have collected out of manie and sundrie authors, in whom what contrarietie, negligence, and rashnesse sometimes is found in their reports; I leave to the discretion of those who have perused their works: for my part, I have in things doubtful rather chosen to *shew the diversitie of their writings*, than by over-ruling them, and using a preremptorie censure, to frame them to agree to my liking: leaving it neverthelesse to each mans judgement, to controll them as he seeth cause.⁹ [my italics]

⁷ Prologue to *Nice Wanton*, in R. Dodsley and W.C. Hazlitt, eds., *A Selection of Old English Plays*, 4th edition, London, Reeves and Turner, 1876.

⁸ Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian*, p. 31. For more on this see Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 115.

⁹ Quoted in Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 15.

Pugliatti rightly points out that such a preamble probably had much to do with nervousness in the face of the operation of censorship, which she says exerted a double pressure upon the chroniclers:

What the authorities feared, in particular ... was the way in which historians connected past events with the present, although they considered that the establishing of such connections was one of the obligations of historians.¹⁰

Patterson's argument for multivocality also recognises a sixteenth-century acknowledgement of the complexities inherent in historiography. Her argument explains the attention given in Holinshead and Hall to what A.P. Rossiter calls 'that long line of women broken in the course of great events', like Margaret of Anjou or Elizabeth, wife of Edward IV, because it gives them a narrative as well as an emblematic value as signifiers in competing histories.¹¹ The inclusion of detailed stories about mothers in the chronicles therefore has an effect upon the history plays which took material from such publications as the basis for their works. The dramatisation of the mother figure extends her function in the chronicles and accommodates her into a visual narrative structure, the vehicle for a voice which operates in counterpoint to the martial and political impulses that constitute the plots. Traditional meanings of motherhood, alongside classical narratives of powerful and active women who will not be shamed, allow for a representation of chronicle history in which the stories themselves, and the way they are told, can be tested against other discourses, other perspectives.

History, in the period, was the subject of serious study and some revision. There was an appreciation of a need for objective, dispassionate academic study, although John Bale's insistence upon the importance of recording events 'al affections set a part' is a reminder, in view of his extreme partiality, that the idea of 'indifference', which he was keen to promote, was itself a highly qualified notion.¹² However, the popular practice of representing past events as propaganda, implying the value of the past as a mirror for the present, was well established in drama, as is clear from my discussion of the works of Bale and Sackville and Norton in the previous chapter. History, in such versions, remained open-ended, allowing ideas about the past to bleed into the interpretation of the present and so to contribute to perceptions of the future. Hayden White points out that this is what also

¹⁰ Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian*, p. 33.

¹¹ A.P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures*, ed. Graham Storey, London, Longmans, 1961, p. 41.

¹² Quoted in Patterson, *Angel with Horns*, Preface, p. viii.

distinguishes the chronicle as a kind of history that ‘is marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure’,¹³ so that the story breaks off ‘in medias res, in the chronicler’s own present; it leaves things unresolved or, rather, leaves them unresolved in a story-like way.’¹⁴ In history plays, the mother figure, when she appears, offers an alternative to the relentless teleology of the chronicle. She functions as an anachronism, working in the narrative *against* a chronology of martial and political incidents to allow for the imagination of a number of ‘histories’, only one of which is the sequential and episodic reiteration of key political or military moments which are plotted to give the play its ‘story’.¹⁵

III.ii History and the classical model

Richardus Tertius, a play in three parts, written by Dr. Thomas Legge in the mid 1570s, makes use of an overtly classical model to account for recent English political history.¹⁶ Adapting chronicle history to a Senecan model and performed in Latin to an elite audience, the play nevertheless tends to demonstrate that even when English dramatists were most self-consciously imitating classical models, representation was complicated by the intrusion of informing literary and dramatic traditions, including the traditions of popular theatre.¹⁷ Richard’s reign had become mythologised as a tyranny by

¹³ Hayden White, ‘Three Forms of the Historical Representation of Reality, Annals: Chronicle: Historical Narrative’ in Susana Onega, and Jose Angel Garcia Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction*, Harlow, Longman, 1996, p. 277.

¹⁴ Hayden White, ‘Three Forms of the Historical Representation of Reality’, p. 277.

¹⁵ The use of the mother figure is a popular way to construct this sense of multiple kinds of history. There are others. In *Henry V*, for example, Shakespeare uses the structures of epic to create a similar effect. Marlowe’s *Edward II* and Shakespeare’s *Richard II* use a tragic, rather than chronicle structure.

¹⁶ *Richardus Tertius* by Thomas Legge, ed. R.J. Lordi, London, Garland, 1979, p. v. All subsequent references are to this version of the text.

¹⁷ The play is an occasional piece, intended for playing on consecutive days. The only recorded performance was at St. John’s College, Cambridge, in March 1579/80, but Dr. Legge’s play seems to have been known and appreciated in intellectual circles beyond the University. Lordi observes that Francis Meres placed Legge in the company of Marlowe, Peele, Shakespeare, Kyd, Drayton, Chapman, Dekker and Johnson in his list of “our beste for Tragedie”. Lordi also mentions the approbation of Heywood, Fuller and Harington for Legge’s work. Lordi, p. iv. Chambers quotes Harington’s praise of *Richardus Tertius* as having the power to “moue even tyrants”, as well as Meres. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. IV, p. 238. Legge’s continuing celebrity is

the time that the play was written and the perceived relationship between his story and the 'Mirror' tradition in literature is likely to have been seen as compatible with the contemporary understanding of the pagan tyrant. *Richardus Tertius* centers upon the situation of the widowed Queen Elizabeth (mother of the princes eventually murdered in the Tower of London) and her efforts to protect her family from the machinations of the eponymous King.¹⁸

The play concentrates particularly upon the description in Hall's Chronicle of the conflict between Elizabeth and Richard's men, who want to remove her younger son to join his brother under the King's 'protection' in the Tower. Legge reconfigured Hall's account by reference to Seneca's *Troades*, a play organized around a debate between Andromache, desperate to save her son from certain death, and Ulysses who, for reasons of policy, must take the child from her and destroy him. The classical play enacts a conflict between the mother's personal, instinctive feelings and the demands of the public and politic which is also familiar in early non-pagan narratives, as Erich Auerbach demonstrates in his discussion of Madame du Chastel's similar predicament.¹⁹ Maternity is

evident in a passing mention of his work in Nashe's play *Have with You to Saffron Walden*. See Chambers III, p. 408.

¹⁸ This shift is noted by Bullough who rather irritably notes that Legge 'took every advantage afforded by the chronicles to introduce scenes with female participants.' G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* Vol. III, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 235, though he notes that Hall's narrative had already 'added pathos wherever possible.' p. 226.

¹⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Ronald Trask, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, Chapter 10, p. 203 ff. Madame du Chastal is forced to decide between the life of her only child and the dishonour of her husband. Auerbach shows how the pain of her decision (that the child must be sacrificed to safeguard her husband) is articulated in the original in terms of what he calls realistic detail; the sleepless nights, the mundane habits peculiar to grief, for example. Auerbach discusses the importance of the evocation of what is sensory in lending the tale a kind of 'realism', and sees this as an important influence of earlier literature in the Renaissance reworking of the classics. He argues that such realism allowed 'a deeper penetration of the sensory and the creatural [which] asserted itself, and this Christian heritage it preserved and passed on to the Renaissance. [...] It supplied the Renaissance with a strongly counterbalancing factor against the forces working towards a separation of styles that grew out of the humanists' emulation of antiquity' (p. 229). My aim is not to take on Auerbach's analysis here (this has been done, for example, by Paul Ricoeur — in *Time and Narrative*, Volume 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 1984 — in scattered references, for example, p 245), but rather to suggest that it is significant that he chooses a tale about motherhood to make a point about the synthetic quality of Renaissance culture.

a concept which, as Auerbach makes clear, implies the personal and the instinctive, and though it offers the potential of a persuasive allegorical trope there is always a simultaneous sense that the meanings of events mediated through the figuring of motherhood have some anchor in an appreciation of the experience of what is 'real', in the sense of an emotional engagement that is 'creatural' (Auerbach's term, as it is translated by Trask from the German).²⁰ Legge's play owes as much to the structure of moral plays and earlier typology as to the Senecan examination of the philosophical questions represented in the *Troades*. It could be argued that what he depicts in *Richardus Tertius* is an English history version of *Jocasta*, a psychomachia of State, which is adumbrated through the conventional figure of a distracted mother Queen.

However, Auerbach's insistence upon the eruption of the sensory into Renaissance cultural products is useful as a way of accounting for the relation between Legge's play and its Senecan model, and for suggesting a rather more complex function for the mother figure. Seneca's play is structured as a debate in which Andromache's dilemma functions as the basis for a rhetorical exercise, taking her potential pain and grief as axiomatic, as informing the problem, rather than incorporating them into the dramatic structures of his play.²¹ In Legge's adaptation, however, the dramatist explores the affective potential of Elizabeth's dual role as mother and as Queen. Her opening speech establishes a rhetoric which describes the political matter of the play in terms of the personal experience of motherhood. It is this insistence upon what is intimate and real that creates for the play a rather different agenda from the classical model, offering a counterpoint to the stylised structure of Senecan debate, and to the emblematic representation of moral drama. Elizabeth asserts a familiar (from the previous chapter of

²⁰ The mothers of the Innocents in earlier Cycle Plays, who unlike Madame du Chastal, physically fight to defend their children, offer their audience an affective and literal depiction of maternal grief whilst simultaneously promoting their figurative function, for example.

²¹ See C.D.N. Costa, ed., *Seneca*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 103. Costa, pp. 105–108, says that there has been a suggestion that Seneca wrote plays as part of a formal programme of Stoic teaching: 'There is a cold intellectuality in Andromache's soliloquy which reflects the debating schools rather than the anguished decision she has to make, whether to give up her son to death or allow her husband's tomb to be desecrated.' And later, 'The flavour of declamation tends to distance the thoughts from reality and human feeling, and Seneca seems to abandon the exploration of mankind's behaviour in favour of formulating its most unoriginal thoughts. But as expressions of the axiomatic they are unbeatable, and it is fair to Seneca to see this as a conscious part of his purpose.' I wonder whether Costa is here underestimating the value of the iteration of the axiomatic in provoking emotional engagement in an audience, and whether in performance this would at least complicate the reception of the 'cold intellectuality' of Andromache's speech.

this thesis) rhetorical connection between successful motherhood and political stability. The link, though, is a complicated one because of the audience's awareness that this is history and that they are witnessing the representation of something that *really happened*. This awareness creates a subtle shift in significance — as a material occurrence in the past, what is depicted has reverberations in a real present: what happened then made now the way it is. This brings another dimension to an audience's understanding of the play, enriching and complicating the established significance that the mother brings to it.

The play thus invites engagement beyond the level of intellectual debate, hinting at realism in its intimations of personal feeling which provokes an emotional response to the historical Elizabeth's plight. The emphasis upon family — the bond between the Queen, her husband, her children and the nation: 'I, a mother, enriched the home of the King with a double heir' — ensures the mother's predicament is consistently read in terms whereby the personal and emotional is always implicated in the public and political.²² Her own fears mirror a political uncertainty. Her personal insecurity implies a wider, public anxiety:

Even though the happy sceptre of my son
urges me, his mother, to rejoice, yet my
ardent mind does not dare to hope for itself
the promised joy; it fears a good when obtained,
and fear once born breeds fear, and hence
my anxious heart burns with many cares.²³

Paradoxically, though, the formality of the rhetoric distances at the same time as it invites engagement. The stylised language promotes Elizabeth as a generic type so that she becomes not only a specific figure in history but also the signifier of a generalised motherhood which operates outside of the time of the play, signifying the irreconcilability of the personal and political demands of maternity, its abundant love and its innate vulnerability, which resonate back through Christian history and literary tradition and forward to the political future. Specific and generic meanings exist simultaneously, lending the mother-queen an exquisite poignancy in the tension between her historic individuality and her generic significance. In this way, Legge is able to enrich Hall's narrative by

²² *Richardus Tertius*, p. 26-7.

²³ *Richardus Tertius*, p. 26-7.

adapting the chronicle's use of Elizabeth as a locus of pathos so that she is given an enhanced political (as well as more emotionally provocative) and dramatic function.

The narrative dynamic is thus constructed so that the play offers meaning from several temporal perspectives. Syntagmatically the drama depicts a linear chronology of incidents that are invested by the plot with political and moral meanings that will be resolved at the end of the play. From a hermeneutic perspective, motherhood endows the plays with significance in a way that Paul Ricoeur has called '*transhistorical*'.²⁴ What is played out in the drama is given meaning, by motherhood, which resonates beyond the boundaries of the play's chronology. Elizabeth figures the point of conjunction of a cluster of narratives, a site where the personal intersects with the political, where an episode located at a particular point in historical time (and performed at another such moment) simultaneously reverberates through past and future.²⁵

What brings these meanings into proximity with one another in *Richardus Tertius* is that together they construct an idea of nationality which is formed out of an emotional engagement with history: the real, historic mother Queen becomes an emblem of the wellbeing of England *now*.²⁶ As Queen she had produced heirs who should ensure the succession, but whose right is to be frustrated by Richard's intervention. Her prophetic anxieties make her status both pathetic and emblematic; she is simultaneously a mother about to be bereaved and a voice for the nation, mother of children who are potential kings, emblem of a land that is also suffering. Even her enemies and their agents acknowledge a link between the personal experience of motherhood and its association with the public mood, based upon emotional sympathy between herself and the people and blaming her personal pain, the cares in her heart, for public grief. Her suffering becomes a great weight, sufficient to oppress the whole nation:

²⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 15. Ricoeur uses the term to describe types that run 'through history in a cumulative rather than just an additive manner' which is exactly the quality of the dramatisation of motherhood that I wish to describe here.

²⁵ As Howard and Rackin point out, both Chronicle history and chorography offered co-existing models of national identity in the late sixteenth century. See Jean E Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 49.

²⁶ Michael Bath writes that religious emblems in particular are 'more intent on discovering the meanings already inscribed in the books of scriptures and nature'. The meanings of the mother figure are similarly discovered through the dramatic process in the plays discussed in this chapter. See Bath, *Speaking Pictures*, p.3.

... why do you turn cares about in your anxious heart and weigh down the public joy with your sorrow?²⁷

Elizabeth's enemies are shown to be out of touch (and therefore wrong) through their inability to appreciate the implications of the relationship between Queen and nation, which they unwittingly describe here. It is they who oppress the public through what they are doing to her family, and through her family, to the nation. When Richard's Cardinal apparently fails to see the significance of Elizabeth's fear, her ironic response — 'may you remain ignorant of anything more miserable than my sorrows' — relies for its effect upon her dual function as parent and figure of state, and thus engenders an emotional response to both the mother's predicament and the national disaster that is inscribed within it.²⁸

Much of this play makes use of the traditions discussed in the previous chapters. Elizabeth prophesies civil war in language that associates such conflict with personal physical trauma.²⁹ She emblematises the war-torn nation by her distracted condition reported in a messenger speech which relies for effect upon the contemporary understanding of the Classical model and its perceived implications.³⁰ The 'unnatural' separation of mother from child that is perpetrated by Richard and his followers is associated with the destabilisation of the kingdom, which is equally against the natural order of things. Richard's followers insist that the conflict between the interests of the mother and those of the nation is inevitable, but the emotional dynamic of the play, informed by the dramatic meaning of the relationship between motherhood and the State, ensures that such assertions can only be understood ironically.³¹ In the person of the mother, *Richardus Tertius* uses emotional and 'feminine' responses to personally traumatic circumstances in the consideration of political stability

²⁷ *Richardus Tertius*, p. 268.

²⁸ *Richardus Tertius*, p.268.

²⁹ *Richardus Tertius*, p. 269.

³⁰ The messenger speech precedes Elizabeth's entrance on stage and makes much of both her state of mind and of its physical manifestations, for example her 'uncertain breathing' and unconventional costume 'her sense of decorum made her put away her regal clothing', so that we are prepared for her distracted appearance when she finally appears. Lordi, pp. 286-7.

³¹ Legge amplifies his sources so that Richard's agent Howard demonstrates a brief and significant moment of remorse in a monologic aside — 'Why have you disturbed the dear heart of the mother so?' — in response to the spectacle of Elizabeth's tearful and protracted farewell to her second son. Lordi, p. 315.

and instability and, at the same time, contemplates a potential subversiveness in the mother who is prepared to defy the State. Chronicle history, re-presented as drama, works to dramatise the telling of the story as well as the story itself and to thicken the texture of the history it offers, inviting a reconsideration of its function and its significance.

III.iii Mothers, Queens and the shaping of national identity

George Peele's *Edward I* was registered in 1593 and there are records of performances of a play called *Longshankes*, which may be the same play, in Henslowe's diaries in 1595.³² The first performance recorded by Henslowe is annotated 'ne' suggesting that the play is new to the Admiral's men. The gap between the date of publication and recorded performance (if this is indeed the same play) perhaps accounts for some of the peculiarities of a script which has caused problems for all its editors; possibly this is a text which had been considerably changed and reworked during the early 1590s. Written in Peele's typically eclectic style, the play presents major problems of narrative consistency, making any discussion of its use of a particular figure difficult and complicated. It is because of these complexities of structure that the play merits discussion here. Motherhood is integral to the construction of the plot, and the play's peculiar disjunctions in fact reveal a working out of mother-queen's dramatic function which offers a useful measure to bring to the reading of more familiar history plays.

There are two royal mothers in this play. The first, the Queen mother, appears only once at the beginning of the play, to celebrate her son's return from the Crusades.³³ There is an extraordinary first scene that begins with her entry on stage, the only female figure surrounded by politically powerful men:

*Enter Gilbart de Clare Earle of Glocester, with the Earle of Sussex, Mortimer the Earle of March, David Lluellens brother, waiting on Helinor the Queene mother.*³⁴

³² See *King Edward the First by George Peele 1593*, published by the Malone Society, Oxford University Press, 1911, p. vi. All subsequent references to the play come from this edition. There is some critical uneasiness concerning the identification of the play *Longshankes* mentioned several times by Henslowe, with *Edward I*. Though I am persuaded by the play's most recent editors that the two may well be the same play (though perhaps not the same text) there are powerful arguments for caution, most notably from E.K. Chambers in *The Elizabethan Stage*, Volume III, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 461, and Roslyn L. Knutson, in 'Play Identifications: *The Wise Men of Chester and John a Kent and John a Cumber; Longshanks and Edward I*', *HLQ* 47 (1984) pp. 1-11.

³³ To avoid a horrible tangle of terminology, I am consistently referring to reigning queens who are also mothers in history plays as 'the mother-queen'. So the Queen mother retains her modern meaning as the mother of a reigning monarch.

³⁴ *Edward I*. Opening direction of play, A2.

There is a nice irony for the modern reader of this play in imagining the spectacular effect of this entrance; the sole woman waited on by several men, something which is compounded by the way in which Helinor takes immediate control of the scene, speaking first, announcing her son's safe return, and dispatching the nobles to meet him. However, it is not an irony intended by Peele, for whom this mother has a specific dramatic function which becomes clear only sixteen lines into the play. Helinor remains alone on the stage to deliver a paean to England and to her son, which is quoted in full here before a discussion of its construction in some detail:

Illustrious England, ancient seat of kings,
 Whose chivalrie hath roiallized thy fame:
 That sounding brauely through terrestiall vaile,
 Proclaiming conquests, spoiles, and victories,
 Rings glorious Eccoes through the farthest worlde.
 What warlike nation trained in feates of armes,
 What barbarous people, stubborn or untaimd,
 What climate vnder the Meridian signes,
 Or frozen Zone vnder his brumall stage,
 Erst haue not quaked and trembled at the name
 Of Britaine, and hir mightie Conquerours?
 Her neighbor realmes as *Scotland, Denmarke, France,*
 Aude with their deedes, and ielialous of her armes,
 Haue begd defensiue and offensiue leagues.
 Thus *Europe*, riche and mightie in her kinges,
 Hath feard braue England dreadfull in her kinges:
 And now to eternize Albions Champions,
 Equialent with *Troians* auncient fame,
 Comes louely *Eduard* from *Ierusalem*,
 Veering before the winde, plowing the sea,
 His stretched sailes fild with the breath of men,
 That through the world admires his manlines.
 And loe at last, ariued in *Douer* roade,
Longshanke your king, your glory and our sonne,

With troops of conquering Lords and warlike knights,
 Like bloody crested Mars orelookes his hoste,
 Higher than all his armie by the head,
 Martching along as bright as *Phoebus* eyes,
 And we his mother shall beholde our sonne,
 And Englands Peeres shall see their Soueraigne.³⁵

What is immediately striking about this is its similarity to Gaunt's famous celebration of England in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, and it has a similar narrative function, eulogising the nation at a time when, as we are to discover in Peele's play, that nation is under threat:³⁶ Peele, and perhaps a year or so later, Shakespeare, both make use of that rhetorical tradition which represents the nation as mother. Whereas Shakespeare confines his use of the trope to rhetoric; 'This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings', Peele, in giving the speech to the mother of the monarch herself, makes her spectacularly emblemise the nation that she so joyfully celebrates.³⁷ Helinor moves from the articulation of a personal, private desire to see her child in the line before her speech — 'Vntil his mother see hir princely sonne' — to an expression of their reunion as a public and political moment in the final couplet, indicated by her move to the plural pronoun 'we, his mother', and her linking of maternal satisfaction at seeing Edward with public celebration of the return of the king.

³⁵ *Edward I*, lines 16-45.

³⁶ See William Shakespeare, *Richard II* (The Arden Shakespeare) ed. Peter Ure, London, Methuen, 1964, Ii, lines 40-60. Subsequent references come from this edition. Appendix III gives a version of the trope from John Eliot's *Ortho-Epia Gallica* (1593) in which his celebration of France describes it as 'The nurse of many learned wits', and Appendix IV quotes Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, from *Devine Weekes and Workes*, published in 1605, where 'Albion' is hailed as a 'Thrice-happy Mother, which aye bringest-forth / Such Chivalry as daunteth all the Earth.' Both pieces are typical in that they contain references to other lands, to the sea and to Nature, all of which were typically gendered female, usually specified as maternal, in contemporary allegory. In the notes to his edition of *Edward I*, Frank S. Hook suggests that Peele is borrowing from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine I*, but while it seems clear that Peele is aspiring to a similar rhetorical style to that of Marlowe, the similarities in terms of imagery are rather too commonplace to make a definite connection. For this thesis, it is the very popularity of the trope in the second half of the century that is the point. See *The Dramatic Works of George Peele*, ed. Frank S. Hook, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1961, p. 50.

³⁷ Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 2.1.51.

What is also important here, though, is the mother's assertion of her *mythic* function as genitor of a monarch who is equivalent to the Trojan heroes, a King like 'bloody crested Mars.' As in Legge's play, the connection between the historically placed Queen mother and the mother myth offers an alternative long view of English history. In a development of Bale's appropriation of the mother for political purposes, Peele evokes through this mother figure a sense of national ease and celebration; for here, unlike the beleaguered figure of Legge's Elizabeth, caught in an irreconcilable conflict between what she instinctively knows and desires and what is politically demanded of her, Helinor coalesces both maternal pride and national celebration; her roles as mother and as Queen are in harmony at a moment of political and personal triumph for the monarch.³⁸

An appreciation of maternal vulnerability is as important to this celebration of successful maternity as it is to the representation of more persecuted motherhood. Here, it adumbrates the proper relation of monarch to the state but also reminds an audience of the fragility of that relation, shown in Helinor's response to her son's arrival (anticipated by a colourful and long ritual procession). She greets the king and his brother with what sounds like spontaneous intimacy, 'O my sweete sonnes', and then falls into a faint, much to Edward's alarm. (He is reassured that there is nothing to worry about — 'tis but mothers loue' — and Helinor revives). But her physical collapse in the face of ceremonial formality provokes a nice tension between a display of private emotion and the meanings engendered by public ritual. One spills into the other, apparently unbearably. Helinor's collapsed body — no longer speaking; no longer in control — is emblematic of that mythic motherhood which exists outside the chronology of the play, but which is always present in the text. The cause of her collapse is 'mother's love', which may work through a particular historical mother figure but which operates and resonates beyond the succession of discrete episodes and individualised figures which structure the history play. The effect is to promote what was present, though less theatrically asserted, in Legge's play: the concept of nationality as a personal, emotional experience as well as a public and political circumstance, intended perhaps to engender a sense of national pride in an audience moved by the

³⁸ Howard and Rackin argue that Shakespeare's Gaunt is nostalgically hankering after a masculinised England, constructing an antithesis between 'a warlike, masculine historical world and a degenerate, effeminate present' and see this as 'projected in opposition to the present realities of female power and authority'. I would argue, though, that there is a difference between effeminacy and femininity and that in Peele's play this is clear. The Queen Mother is capable of both representing and articulating the triumph of the martially successful nation, and of the abundance of emotion for her sons which cause her to faint when her sons arrive. Both these qualities are strengths. See Howard and Rackin, pp. 147-8.

spectacularly overwhelmed feelings of the mother of the king. What is represented as an involuntary faint works as a moment of realism intruding into the formalised rhetoric and ceremonial spectacle of the play so far. It also carries symbolic resonance, as the Queen mother, figuring both personal love and the affection of the nation, falls before her king.³⁹

This symbolic role is reinforced in a moment towards the end of the scene, where Peele, who was meticulous in his attention to spectacle, demonstrates clearly the importance of the function of the female figure to the visual success of his play:

*The Queene Mother being set on the one side, and Queene Elinor [Edward's wife] on the other, the king sitteth in the middest mounted highest, and at his feete the Ensigne underneath him.*⁴⁰

The women who flank the king operate in part allegorically to signify a perfect moment in the nation's history as the all-conquering monarch is framed by maternal figures who, through their function as royal mothers and as carriers of the mother myth, are made emblems of both the past and the future of the English body politic. As Martha Hester Fleische has pointed out, the tableau is a clear reference to the conventional trope of Christ in Majesty, adding a Christian gloss to the celebration of a moment of military success in English history.⁴¹ Its triumph and its oddness are compounded by the fact that the Queen Mother does not appear again after this celebratory scene, her specific, emblematic function over.

³⁹ See Edwin Davenport, 'The Representation of Robin Hood in Elizabethan Drama: *George a Greene* and *Edward I* in *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend in Performance*', ed. Lois Potter, London, Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 55 where he discusses the play in terms of 'national struggles metonymised into personal relationships'.

⁴⁰ *Edward I*, lines 116-9. I agree with Inga-Stina Ewbank's contention that this is a play which is particularly effective through Peele's choreographing of spectacle. Ewbank, acknowledging the textual problems that the play offers, persuasively argues that '... if, through these complications, we try to glimpse the original and unrevised structure of the play, we find it to be ... a primarily visual one. The action moves through a series of pageants ..' Ewbank rightly shows that even in the passages of formal rhetoric, there is an emphasis upon the way things look. See Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'George Peele and the Importance of Spectacle', in *The Elizabethan Theatre V*, Ed. G. Hubbard, London, Macmillan, 1975, p. 145.

⁴¹ Martha Hester Fleische, *Iconography of the English History Play*, Institut für Englische Sprache and Literatur, Universität Salzburg, Austria, 1974, p. 55.

In contrast, Edward's wife (confusingly called Elinor) becomes a major figure for the rest of the play. This character is remarkable for having two distinctive dramatic roles which appear to conflict absolutely, so that it is difficult to ascertain quite how Peele intended her to be played, or how far this is the consequence of a particularly corrupt text.⁴² She is, in one role, beloved Nell, the wife to whom the king is utterly devoted, who has followed him loyally throughout his campaigns, who expresses great pride and love for her husband and her children, and professes herself an enthusiastic promoter of English interests. But she is also a vicious creature full of 'Spanish pride', who rejects much of what England has to offer, who physically attacks the king more than once, who murders another woman and who, at the end of the play, admits to two acts of adultery. This, at first glance, odd combination of characteristics, seems to have nothing to do with the chronicle material that was available to Peele; indeed the historical Elinor is rather a shadowy figure who bore the king at least fifteen children, and whom he adored, setting up the famous crosses that mark the stages of her funeral procession to Westminster as a tribute to her.⁴³

A clue to the significance of this duality, however, comes towards the end of the first scene of the play, where Elinor not only asserts herself over her husband — 'You will allow what I do, will you not?' — but describes herself, worryingly, as 'the king of Englandes wife, and the king of Spaines daughter', for which her 'mounting mind' is reproved by her husband. Peele structures the scene to end as it began, with a stage controlled by women, but this time Queen Elinor and her daughter Joan.⁴⁴ In contrast to the certainties that opened the scene, however, there is a subversive tenor to the closing

⁴² Those who have written about this play tend to throw up their hands in horror at the impossibility of making any sense of the contradictions in Elinor's representation. Noting that *Edward I* is 'an unusually corrupt text' Frank S. Hook observes that 'the final section of the play contains the most violent departures from historical fact, one so flagrant that it raises ... fundamental questions about the nature of the text.' He acknowledges that ultimately, it is impossible to try to make sense of the play in terms of consistency. See George Peele, *The Dramatic Works*, ed. Frank S. Hook, John Yoklavich, R. Mark Benbow, and Elmer Blistein. 2 vols. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961-70, pp. 19 and 37.

⁴³ My information here comes from Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, London, Methuen, 1988, particularly pp. 123-8; and from *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307*, ed. Sir Maurice Powicke, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 408. Editors have searched possible chronicle sources for the Elinor's treatment in the play and found little; much more promising is popular ballad material, as I will show later in the chapter. For a brief discussion of the absence of chronicle support for Peele's version of Elinor, see David H. Home, *The Life and Minor Works of George Peele*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1952, p. 107.

⁴⁴ *Edward I*, lines 188-200.

exchanges, which hint at political instability. In a discussion of the forthcoming coronation Elinor reveals an alarming *penchant* for ostentatious dress, informed by a desire to promote Spanish interests: ‘That Spaine reaping renowne by Elinor / And Elinor adding renowne to Spaine / Britaine may her magnificence admire.’⁴⁵ Her assertion sets up a debate which is central to the play, characterised by David Bevington as ‘a patriotic and exaggerated study in contrasts between English “familiar majesty” and a foreign tyranny’ in which political problematics are articulated, indeed metaphorised, through a merging of the relations between the personal and the public.⁴⁶ Joan (whose name, with its generic implications, suggests Englishness, despite the nationality of her mother) remonstrates with the queen in a speech which problematises the consequences of personal behaviour for political success. The power relations — the daughter advising the mother — are clearly unusual here, undermining Elinor’s status both as mother and wife of the king:

Madam, if *Ione* thy daughter may advise,
 Let not your honour make your manners change,
 The people of this land are men of warre,
 The women courteous, milde and debonaire,
 Laying their lives at princes feete,
 That gouerns with familiar maiestie,
 But if their soverignes once gin swell with pride,
 Disdanning commons love which is the strength,
 And sureness of the richest commonwealth:
 The Prince were better live a priuate life,
 Then rule with tirannie and discontent.⁴⁷

The scene is at first remarkable for the fact that it is presented as a private exchange between mother and daughter. Such a pairing on the stage would conventionally signify privacy and domesticity, and here it does do that, while at the same time unconventionally dealing with matters of state. The collision of political and personal, which worked to celebrate England and the English King at the beginning of the scene, becomes dangerous here. Joan’s assertion that Englishwomen lay their lives at

⁴⁵ *Edward I*, lines 257-60.

⁴⁶ See David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 206.

⁴⁷ *Edward I*, lines 270-80.

princes' feet recalls and reinforces the symbolic value of the Queen mother's collapse at the start of the play. Her concern is that Elinor is in danger of confusing her private desires with her public duties, of bringing into conflict those personal and political aspects of wifhood and maternity that were demonstrated in such harmony in the figure of Helinor. Elinor's response to Joan — 'Indeed we count them headstrong Englishmen / But we shall hold them in a Spanish yoake / And make them know their Lord and soveraigne' — confirms Joan's fears and reveals further the problematic nature of Elinor's status as a Spanish woman on an English throne, and the potentially dangerous nature of her presence at the English court.

The unhistorical emphasis upon Elinor's Spanish connections is perhaps the most perplexing problem in the play. Certainly here is a manifestation of anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic sentiment, perhaps tapping into popular feeling following the Spanish threat and the defeat of the Armada as well as anxieties associated with the political turmoil of the 1590s, especially frightening at this late stage in Elizabeth's reign.⁴⁸ David Home accuses Peele of 'pandering to popular taste', while Marie Axton,

⁴⁸ The anti-Catholic sentiment implicit in Peele's play finds fuller expression in the anonymous *Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*, first published in 1591. See *The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*, ed. J W Sider, London, Garland, 1979. Like Bale's *Kyng Johan*, the play deploys a version of history to draw attention to the dangers of Catholic political intervention. As in *Edward I*, maternity is essential to the organisation of the dynamics of the polemic of the play. As in *Edward I*, it is the monarch's mother, yet another Elinor, who opens the play with a speech which immediately asserts a relationship between her own condition as mother to the king and the continuing government and health of the nation:

Barons of England, and my noble Lords
 Though God and Fortune have bereft from us
 Victorious Richard, scourge of Infidels
 And clad their land in stole of dismall hieu:
 Yet give me leave to joy, and joy you all,
 That from this wombe hath sprung a second hope,
 A king that may in rule and vertue both
 Succede his brother in his Emperie.

This identity of the person of the Queen mother with the safe government of the kingdom is especially interesting because Elinor asserts that identity herself. She suggests that through her office as wife and mother to kings she has ensured continuity in the monarchy and so enabled the political advantages of such continuity to prevail. What is interesting here is Elinor's placing of herself at the centre of the provision of good government.

like Bevington, sees the play as having a more subtle political strategy.⁴⁹ For Axton, the play ‘face[s] squarely the English nightmare: a Spanish Infanta seated upon the throne of England’ by setting up a version of history which illegitimises absolutely any Spanish claims to England by inventing a genealogy and a pattern of events which work, she argues, as metaphor, rather than as restatement of fact.⁵⁰ Axton contends that ‘Bastardy, incest, death are to be seen as dramatic metaphors in a figural view of history offered as a response to the national and, especially international, insecurities of the 1590s.’⁵¹

To an extent this is a helpful analysis, although the emphasis upon the play’s figurative function would be even more persuasive if Peele’s apparent source for most of the narrative material which vilifies the Queen, were also taken into account. The only obvious sources for this material are two contemporary ballads, *The lamentable Fall of Queen Elinor*, and *Queen Eleanor’s Confessions*, which tell different, complementary stories about the evil machinations of (different) foreign Queens of the same foreign name upon the English throne.⁵² Whatever the figurative sophistication of Peele’s play, there is a sense that history is also being rewritten *for real* in both the popular play and the popular ballad. Both offer a revisioning of the political failures of the past as the consequence of

She establishes herself as offering another kind of mother-service to the nation, implying that her good offices are integral to its prosperity in lieu of her husband’s absence. She is also, however, John’s champion, and in a play which seeks to demonstrate his cause to be not only right but a model to which succeeding monarchies might refer, this is important.

⁴⁹ Home, op. Cit., p. 107: ‘... his unhistorical and unjustified libel on Edward’s Spanish Queen can be fully accounted for only by assuming that he was pandering to popular taste.’ Also, Marie Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the English Succession*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1977, pp. 101-4.

⁵⁰ Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 101.

⁵¹ Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies*, p. 102.

⁵² The first is printed in full in Hook, pp. 210-11 as ‘The lamentable Fall of Queene Elinor, who for her pride and wickednesse, by Gods Judgement sunke into the ground at Charing crosse and rose up againe at Queene hive. To the tune of, Gentle and curteous.’ The second, which is actually an attack upon a different Eleanor, Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife to Henry II, is titled ‘Queen Elinor’s Confession, shewing how King Henry with the Earl Martial in Fryars Habits, came to her instead of two Fryars from France which she sent for.’ This provides the narrative for the last scene of Peele’s play.

foreign, female duplicity, which, as Howard and Rackin argue, is central to Shakespeare's construction of his First Tetralogy.⁵³

This refashioning of the past works because Peele's use of dramatic typology, coerces his preposterous storyline into a familiar set of structures. The synthesis of classical and popular dramatic forms brings together the potential of the politically seditious mothers of pagan drama, such as Clytemnestra and Medea (the latter, like Elinor, a foreign princess) and the Christian tradition of representing duplicitous maternity by reference to the archetype mother Eve, and her typological relations such as Noah's wife. Elinor's fecundity is consistently emphasised in the play; she is either visibly pregnant or in childbed for most of it, her great belly seeming to work as a signifier of the sins of Eve, or at least as a reminder of the conventional fallibilities of women which signify female original sin — vanity, garrulousness, lasciviousness, deceit — and of the conventional punishments for them; the discomforts of pregnancy as corporeal signifiers of the threat of damnation.⁵⁴ Elinor's is a body made doubly grotesque, first because of the way in which her pregnancy is represented (she complains of her bulk and the sweat that drips from her), and secondly because hers is a body shown to be luxuriating in spectacular material excess. Her arrival 'great with child' in Wales is an exhibition of exotic luxury that, if set against Joan's account of the 'milde' temperament of Englishwomen quoted earlier, is clearly gratuitous indulgence:

*The trumpets sound, Queene Elinor in her litter borne by foure Negro Mores, Ione of Acon with her, attended on by the Earle of Gloucester, and her foure footemen, one having set a ladder to the side of the litter. She discended, and her daughter followeth.*⁵⁵

The spectacle of the pregnant Queen, complaining of the heat and her sweat, clambering down from her litter operates like the old Noah plays as both comic and, by dint of typological association, redolent of the threat of evil, understood in this play as political subversion. Elinor is disgruntled with the king for forcing her to come pregnant to Wales, and they have an argument that descends into

⁵³ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, especially on Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou in the first two Henry VI plays, pp. 49 ff.

⁵⁴ Amongst numerous other typological antecedants of this kind of mother is Gill, the wife of the trickster in the Wakefield Second Shepherd's play, which is discussed in subsequent chapters.

⁵⁵ *Edward I*, line 1100 ff.

violence, when she hits him, boasting that mighty England has felt her fist.⁵⁶ The scene is again reminiscent of the Mystery cycles, where the sinfulness of the world before the Flood is figured through the on-stage fisticuffs between Noah and his wife, in which the woman always deals the last and most successful blow. Edward, exactly like Noah, turns to his audience to give a rueful warning:

Learne lords gainst you be married men to bow to womens yoke:
And sturdy though you be you may not stur for every stroke.⁵⁷

Frank S. Hook, who has edited the play, sees this scene as promoting Elinor as a sympathetic figure:

Nell's actions are as earthy as her speech. Arriving in Wales, she climbs from her litter gasping for breath and dripping perspiration in the humid Welsh summer. She is beset by an uncontrollable desire to box Ned's royal ear. ... In speech and action this Nell is more woman than Queen, but that very quality lends her sympathetic appeal.⁵⁸

It is tempting to wonder what model of womanhood Hook, writing in 1961, is referring to here. I would argue that what we have in the figure of Elinor in the play, as it now exists, is perhaps a collision, rather than a synthesis, of diverse narrative sources and structural models, resulting in a play, and the construction of a mother-queen, resonant with conflicting typologies. Peele's fascination with earlier popular drama seems to be responsible for the more earthy scenes in which Elinor and her husband engage in the kind of husband and wife banter familiar, as Axton notes, from traditional depictions of Adam and Eve, and especially those of Noah and his wife.⁵⁹ Her appeal at these moments in the play is to do with the recognition of a combination of familiar comic types: the scold and the irascible pregnant woman, both of which are integral to the typology of female sin and

⁵⁶ Something similar happens when Noah commands his wife to climb aboard the Ark.

⁵⁷ *Edward I*, lines 1248-9.

⁵⁸ *The Dramatic Works of George Peele*, ed. Frank S. Hook, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1961, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 101.

subversion and both of which signify danger and disruption to a patriarchally structured, politically driven, world.⁶⁰

Rather than seeking some kind of coherence of narrative, it is more useful to consider that motherhood works in this play as a narrative *event*: as an intervention in an iteration of chronologically organised occurrences to complicate the meanings offered by the dramatic representation of history.⁶¹ This event is something which *happens*, it disrupts the ‘story’ to cut across the teleological drive which organises the dominant narrative.⁶² Pierre Nora has characterised ‘events’ (in a rather different context) as ‘vehicles for a whole collection of emotions, habits, realities, of inherited representations of the past which suddenly show on the surface of society — places of social projections and latent conflicts’ and this offers an analogy for the operation of motherhood in this play — a complex embodiment of chaotic meanings which at intervals emerge out of the story of Edward’s campaign to create or to presage misrule, and its sinister obverse, sedition.⁶³

⁶⁰ The figure of Mrs Noah, of course, has associations with even older pagan fertility rituals and games; she is the creation of the appropriation of pagan playing into Christian ritual. Peele’s play juxtaposes serious politics with playing and song — the Welsh Lluellen and his train, between battles, dress in green to play a Robin Hood game and sing a song called ‘Blith and bonny.’

⁶¹ I have avoided using this word to describe the episodes depicted in plays specifically because I wish to give the term a particular meaning in this chapter. By ‘event’ I follow Ricoeur: ‘A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story.’ This is important because, as he points out, ‘The plot, therefore, places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity’. See Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Time’ in *On Narrative*, Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 167. There is not room in this thesis to discuss narrative theory in detail. It is nevertheless obvious that my argument here follows Barthes: ‘to understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognise its construction in “storeys”, to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative “thread” on to an implicitly vertical axis; to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next’. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London, Flamingo, 1984, pp. 79-117.

⁶² See Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrative Time’ in *On Narrative*, Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 167. To follow Ricoeur, a story ‘is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story’.

⁶³ Pierre Nora, ‘Le Retour de l’événement’: in Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.) *Faire de l’histoire*, Vol. I: *Nouveaux Problèmes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, pp. 210-228: “... événements véhiculent tout un matériel d’émotions, d’habitudes, de routines, de représentations héritées du passe qui affleurent soudain à la surface de la société ... une événement est ... une déchirure du tissu sociale ...” p.224. Nora characterises events as

For Nora, the event is always destructive, ‘a rip of the social fabric’ and it is interesting how Peele’s play sets up spectacular social celebrations in between representations of Edward’s exploits — folk play, church ritual and civic ceremony — only to have Elinor subvert and undermine them⁶⁴ The effect is weirdly surreal, as the usual boundaries between genres blur in a play that swings between the celebration of a successful English king and the depiction of the subversiveness of his wife.

This is shown most clearly in a scene where Edward visits Elinor in her childbed, ‘lying in’ after the birth of his son. The stage directions require a special tent for the Queen on stage, large enough to hold several actors, so that there is a visual sense of an enclosed world, dominated by the figure of the Queen ‘discovered in her bed’. In a fascinating piece of theatrical spectacle, Edward and his male companions enter the stage and then ‘the Queen’s tent opens’ to discover a hitherto concealed place occupied only by women: Elinor and her female attendants, who present the child to his father. The relatively rare (and usually comic) dramatic depictions of ‘lying in’ in Elizabethan theatre tend to emphasise the female control of the ritual, and to joke about the emasculation of male visitors at these occasions. The effect of this ritual as theatrical spectacle gives the ceremony a double edge; offering the potential for a joke about emasculated men and powerful women while creating a visual arrangement not unlike that of a nativity scene. In this play for example, the curtains draw back to reveal the Queen ‘dandling’ the baby which she then presents to its father, the king who is, for Elizabethan Protestants, God’s representative as head of the Church of England. This is a complex dramatic moment, celebrating the birth of an English heir by reference to Christian iconography whilst teetering, in a display of luxury and comic, sinful womanhood, very close to travesty.⁶⁵ Elinor’s successful motherhood has done the nation a service, and as the mother of a future monarch she is blessed. But simultaneously she is comic, dandling the child in bed, talking too much, making outrageous demands, becoming simultaneously mad and dangerous in her most extreme request that all Englishmen should shave and all women have their right breasts cut off, something Bevington says is ‘intended to be a test of absolute royal supremacy over the personal lives of subjects’ which may be

essentially spectacular and theatrical, and always tragic or prescient of tragedy; “Il n’y a pas d’événements heureux, ce sont toujours des catastrophes” p.220.

⁶⁴ Both Bevington and Axton argue that these celebrations are presented within the context of a narrative that deals with the realities of Elizabethan national politics.

⁶⁵ Elinor will not yet have been ‘churched’ and so is still polluted following childbirth. Fleische certainly sees this moment as a ‘profane nativity’ but I would suggest that the scene is too complex to be merely that. See Fleische, *Iconography of the English History Play*, p. 92.

right but doesn't really account for the craziness of it.⁶⁶ An Elizabethan audience's knowledge that this prince was the future problem King Edward II might be expected to further colour their reading of what they see. Type and antitype are deployed in tension here, the queen seems to figure both: confusingly, but perhaps deliberately. There is a sense in which the oppositions combined in Elinor are a development of the kind of psychomachia of state addressed through the deployment of idealised motherhood in Legge's play. In Elinor's forwardness and pride, displayed alongside her affection for and loyalty to the king, and service to the nation, perhaps it is possible to see a figure which expresses the demands, compromises and conflicts inherent in the *realpolitik* which is the subject of much of the political content of the play, the struggle between the religious and political pressures of international negotiation and the need to consolidate a sense of national integrity at home.⁶⁷

The birth of Prince Edward seems to mark a point of transformation in the representation of the Queen as Peele turns to the ballad material to inform her subsequent role in the play. From this point on she is an incarnation of malevolence. Elinor's subversive Spanish pride is associated with maternity in the ballad that gives Peele so much of this material, and the connection is fully incorporated into the play. The latter half of the ballad involves an unhistorical incident concerning the Mayoress of London, who first appears after the birth of her own son, in a highly ceremonialised churching procession.⁶⁸ The ballad insists upon the poignancy of this; the Mayoress has waited for this child for ten years, producing it in her husband's term of office. Elinor is offended by what she perceives to be an affront to her own ritual pre-eminence, and takes revenge in a bizarre scene where she and her Spanish maid tie the Mayoress to a chair and force her to suckle an adder until she dies.

The incorporation of this incident into the play is bewildering; perhaps it attests to the contemporary popularity of the ballad; certainly it signals the dramatic transformation of the Queen into a kind of witch who deploys the snake, the traditional symbol of evil in women, to attack a good, and importantly, English wife and mother. Like Lady Macbeth, Elinor has repudiated maternity, transforming herself into the devil's agent. Her next appearance is as a kind of witch: heralded by thunder and lightning, and her possession by evil is so complete that when she denies (now speaking in prose) her part in the Mayoress's death — 'Gape earth and swallow me, and let my soul sinke down to Hell if I were Autor of that womens Tragedy' — the earth obeys and she sinks into it. Research for

⁶⁶ Bevington, p. 206.

⁶⁷ *Edward I*, Lines 1595-1673.

⁶⁸ This can be seen as a structural opposition to Elinor's lying in scene; here the Mayoress has been cleansed of all pollution.



this thesis, and those of many previous critics, has not tracked down the source of the odd story, that the Queen sank into the ground at Charing Cross and rose up again at Potters Hithe, which occurs in the ballad, but she does both in the play, arising a chastened woman, close to death, ready to make confession. Editors of the ballad agree that the story has much to do with anti-Spanish feeling, but are undecided as to its specific target. William Dickey, an early eighteenth century printer of the song is probably the writer of an apology that preceded it in his collection. He sees this as a song already old by the 1590s:

I look upon this song as a Satyr, written in the days of Queen *Mary* the First. ... As, the Invention of Coaches [Elinor in the Ballad insists upon coach travel, something replicated in the play by her entrance on the litter] which is recorded to have been in her time: and her jealousy of a woman who was brought to Bed; for Queen *Mary* never had a child, notwithstanding it had been given out in all Churches that she was big, and Publick Prayers made for her safe delivery. Nor can it be thought absurd that she should be called a *Spaniard* for she was the daughter to *Catherine* an *Infanta* of Spain and (after her Coronation) marry'd to *Philip* Prince of Spain. I do not know what particular Fact is meant by her usage of the Mayor of *London*'s wife; but I am apt to think it spoken of her cruelties in general: And her being swallowed up, seems to be a Threat of the Poet's that unless she amended, Vengeance would overtake her. A Plan for this Satyr being thus form'd, I am apt to think our poet looked back for a *Spanish* Queen that he might the better disguise his Satyr, and not lay himself so openly to Censure, as he would otherwise have been: And, probably, *Eleanor* was the first *Spanish* Princess whose Name he met with.⁶⁹

Dickey reads the ballad, as Axton and Bevington read the play, as figurative; the subversive machinations of an invented mad mother Queen function in both accounts to denote the unpredictability and danger of foreign alliance. However, the incident with the Mayoress may have even more specific meaning. The emblematic circumstances of the birth of her son in the year of his

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hook, p. 211, who cites this as appearing in the Harvard copy of the ballad. Hook notes that 'Chappell, in editing the Roxeburgh Collection, discards this explanation for the suggestion that the ballad results from popular opposition to the attempt by James I to marry Prince Henry to the Spanish Infanta', though this would make the ballad later than Peele's play, which seems unlikely. Bullen believes that the ballad stems from the strong anti-Spanish feeling at the time of the Armada. See Hook, p. 20.

father's office and the pageantry of the churching ceremony in which she first appears perhaps link her to a tightening of the nationalism of the play to focus upon London itself. The foreign Queen is shown attacking the nation literally at its very heart (and where the play's audience physically is) as her adders suck blood from the English breasts that should produce sustaining milk.⁷⁰ The spectre of such malevolence (however metaphorical) on the stage, so close to home, is potentially very disturbing, working like a morality play to demonstrate the power of evil in the midst of what is most familiar.⁷¹ Bevington argues this, suggesting that Peele deliberately localises the Queen's tyranny:

Peele overtly appeals not only to Londoners' fear of Catholic takeover, but to their insistence on citizens' prerogatives and a consequent restraint of monarchical authority. ... Most of all, the English monarchy must respect the privileges of the city of London. It is no coincidence that the haughty Elinor's chief antagonist is the Mayoress, wife of 'Sweet John Bearmber, Mayor of London.' Charitable towards the poor, beloved of the citizens, she is a victim of royal and foreign tyranny for which the heavens will require the humbling of Elinor.⁷²

Elinor has become a kind of grotesque anti-mother who debases and undermines all that maternity, in its positive aspect, can signify, making blood flow where there should be milk.⁷³ The grossness and

⁷⁰ There may be some historical basis for a representation of Elinor as an enemy of the city. Michael Prestwich suggests that court records demonstrate 'evidence of high handed and extortionate behaviour' particularly in relation to the city of London, and says that the King's minister Peckham 'wrote in very direct terms to Elinor, telling her that the King's harshness was attributed to her influence, and that her use of Jewish debts to acquire land amounted to usury and mortal sin. Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, p. 125.

⁷¹ It has been argued that Peele has close associations with the City and thus a particular interest in the relations between City, court and nation, especially through his father who was Clerk of Christ's Hospital, which was then administered by the City of London. See George Peele, *The Old Wife's Tale*, Ed. Charles Whitworth, New Mermaid edition, London, A and C Black, 1996, p. xiv.

⁷² David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1968, pp. 206-7.

⁷³ The association between this perverted abuse of maternity and Elinor's witch-like status is made clearer in the ballad where the murder of the mayoress is turned into a kind of satanic rite after protracted torture:

She made her wash, she made her stretch
She made her drudge away:

perversity of her own sexuality and its consequence, maternity, becomes clear in her final scene. Dying, she is revealed to the audience once more 'in childbed', again the centre of a female world but this time it is disrupted by the King and his brother who arrive disguised as friars to hear her confession, to be told that she slept with the brother before marrying the king, and that Princess Joan is the illegitimate daughter of a 'lusty friar'.⁷⁴ Thus the play ends in mourning for a Queen whose exhibition of deadly sin and its consequences operates as a warning of the dangers of foreign intrusion into the English monarchy. As the ballad reminds its audience: 'She was the first that brought this land / The deadly sinne of Pride', before warning its local audience:

Beware of Pride you London dames
 Both wives and maydens all,
 Beare this imprinted in your minde
 That pride will have a fall.⁷⁵

It is interesting that, throughout the play, Edward is not shown to reject the Queen, but rather to contain and to counter her excesses. Ultimately, it is God who chastises her, bringing about her humiliation before the citizens of Potter's Hithe. Edward's pragmatic, reasonable but firm approach to the dangers of 'Spanish pride' offers up a version of monarchy that is neither particularly aggressive

She made her nurse up children small,
 And labour night and day.

But this contented not the Queene,
 But shewed her more despight:
 She bownd this lady to a poste
 At twelve a clock at night:
 And as poore lady she stood bound
 The Queene in angrie mood,
 Did set two snakes unto her breasts
 That suckt away her blood.

Reproduced in Hook, p. 204.

⁷⁴ *Edward I*, line 2679: Elinor in childbed with her daughter Ione, and other ladies; this may, of course, be a printer's error.

⁷⁵ Hook, p. 211.

nor defensive, but which maintains the authority to contain the potential dangers represented by foreign, and Catholic, intervention.⁷⁶ As Bevington notes, ‘this portrait obviously bears little personal resemblance to Elizabeth, even less to the historical Edward I. It is London’s sentimentalised projection of a king created in her own image.’⁷⁷ It is also a reworking of English history in which the concept of royal motherhood is central both in celebrating the nation and in undermining it. Using opposing typologies of motherhood to tear through the main narrative at symbolically significant moments in the play, Peele offers a version of the past in which motherhood, both as metaphor and historical figure, supplies a schema by which the Elizabethan audiences were able to reappraise their own relation to recent, and not so recent, history.

⁷⁶ James I later displayed similar pragmatism in action when he permitted Middleton’s anti-Spanish satire, *A Game at Chess*, to play for a fortnight before closing it down. The example demonstrates both how pertinent, and how popular plays displaying such sentiment were from 1590, suggesting that the anxieties provoked by the uncertainties of Succession that characterised the end of Elizabeth’s reign were reformulated by James’s pro-Spanish policies. This is discussed in detail by Annabel Patterson in *Censorship and Interpretation: The conditions of Reading and Writing in Early Modern England*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, p. 17.

⁷⁷ Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 207

III.iv Motherhood as destruction and cure: Shakespeare's Queen Margaret

As is clear from the earlier study of *Richardus Tertius*, the Chronicles, which provided such useful source material for so many historical dramas of the 1590s, exhibited a tendency to embellish their source materials, notably by importing conventional narratives and ideas about motherhood in order to give their work clear emotional (and thus political) direction.⁷⁸ For Howard and Rackin, the Chronicle is essentially a masculine genre which takes a patriarchal view, representing the nation as repeatedly challenged by subversive women.⁷⁹ In their analysis such women often represent foreign threats, 'foreign worlds are typically characterized as women'.⁸⁰ And yet, as is suggested in the above discussion of Peele's play, such a narrative strategy can be shown to have a more complex intention in that the contradictory meanings embodied in the figures of women who are also mothers, or merely in the deployment of motherhood as metaphor, allow for an intricate and multifaceted telling of a constantly shifting story. As Lawrence Danson recognizes in his discussion of the First Tetralogy, 'the shape of history in the three parts of Henry VI is forever changing — an incessant forming and re-forming and betrayal of alliances and also curiously repetitive in its endless battles for power'.⁸¹ The mutable alliances, values and strategies in two of Shakespeare's stories of the Wars of the Roses (2 and 3 *Henry VI*) have their complexities and contradictions wonderfully mirrored in a narrative structure which operates through a depiction of the career of the dangerous, wholly admirable and despised figure of Queen Margaret. In this character, the ambivalence and contradiction, which were so schematically drawn by Peele, are reconfigured and integrated.

⁷⁸ For example, here is Hall relating the moment of separation between Queen Elizabeth and her son, who will be murdered by Richard III, and milking the incident as far as he possibly can: 'And therewith all sha saied to the child, fare well mine owne swete sonne, God send you good kepyng, let me once kisse you or you go, for God knoweth when we shal kisse together again & therewith she kissed hym & blessed hym, and turned her backe and wepte, goyng her waie, leaving the poore innocent chylde wepyng as faste as the mother.' Quoted in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, p. 261. Howard and Rackin take as a keynote Nashe's celebration of the history play, which, they say, 'imagines an audience of men inspired by the representation of a heroic, masculine world, to emulate the manly virtue of the forefathers.' Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 104.

⁷⁹ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 61.

⁸⁰ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 51.

⁸¹ Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics Series, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 92.

Hall's Chronicles describe the alarming manliness of Margaret's character which, set alongside the gentleness of her husband, has informed so much critical appreciation of the plays:

This woman excelled all other, as well as in beautie and favor, as in wit and pollicie, and was of stomack and corage, more like to a man, then a woman.⁸²

Such grudging admiration ('This manly woman, this courageous Quene ...') is always tempered in Hall's narrative by the implicit threat, thoroughly discussed and documented by Phyllis Rackin and later Howard and Rackin, that a woman who embodies so many manly qualities is seen by her very nature as subversive.⁸³

In Shakespeare's re-working of the Chronicles, which follows Hall's direction, the complexities inscribed in the figure of the mother-queen are most completely absorbed into the narrative, creating a dramatic discourse capable of articulating the contradictions and conflicts that are particular to civil wars. Margaret, the English royal wife and mother, uses all her power, albeit ineffectually in the end, to promote the interests of both her husband and child. Her courage and political daring are celebrated despite the cruelty that characterizes some of her efforts. It is possible to account for this apparently paradoxical representation by referring to Hall's assertion of both Margaret and her husband as victims of a kind of cruel fate. However, the mother's capacity to embody and indeed to figure contradiction also brings considerable narrative advantages to a play which engages with the complexities of civil war.⁸⁴

⁸² G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol III: Early English History Plays*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 102. See the introduction to *King Henry VI Part II*, edited by Ronald Knowles, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1999, p. 37, for a summary of discussion of this aspect of Margaret's dramatisation.

⁸³ Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, p. 106. Rackin, *Stages of History*, passim, Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, passim. In this, Margaret is, like Elinor in Peele's play, reminiscent of the unruly woman, or the manly woman, of the world-turned-upside-down that is the prequel to apocalypse in so many English dramatic narratives, especially Mystery plays, a quality noted in much twentieth-century criticism as Knowles asserts in his introduction.

⁸⁴ See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Source*, p. 103 where he quotes Hall: 'but most of all it should seme, that God with this matrimony was not content. For after this spousage the kynges frendes fell from hym, bothe in Englande and in Fraunce, the Lordes of his realme fell in division emongest themselves, the commons rebelled against their soverigne Lorde, and naturall Prince, felde wer foughten, many thousands slain, and this Quene

It is notable that in the Chronicles that provide the bases for Shakespeare's plays on Henry VI and Richard III, Queen Margaret is consistently described and understood to be the wife and potential mother of English kings. She is characterized with a complexity that is exactly reminiscent of the puzzling, inconsistent Elinor in Peele's play:

... the Quene ... was a woman of a greate witte, and yet of no greater witte, then of haute stomacke, desirous of glory, and covetous of honor, and of reason, policye, councaill, and other giftes and talentes of nature belonging to a man, full and flowynge ... but yet she had one point of a very woman: for often tyme, when she was vehement and fully bente in a matter, she was sodainly like a wethercocke, mutable and turning.⁸⁵

Like Elinor too, whether Margaret is presented as a force for good, or as the embodiment of evil, her wifehood and motherhood remain crucial to her construction. Whatever else these women may be in terms of their original nationality or their unbecoming masculinity, they are also the wives of English kings and the mothers of English princes, and because of this they are celebrated as much as, and often at the same time as, they are condemned.

Jean Howard draws attention to the recitations of male lineage that regularly decorate the narratives of Shakespeare's history plays. She sees these recitations as 'crucial in a feudal world in which legitimacy descends through the blood line.' Howard goes on to suggest that 'one way to disrupt the purity of these lines is through female sexual errancy.'⁸⁶ This is in keeping with her earlier argument, with Rackin, that 'masculine decline comes about only after female association'.⁸⁷ The problem is, of course, that female association is necessary to keep that male lineage going; perhaps it

sent home again, with as much misery and sorowe, as she was received with pompe and triumphe. Suche is worldly unstableness, and so wavering is false flattering fortune.' Knowles, however, reads Hall as showing 'a distinctly sceptical attitude towards any claim to discern the divine at work in history, for example in his remark concerning 'man's fantasies' rather than 'divine revelation'. Knowles, *King Henry VI Part II*, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on Thames, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1999, p. 53.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, p. 105. Margaret is here contrasted with the King who is described as one who 'studied onely for the health of his soule.' Hall's admiration, horror and anxiety find expression in the use of metaphors which, again, are familiar from Peele's *Queene*, as he laments that she was often 'perswaded, incensed and exhorted' by 'venemous serpents, and malicious Tygers', p. 106.

⁸⁶ See Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 130.

⁸⁷ Paraphrased by Knowles, *2 Henry VI*, p. 73.

is an acknowledgement of the contradictions inherent in bringing together these two problematics which contributes to the tensions and complexities colouring Margaret's characterization. Shakespeare offers a fairly straightforward representation of an adulteress in *2 Henry VI* in an uncomplicated narrative that places Margaret morally on the bad side, in a familiar reworking of the conventional type so well drawn upon by Peele in his play. Margaret boxes Henry's ears, as Peele's Elinor had boxed her Edward's ears, and Margaret is shown to attack and humiliate Eleanor of Gloucester, as Elinor attacked the Mayor's wife in *Edward I*.⁸⁸ Margaret's more interesting perversion of her potential maternity, clasping her dead lover's head to her bosom — 'here may his head lie on my throbbing breast' (4.4.19) — can be read as true to type, the bad woman whose sexual and maternal tendencies are misdirected in the service of her own desires.⁸⁹ And yet the characterisation of Margaret is also more complicated than mere typology. The passion between Suffolk and Margaret, and her pain at his death are depicted sympathetically, and her assertion of control in the English court is depicted not so much as the dangerous ambition of a dominant woman, but as the inevitable consequence of the masculine weakness that surrounds her. In Suffolk's fantasy of dying at her breast, he turns his lover into a comforting mother, which her later behaviour recalls:

Here could I breathe my soul into the air,
As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe
Dying with mother's dug between its lips (3.2.312-4)

Such a discomfiting confusion of roles serves to infantilise Suffolk rather than to vilify Margaret, though it does configure Margaret as potentially politically problematic simply because she contains the potential for such confusion.

Howard and Rackin see this scene as evidence of female sexuality as 'dangerous to men and the good order of the kingdom.'⁹⁰ But the scene can also be read as demonstrating, uncomfortably,

⁸⁸ The boxing of Henry's ears (which Howard and Rackin see as associated with the foreign-ness of the queen, something which could equally be applied to Peele's Spanish Elinor) occurs in 1.3.135-40. The humiliation of the Duchess of Gloucester is in Act 2, Scene 3.

⁸⁹ Adelman reads this as a lesson on the dangers of the mother's body, it 'suggests what happens to men who succumb to its allure.' If this is so, then it is contested by other meanings associated with the inadequacy of the men in the play, as I argue later.

⁹⁰ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 73.

how it is masculine weakness that is dangerous to the good order of the kingdom, and those who rule over it, including the queen, who, it could be argued, turned to Suffolk desperately seeking the kind of manliness and strength she could not discover in Henry.⁹¹ Similarly, Henry, when Gloucester is in grave danger, does not act upon his kingly authority to save his ally but reacts as an emasculated victim. He describes himself to Margaret as a grieving mother, in a scene discussed at length by Howard and Rackin, who conclude that the King here 'is the author of his own disempowerment.'⁹² Just as Suffolk turned himself into an infant before Margaret in the scene discussed above, Henry here describes his enfeeblement — imagining himself as a bereaved female farmyard beast — to his wife.⁹³ The presence of the hapless Margaret on the stage in both these exchanges is telling; repeatedly the addressee of such abjurations from masculine authority, her necessary response (and dramatic function) is to fill the gap.⁹⁴ The play is full of such retreats by men from proper masculine martial conduct, including the accusations of bastardy between Warwick and Suffolk which appear, in the story, to be plaintive attempts to place the responsibility for the conflict back there with the mother. In terms of the wider narrative, of course, the sense of the divided mother nation is thus deployed.

It is therefore difficult to agree with Howard and Rackin that 'Shakespeare's representation of Margaret makes her appear morally worse than she does in his sources.'⁹⁵ It seems to me that Shakespeare is attempting to dramatise the complexity of narrative, circumstance and character that he

⁹¹ See Margaret's articulation of her disappointment at her husband in comparison with Suffolk, who had wooed her on the King's behalf: 'I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours / Thou ran'st a-tilt in honour of my love / And stol'st away the ladies' hearts of France, / I thought King Henry had resembled thee / In courage, courtship and proportion; / But all his mind is bent to holiness' (1.3.50-55).

⁹² Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 71.

⁹³ There is an interesting problem of typology here. In describing himself with reference to maternal grief, Henry attempts to identify himself with the mother-nation whereas - as was clear in Bale's *Kyng Johan*, the king's role is to defend his country, not to take on her identity. There is a typological relation between king and nation which is breached here, revealing Henry's unkingliness as well as his unmanliness in the image he chooses. Something similar happens in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 3.2.4-26, where the king flings himself upon England's earth on his return from Ireland, to the consternation of his companions.

⁹⁴ The scene where Margaret clasps Suffolk's severed head to her breast is, in this reading, even more pathetic in that it is all she has left of the protector and support to whom she turned. The visual effect is that there is one body where there should be two, and it emphasises Margaret's isolation here, forced to take on a public and political role.

⁹⁵ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 72.

discovered in Hall, and that alongside recourse to the familiar dramatic tropes that I have earlier described, is a more subtle portrait of a woman who is, in fact, the product of a civil war; her behaviour a consequence, rather than a cause, of masculine failure. And alongside this use of the complicated and admirable woman that he found in Hall, Shakespeare's use of Margaret, here and especially in *3 Henry VI* offers an acknowledgement that any complete narrative of national conflict necessarily refers to and re-presents an archetypal narrative of diverted and divided maternity.

This discussion has shown that Hall's chronicle draws attention to the co-existence of Margaret's commendable talents and feminine weaknesses in such a way that she becomes both admirable and dangerous in equal measure. It should not be taken as a given that her historical reputation is necessarily that of an evil woman any more than it should be assumed that Shakespeare's plays necessarily portray her as one. As Cox and Rasmussen point out, her place in Early Modern historical narratives was certainly varied; 'Thomas Heywood, Shakespeare's contemporary ... identified [Margaret] as one of the nine female worthies of England, despite what he knew about her from Shakespeare's early history plays', though they disappointingly retreat from reading any of this complexity in Shakespeare's portrayal of her; 'in short, Margaret is a type and Bevington's "domineering female" identified her type as well as any label has.'⁹⁶ Perhaps this is not so surprising in an introduction to an edition of the play that contains an eight-page subsection on 'feminist criticism' in its introduction but makes no reference to either Phyllis Rackin's pioneering work, or her subsequent development of it with Jean Howard. Nevertheless, they are right to note that 'there is still, it appears, much to be said on behalf of Margaret.'⁹⁷ Rackin writes that women in the early histories, including Margaret, are defined as 'opponents and subverters of the historical and historiographical enterprise, in short, as anti-historians.'⁹⁸ However, in *3 Henry VI* Margaret is perhaps more complex, for in terms of the plot she is always in the service of a masculine, dynastic enterprise, accruing power to herself only for her husband and, especially, her son. It is argued here that she *is* anti-historical, but the meaning of the term differs a little from Rackin's usage. The meaning generated by Margaret's motherhood operates as a corollary to her characterisation, giving her an emblematic function at crucial moments in the narrative which works transhistorically and against the teleology of the play.

⁹⁶ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, pp. 141 and 142, quoting David Bevington in 'The Domineering Female in *1 Henry IV*', *Shakespeare Studies* 2, 1966 p. 51.

⁹⁷ *Henry VI Part 3*, edited by John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Thompson Learning, 2001, p. 148. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

⁹⁸ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 148.

Shakespeare follows Hall in emphasising the close relationship, personal and political, between Margaret and her son in *3 Henry VI*. The Prince and his mother are always together on stage, creating a visual statement about her support for him and his attachment to her.⁹⁹ Together they make their first entrance after Henry has, by his own admission, brought shame upon himself and his family by his ‘unnatural’ disinheriting of his son. In the ensuing scene, Margaret yet again is forced to take control of the scene after her husband refuses to do so:

Exeter:

Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her anger.

I’ll steal away.

King Henry:

Exeter, so will I.

Queen Margaret:

Nay, go not from me; I will follow thee.

King Henry:

Be patient, gentle Queen, and I will stay.

Queen Margaret:

Who can be patient in such extremes? (1.1..211-5)

Faced with a stageful of fleeing men, Margaret has no choice but to take control and to continue the condemnation of what Henry has done, setting up her pain and sacrifice as a mother against Henry’s lack of effort to support his child:

Ah, wretched man, would I had died a maid
 And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
 Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father.
 Has he deserved to lose his birthright thus?
 Hadst thou but loved him half as well as I,

⁹⁹ In Hall, as in Shakespeare’s *3 Henry VI*, Margaret is always described in the company of her son, ‘the Quene her selfe, and her sonne’ whether she is cruelly mocking York’s grief for his slaughtered child, or doughtily promoting the claims of her husband and son. See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, p. 178.

Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
 Or nourished him as I did with my blood,
 Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
 Rather than have made that savage Duke thine heir
 And disinherited thine only son. (1.1.216-225)

Margaret speaks of the bond of motherhood in terms of blood and pain, asserting a bond akin to the camaraderie of battle. In her emphasis upon blood and defence, and her contrast of her nourishing blood with Henry's bloodlessness, she makes motherhood her reason to fight and to risk herself, her talk of blood recalling the familiar symbol of the pelican, who traditionally nurses her chicks with blood drawn from her own pierced breast.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the scene her determination in the face of Henry's passivity enhances an image of her as the warrior mother, enraged because she must protect her young. This is reinforced by her son's polite refusal to remain with his ineffectual father while political times are tough:

King Edward:

Gentle son Edward, thou wilt stay with me?

Queen Margaret:

Ay, to be murdered by his enemies.

Prince Edward:

When I return with victory from the field

I'll see your grace; till then, I'll follow her. (1.1259-263)

Indeed, Margaret's assumption of warrior status is not only acknowledged as perfectly reasonable, but positively welcomed by her husband:

¹⁰⁰ Margaret is referring to the contemporary belief that a mother's milk was in fact her transformed blood – an idea which adds to the significance of her assertion of warrior-mother status here. Cox and Rasmussen are wrong, therefore, to suggest that the word 'blood' in line 222 is a compositor's error: Margaret's meaning is clear. See Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, pp. 51-2, and Cox and Rasmussen, footnote, p. 201. It is significant that when Lady Macbeth is discussing her husband's lack of masculine ambition she equates him with a lactating mother full of the 'milk of human kindness' in a kind of reversal of what Margaret is doing here.

Poor Queen, how love to me and to her son
 Hath made her break out into terms of rage.
 Revenged may she be on that hateful Duke,
 Whose haughty spirit, winged with desire,
 Will coast my crown and, like an empty eagle,
 Tire on the flesh of me and of my son. (1.1.264-9)

Henry willingly abdicates his paternal and kingly role of defender of both himself and his son here – yet again Margaret is forced to assume the dominant role, not because she is a tyrant, or unwomanly, but because she has no choice, as a wife and mother, but to fill the gap left by Henry’s abdication. Coppelia Kahn’s argument that in Shakespeare’s early history plays ‘liaisons with women are invariably disastrous because they subvert or destroy more valued alliances between men’ might, in this analysis, be mistaking the symptom for the cause. The warlike Margaret is the product of the breakdown of masculine relations, rather than its source.¹⁰¹

It is the next time that Margaret appears on stage — the infamous scene of the mocking of York — which has confirmed for many critics her reputation as an unnatural monster. Certainly the execution of York is a turning point in terms of Margaret’s fate in the play, as it is in Hall, but it is also a turning point in terms of the history of the nation, and Shakespeare uses Margaret’s maternity to reinforce this.¹⁰² The dramatic continuity of the story here makes perfect sense of Margaret’s behaviour; York is guilty of treason and she metes out to him the humiliation that traitors deserve:

Come, make him stand upon this molehill here
 That raught at mountains with outstretched arms,
 Yet parted but the shadow with his hand.
 What, was it you that would be England’s king?
 Was’t you that revelled in our Parliament
 And made a preachment of your high descent?
 Where are your mess of sons to back you now? (1.4.67-73)

¹⁰¹ Coppelia Kahn, ‘The Absent Mother in King Lear’, *King Lear, New Casebook Series*, ed. Kiernan Ryan, Macmillan 1993, p. 55.

¹⁰² Hall describes how York’s head was presented on a pole to the Queen ‘but many laughed then, that sore lamented after, as the Quene her selfe, and her sonne.’ Bullough, p. 178.

The visual effect is important to make sense of this scene as more complex than an indulgent depiction of feminine cruelty. Margaret is accompanied by her son, the Prince, and his silent presence attests to his dynastic claim, and thus to York's treason; she is the mother of York's victim. When Margaret mocks York by reference to his sons, and most cruelly with the blood of his youngest child, she is enacting revenge for the treasonous hurts that he has inflicted upon her son by denying the Prince his birthright. And yet her behaviour is excessive. She seems to answer to Hall's description of her disposition as admirably brave, but womanly in that it was 'mutable and turnyng', there is a sense that her nature takes her too far and she becomes cruel without restraint. This combination of furious mother and warrior is a terrifying spectacle as the mother takes the warrior way beyond the boundaries of political or martial protocol.¹⁰³ Margaret attacks York through his sons because her own child has been attacked, but her revenge becomes unbearably cruel.¹⁰⁴ It is a revenge all the more pathetic and terrible because the warrior York is reduced to weeping. The spectacle brings Margaret's ally Northumberland to tears, but she, with her son beside her, is mindful of the past and present political danger:

What, weeping-ripe my Lord Northumberland?
Think but upon the wrong he did us all,
And that will quickly dry thy melting tears. (I.4.172-5)

Despite her weeping audience Margaret follows the avenging Clifford and stabs York, with an ironic salute to her inept husband as she does so: 'And here's to right our gentle-hearted King!' (I.4.176) Margaret's frustration with 'gentle-hearted' men at a time when they should be made of stronger stuff is wryly acknowledged here.

¹⁰³ It is interesting that the images that are famously used to describe Margaret — the tigress (in Hall as well as Shakespeare) and the she-wolf — refer not only to the reputation of unrestrained ferocity that these beasts held, but also to their equally celebrated qualities as mothers and nurses in popular mythology. York's famous attack, 'O, tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide' says something specific about motherhood, and the terrifying lengths to which the mother might go to protect her own.

¹⁰⁴ As Adelman observes, Margaret's behaviour recalls Medea here. I would add that Medea's action is likewise complex, in that it is part of a pattern of revenge initiated by Jason, and that she excites a similar response of sympathy and revulsion. See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 3.

In terms of narrative, though, this eruption of cruelty serves to break through the story of the politics and fighting and intrigue to enforce an appalling focus upon the bloody actuality of the wars that the plays depict with such excitement. After the previous thrills of argument and battle the sudden drop in pace of this anguishingly slow scene creates a narrative jolt, a rupture in the sense of ‘event’ that was discussed earlier in this chapter. Margaret the signifier breaks through the story here, the meanings generated by her motherhood overarching the dramatic action even as she determines its course; an emblem of civil war and its implications: the decimation of dynasties, the killing of children, the breakdown of protocol and social and political boundaries. It is a shocking scene because Margaret forces the spectator to confront the implications of what it shows, beyond the bounds of the story, beyond the limits of a particular historical moment, and it is all the more upsetting for that.

The death of Prince Edward offers another such emblematic moment. It is not often noted that Margaret is constructed as a dutiful Queen to her husband and loving mother in this play, whatever she has been previously. Her frustrations with Henry do not seem to affect his respect for her, in fact he follows her lead, whether in taking up her suggestion that he confers a knighthood on their son (quick thinking by Margaret, seeking a gesture which will rally their disheartened troops) or leaving the battlefield with his family in the face of defeat.¹⁰⁵ Henry worries about her when she is in France, seeing her as ‘a poor soul’ whose grief would tame tigers rather than make her tigerish — ‘a woman to be pitied much’ (3.1.36-53). The Prince is protective of her, demanding that she is addressed as ‘Queen’ in France, always at her side.¹⁰⁶ Her dogged determination on behalf of her embattled family and the concern with which they recognise her efforts undercuts a straightforward understanding of her as simply ‘domineering’ or even subversive and offers a version of her as loyal and loved and determined — a glimpse of the qualities admired by Heywood, perhaps. That she has these qualities — whatever else she has been — makes her collapse at Edward’s death so pathetic, her plea for annihilation, ‘O kill me too!’, and her physical collapse making her character the locus of pity, but simultaneously drawing upon her figurative qualities to signify the end of the political struggle, the capitulation of the nation to the Yorkists.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret finds ways to rally her husband’s faltering troops more than once in this play. Her suggestion that her son is knighted follows from her observation that the soldiers will lose heart if they glimpse the King’s own misgivings in 2.2.56-58. She exhorts the troops before her final battle in a long speech which draws approval of her ‘valiant spirit’ from her son. See 5.4.1-38. Henry follows Margaret and Edward off the battlefield at the end of 2.5.

¹⁰⁶ See 3.3.78.

As Cox and Ramussen show, Margaret's lament over the body of her dead son likewise endows her with a value which transcends the story in which it is situated. Pointing out that 'the stage configuration is a *pietà*' they argue that:

Margaret's lament for her son is another example of Shakespeare's secularising stage tradition by using an element from the dramatic history of salvation for its emotional effect while displacing it literally from its narrative and moral context.¹⁰⁷

Shakespeare creates an emblematic moment which evokes dramatic and iconographical tradition, as Cox and Ramussen point out. In doing so, the meaning generated by this particular mother's grief creates not just the emotional effect that Cox and Ramussen discover. Margaret's plight demands a wider consideration not only of the personal implications of the political, but also of the implications of history and the structuring of the narratives which re-present it.

The eruption of motherhood with all its meanings into the teleological narrative of war forces a long view — a view of history which embraces what has been and what is to come, as the mother embodies both the causes and consequences of civil disruption. By incorporating narratives of motherhood and its meanings into the telling of an historical story Shakespeare creates a play that is able to present an anguished, complex analysis of the causes and consequences of civil war from the perspective of the State that suffers, rather than from that of kings and nobles. It would be wrong to assume that, because motherhood at its most protective is dangerous and violent and frightening, it is not also admirable.

Where mothers appear in history plays, therefore, their role, however integrated into the stories in which they are situated, is also to operate outside the plot to emblemise the wider significance of the activities in which they are embroiled. The meanings of the mother figure, determined by the traditions of English culture and coloured by an appropriation of classical tropes, allow her a significance which is manifest in emblematic dramatic 'events' where her meaning extends beyond the confines of the historical plot, pushing against chronology. The mother embodies a point of intersection between theatricality and chronicle narrative, mythology and ideology, past and future history, an emblem which turns narrative focus away from preoccupations of dynasty or monarchy and towards the nation.

¹⁰⁷ Cox and Ramussen, p. 146.

Chapter 4: The mother's body represented in drama

*...unreasonable creatures, and among them the most savage wild beasts, such as tigers and dragons, yea sea-monsters give suck to their young ones.*¹

4.i: The double meaning of the mother's body

In previous chapters this thesis has shown how the mother figure operates to signify spiritual, personal and political concerns in Elizabethan drama. It has also demonstrated how dramatised maternity can produce a particular kind of dramatic pleasure when it is associated with danger or violence. This chapter considers the material signifiers of maternity as motifs which emphasise the mother's difference from other female types because her body implies, and invites consideration of, the conditions of gestation and lactation. She thus evokes a response where moral, spiritual and political meanings, as described in previous chapters, are in tension with the pleasures and anxieties generated by the material — nurture, nursing and physical intimacy. It is this tension which is at the heart of this chapter, which traces a change in the dramatic treatment of the mother's body between the middle and the end of the sixteenth century. Whereas motherhood *as an idea* can be accommodated into a generalised patriarchal view of political and social relations, as a *practice* it is more problematic.

In terms of contemporary social practice, maternity is doubly exclusive. First, a heavily pregnant or lactating woman is withdrawn from the social and economic world, and thus her wifely role is compromised; secondly, gestation and lactation are exclusive to, and almost always managed by, women: they are areas where the father and husband has no function.² The practicalities and the social conventions associated with Elizabethan maternity thus demonstrate a potential tension between the practices of being a wife (in the sense of 'helpmeet') and those of being a mother, and as Puritan ideas about the family slid into mainstream Protestant ideology and practice, such tensions became increasingly visible in both dramatic and other discourses.

In order to explore those discourses and their implications for the drama, this chapter shifts from a consideration of the links between the representation of motherhood and the State

¹ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, London, 1626, p. 289.

² See the Introduction to Elaine Hobby, ed., *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered: Jane Sharp*, Women Writers in English 1350 - 1850 Series, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp xi - xiii, for a discussion of the rarity of the male-midwife, and confirmation of childbirth as an almost exclusively female experience.

towards a discussion of the ways in which the mother figure engages with social concerns. Comedy, especially, has a necessary interaction with the preoccupations and anxieties of its audience, and it is appropriate, therefore, to consider the representation of maternity in other popular contemporary discourses, in particular those which focus upon physiology and medical practice as it related to contemporary maternity, and those which reconsider and recast motherhood in relation to Protestant morality, social practice and religious concerns.

The first chapter of this thesis showed that the mothers who received most frequent attention before the Renaissance were the Virgin Mary and the mothers of the Innocents. Early plays emphasised the significance of Mary's maternity rather than her experience of it, as in the *Ludus Coventriae* Nativity play of the Doubting Midwife discussed in Chapter 1, where the dramatic structure generates tension by setting the mythic against the mundanities of everyday experience, and inviting the spectators to consider conflicting accounts of the truth emblematised by Mary's body. In such plays, the Virgin figures God's mercy and providence; her significance upon the stage is not what she does but what she means.³ Such an exclusive representation was associated with an iconographic tradition which depicted the nursing of Christ, so that the familiar icon of the *Madonna lactans* was in a sense double-edged: it celebrated both the power of the Father and the redundancy of the man.⁴

The traditional function of the image of the mother's breast in organising the emotional dynamic of dramatic narratives was well established by the sixteenth century. Conventionally, her capacity for nurture is cited at moments when her ability to fulfil that potential, or to benefit from it, are under threat. Mystery cycles included reference to the redundant breast and maternal body in the laments of bereaved mothers, for example in representations of the Massacre of the

³ The figure of Joseph is often excluded from, or silent upon, the stage in such representations, so that an exclusive focus upon the holy infant with his mother reminds an audience of the power of an omnipresent Father-God, whose significance is the ultimate subject of such representations. There are, for example, extant medieval pictures of Mary, accompanied by midwives and angels, entering the cave where the Birth will take place, while Joseph remains outside, holding the donkey. See R.T. Davies, *The Corpus Christi Plays of the Middle Ages*, p. 166.

⁴ The image was also read, as Naomi Yavneh points out, as an allegory of holy communion. See Naomi Yavneh, 'To Bare or Not To Bare: Sofonisba Anguissola's Nursing Madonna and the Womanly Art of Breastfeeding' in Naomi J. Miller, and Naomi Yavneh, eds., *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p. 70.

Innocents where the women's distress is typologically associated with the Virgin's grief at the Crucifixion:

Gon is all my good game,
 Me lytyll chylde lyth all lame
 That lullyd on me pappys.
 My fourty wekys gronynge
 Hath sent me sefne yere sorwyng.⁵

In the Classical plays an analogous trope was similarly common, as when, for example, Clytemnestra's appeal to the significance of her proffered breast fails to modify the murderous intentions of her vengeful son.⁶ In such instances, the potential power of the mother as signified by her breast is circumscribed by the assertion of a greater power which is operated through apparently fixed mechanisms such as, for example, law, justice, authority, and whose agents are inevitably male (Orestes, Herod, God). In early drama, then, the breast functions rhetorically as an image of pathos; it signifies the power of maternity at the moment when such power is in abeyance, when the mother is most humiliated, as Marina Warner suggests:

The suckling of Christ by his mother served as the supreme example of her exemplary lowliness. The Madonna of Humility, painted sitting on the ground, sometimes with bare feet, often nurses the child at her breast. Such a connection obviously depends upon social practices that made breast-feeding an act of humiliation. But the prejudices themselves were bound up with Christian teaching. Womankind had been especially punished for Eve's sins by the sufferings of childbearing in all its biological aspects, from menstruation to lactation.⁷

⁵ This example is from the Ludus Coventriae 'The Death of Herod', in Happe, *English Mystery Plays*, p. 336.

⁶ The absorption of Classical mother tropes into the Elizabethan canon was discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. For the example given here, see Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, Trans. Robert Fagles, London, Wildwood House, 1976. Clytemnestra pleads: 'Wait, my son - no respect for this, my child?/The breast you held, drowsing away the hours/Soft gums tugging the milk that made you grow?' (lines 883-5).

⁷ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Picador, 1995, pp. 201-2.

For all its potential as a symbol of emotional abundance and spiritual triumph, lactation paradoxically indicated humility; the humble mother's body figured as strangely at odds with the marvellous but involuntary processes by which it operates and from which maternity derives its meaning. Warner above asserts an important relationship between iconographic representation, social practice and Christian teaching. The obverse of the celebrated image of the Madonna was the punishment entailed in childbirth and lactation for the sins of Eve. Janet Adelman, reading this psychoanalytically, considers this familiar duality in relation to the early modern practice of putting children to nurse, suggesting that because it involved immediate separation from the mother, wetnursing generated an ambivalent response in the adult:

What we know of the actual conditions that shape infantine fantasy suggests ... that many would have experience a long period of infantile dependency, during which they were subject to pleasures and dangers especially associated with nursing and the maternal body.⁸

From this perspective, such practices generated a desire to control the processes of the maternal body, to render them safe by ensuring that they are controlled. And Gail Kern Paster has pointed out that, 'even within the hermetic enclosures of the womb, the birthing chamber, and the nursing dyad, patriarchy continued to deploy the disciplinary mechanisms of shame' in early modern culture, making it possible to 'manage the female bodiliness so visible in the symptomatology of pregnancy and lactation.'⁹

The operation of such 'management' as manifest in dramatic traditions continued to be resonant in post-reformation drama, appropriated from and as part of a developing Protestant discourse around the idea of family. The control Paster discusses is evident in the polemical promotion of a connection between the biological advantages of maternal nursing, and the importance of maternal breastfeeding as good Christian practice:

⁸ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 5.

⁹ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 215.

Many strong arguments there be to presse it upon the consciences of mothers, and to shew that (so farre as they are able) they are bound to give sucke to their owne children. Some are taken from the light of Gods word and some from the light of nature.¹⁰

This concern with the ‘natural’, biological, aspects of motherhood, and their relation to morality, is paralleled, in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, by an increasingly intense preoccupation with the control of women’s bodies. This is evident, for example, in the publication of books, written by men, about the management of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation, a new male intervention and appropriation of what had been traditionally an all-female event.¹¹ *The Byrth of Mankynde*, for example, appeared as a translation of a German text, Rösslin’s *De Partu Hominis*, by Richard Jonas. It was re-worked by Thomas Raynalde for publication in 1545, and ran to several editions in the next fifty years.¹² Maternity, in its physical aspects at least, became commercially exploitable, attesting to the interest it generated.

Raynalde’s text, and others like it, refer to breastfeeding as a potential area of conflict — or at least an issue of authority — between husband and wife:

I am of the opinion that it is for every Mother to nurse her own Child, because her milk which is nothing but the blood whitened, which nourished the child in the womb and of which the child was conceived, and formed, is fittest and more naturall to the Child, then the milk of a stranger, and by the womans nursing her child, she shall be wholly accounted his Mother, but in case the Mother be sick or weak; or hath no milk, or that her Husband will not let her nurse her Child, then it is necessary to look out a nurse, but most men doe know how hard it is to get a good one.¹³

¹⁰ W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, London 1622, p. 508.

¹¹ See Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, especially chapter 1, for a full discussion of the proliferation of obstetrical textbooks in the period.

¹² See J.W. Ballantyne, ‘The “Byrth of Mankynde” - its authors and editions’, in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire* Vol X Oct 1906, No. 4. Ballantyne lists editions updated in the years 1540, by Richard Jonas, then 1545 (Raynalde’s translation) which reappeared in 1552, 1560, 1565, 1598, 1604, 1613, 1626, 1634 and 1654.

¹³ Quoted by Ballantyne, p. 191. This concern was echoed by the translator of Guillemeau’s *The Happy Deliverie of Women*: ‘yet since they may be hindered by sickness; or for that they are too weake and tender, or else because their Husbands will not suffer them, therefore I say, it will be very necessary to seeke out

This problem was being increasingly addressed by Protestant teaching on the family and appears to address real changes in social practice.¹⁴ Anxieties became realised in printed texts at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when clerics like the Puritan William Gouge strove to promote breastfeeding as a practice in their congregations, stressing its advantages from both a practical and a spiritual point of view, and implying, in their energetic promotion of it, that there was considerable resistance among their congregations.¹⁵

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, mothers like Elizabeth Clinton were also writing to promote breastfeeding, attesting to the control that husbands had over maternal nursing. Clinton explained that she had decided not to breastfeed ‘... not for want of Will in myself, but partly I was over-ruled by another’s Authority, and partly deceived by some ill Counsel’.¹⁶ Even here, though, in a text inspired by the deaths of two of her own babies, she expresses a resigned recognition that the desires of the mother are inevitably circumscribed by those of a wife:

wives must use all the reasons they can by themselves
or others to persuade their husbands to let them perform

another Nurse: and every one knowes how hard a thing it is, to finde a good one’ (side note: ‘the difficulty of finding a good nurse’). Jacques Guillemeau, *Childbirth, or The Happie Delivery of Women, to which is added, a treatise of the diseases of infants and young children. Written in French and translated into English*, London, 1612, Book 3, Chapter 1, p. 10.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Badinter discusses the situation in sixteenth-century France. She cites the example of a woman married in 1532 who nursed her five children; her daughters made occasional use of wetnurses, and her granddaughters routinely did so. If this pattern mirrored English practices, as the exhortations in sermons and obstetric books seems to suggest, there was clearly radical change in a relatively short time. Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. Roger DeGaris, London, Souvenir Press, 1981, p.42.

¹⁵ Dorothy McLaren, ‘Fertility, Infant Mortality and Breastfeeding in the Seventeenth Century’, *Medical History* 22, 1978, pp. 378-396. Janet Adelman suggests that sending babies out to nurse was ‘sometimes tantamount to murder’ and though this assessment might be challenged because of its extremity, it does nevertheless seem true, from Elizabeth Clinton’s account, for example, that it could be a dangerous practice - for all parties when it involved the exploitation of the rural poor. See Dorothy McLaren, above.

¹⁶ *The Countess of Lincoln’s Nursery*, Oxford, 1662. (Harleian Misc. Vol 4., p. 25.) The quotation is from the Introduction, dedicated to Bridget, Countess of Lincoln, by Elizabeth Clinton who was the wife of the third Earl of Lincoln, and Bridget’s mother-in-law.

it: ... they may not make themselves accessory to their husbands fault by providing a nurse and sending the children away themselves: if their husbands will stand upon their authority, and be persuaded by no means to the contrary, they must be meere patients in suffering the child to be taken away.¹⁷

Certainly the decision whether or not to breastfeed was not left to mothers alone. Sir William Knollys wrote to his goddaughter Ann Fitton that he would not like it 'that you play the nurse, if you were my wife', adding that though 'it argueth great love', it 'breedeth much trouble to yourself.' Her father was moved to write likewise, 'I am sorry that you yourself will needs nurse her.' Unfortunately neither writer explained the reason for his opinions.¹⁸ Gouge affirms that, ultimately, patriarchal authority is what counts. Answering the question whether a wife should yield even to a wicked husband, he concludes that, 'yes, because in his office he is in Christ's stead.'¹⁹

Anxiety about the cultural significance of breastfeeding is evident too, in contemporary popular discourse. At a time when commentators (only half jokingly, according to Keith Thomas) still debated whether women were closer to beasts than to men, the significance of suckling was problematic, commendably fulfilling natural law (or God's will) at the same time as debasing the practitioner. The relationship between woman and beast was not merely analogous;

¹⁷ *The Countess of Lincoln's Nursery*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Quoted in Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 82. Patricia Crawford has suggested that reasons might vary according to social class, so that for the wealthier families reasons might include: 'the important factor of siring heirs to lands and businesses. Sending the child to a wet nurse freed the mother to become pregnant again ... Thus wealthy women could theoretically have a new pregnancy every year or so.' For the more general population she suggests: 'often husbands did not want the inconvenience of having small babies in the home ... In London, especially, there was also the problem of space. In many families, particularly those of merchants and other traders, women had an important role to play in running a household business so that it was cheaper for the husband to employ a wet nurse for his child than to find a replacement for his wife while she suckled.' See Patricia Crawford, 'The Sucking Child' in *Continuity and Change*, I, 1986, 23-54, pp. 83-4. See also Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914*, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1984, pp. 59-61 for a summary of earlier debates on early modern breastfeeding practice.

¹⁹ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 239.

both lactating women and nanny goats were used to suckle sick human adults, and a woman seeking to relieve engorged breasts might send for a puppy dog to take her milk. The language of childbirth was peppered with the imagery of the stalls; pregnant women were often likened to farrowing sows; the period of lying-in after childbirth was referred to as being 'in the straw'. Like the mess and pain of birth itself, the involuntary nature of lactation affirmed woman's ambiguous affinity with the natural world.²⁰ Despite his evident enthusiasm, William Gouge may not have been doing his cause much of a favour when as part of his impassioned sermon promoting maternal nursing he asserted that 'unreasonable creatures, and among them the most savage wild beasts, such as tigers and dragons, yea sea-monsters give suck to their young ones'.²¹ From this perspective nursing could either be construed as occupying a dangerous and uncivilised place where maternity was threatening and monstrous, or understood as evidence of God's benevolence through the operation of natural instinct.

IV.ii: Changes in emphasis on the mother's body in two plays of Patient Griselda

The idealisation of the lactating mother was refigured to operate as a moral type, informed by the preoccupations set out above, rather than as an inimitable signifier of spiritual truth. This section considers two plays which rework, very differently, the familiar story of Patient Griselda in the light of the tensions described above. In each play motherhood is both rhetorically and emblematically crucial in organising the emotional dynamic of the drama. The tale does not seem to have been dramatised in England before, though there are several poetic versions of the story, which comes from the last book of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. It tells of a humble girl who is chosen by a Marquis to be his wife and then subjected to cruelty and humiliation in order to test her constancy. He removes her children from her, telling her that they are to be killed; takes back the clothes that she has worn as his wife and makes her dress in her own peasant rags; and finally sends her home in disgrace to her father. He later recalls her to organise the celebration of his marriage to another woman, and at the height of the festivities reveals the new bride to be Griselda's daughter. Griselda is rewarded for her extraordinary endurance by her reinstatement as an exemplary wife and mother, to general celebration.

In all versions of the tale, the heroine's body is made emblematic of her changing status. In the *Decameron* she is stripped naked at her wedding, as her rags are exchanged for the fine clothes she will wear as a ruler's wife, and at her banishment the courtly clothes are once again

²⁰ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, London, Penguin, 1987, Chapter III, p. 92.

²¹ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 289.

removed, to be replaced by a shift for which Griselda pleads 'in exchange for my virginity', which, 'I brought here and cannot carry away' so that what she wears alludes not only to her material prosperity and sexual status, but also emblematises her virtue.²²

Versions of the story available to sixteenth-century readers are clear in their anxieties concerning its moral implications. In Boccaccio's version, the narrator refers to the husband's 'silly brutality' before even beginning his story.²³ In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's Clerk chooses to re-tell the tale as a parable and distances himself from a too literal appreciation of the narrative by emphasising the general moral point which he insists lies at the heart of his version:

This story is seyde, nat for that wyves shoulde
 Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
 For it were inportable though they woulde;
 But that for every wight, in his degree,
 Sholde be constant in adversitee
 As was Grisilde ...²⁴

Here, the cruelty described in the tale is contextualised by a moral framework devised and controlled by a storyteller whose authority is crucial in structuring the pleasures which the story might offer to its audience. As Cristelle L. Baskins has observed, such control operates through a sequence of patriarchal interventions. Male characters exert absolute control over the woman in the story, though they agonise over doing so; fictional narrators condemn the way she is abused but tell the story anyway; writers express concern that the cruelty detailed in their work should not be taken as a literal recommendation concerning the treatment of wives by their husbands, but nevertheless reproduce the tale.²⁵ There is thus a consistent awareness of tension between the pleasures and possibilities offered by this story and its ostensible function as moral edification.

²² The story is the final tale in *The Decameron*. I refer to the translation by Richard Aldington, Volume 2, London, Folio Society, 1957, p. 657.

²³ Aldington, p. 657.

²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, ed. A.C. Cawley, London, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978, p. 254.

²⁵ The implications of this kind of 'control' of the Griselda story are addressed in Cristelle L. Baskins, 'Griselda, or the Renaissance Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelor in Tuscan Cassone Painting', *Stanford Italian Review*, 1991, Vol. X.2, p. 159., where she refers to 'a contest of possession and clothing which parallels Griselda's own circulation between father and husband, her "author", and the agent of her

The tale was dramatised twice for audiences in Elizabethan England, first by a Protestant balladeer and polemicist, John Phillip, whose play was published in 1565, and then later by the commercial dramatists Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, performed in about 1599.²⁶ Both versions retain a focus upon the body of the heroine, but shift emphasis in their narratives from the virginal image of the bride stripped bare which is the emblematic focus of the earlier stories, to the body of Grissil (as she is called in both plays) the mother. The main crisis in both these versions of the tale is figured through conflict which is emblematised by the maternal body, in distressing scenes when Grissil, as a new, lactating mother, has her babies forcibly removed from her on the stage.

Dramatisation inevitably alters the dynamic of a narrative; it makes available the often disturbing and complicating pleasure of what an audience sees, which can have the potential to undermine a reading of the tale as morally edifying, as narrative and spectacle make competing demands upon their audience. In her discussion of pictorial representations of Griselda, Baskins alerts us to the dangers of theorising the story only as literary allegory, or of reading it as historical evidence, arguing that reproductions of the tale realised in painting, are immediately complicated by a tension between the dominant meanings of the story as narrative, and its effect when climactic moments from it are visually depicted.²⁷ 'Seeing' the girl's naked body as she is stripped in preparation for her transformation from maid to wife, or the woman's exposed breasts as she later pleads for the lives of her children, sets up a complex tension between titillation and moral meaning in which the woman's body becomes dominant in structuring the response of the

transformation.' In a footnote she cites S. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1989, 'for a penetrating discussion of the interrelated practices of textual "castigation" and "contamination" as conceived by fifteenth-century Italian humanists'.

²⁶ John Phillip, *The Commodity of patient and meeke Grissil*, ed. R.B. Mckerrow and W.W. Greg, London, Malone Society, 1909. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle and William Haughton, *Patient Grissil: A Comedy*, reprinted from the black letter edition of 1603, London, Shakespeare Society, 1841. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

²⁷ Baskins, p. 171 'despite their avowed allegiance to patriarchal values, Petrarch as well as other readers, reserved some doubt about the legibility of Griselda's nudity as an *exemplum virtutis*. It seems that the literary critics and the social historians, in their eagerness to claim either ennobling meaning or to find illustrations of social practice, reduce the powerfully conflicting investments of the textual and pictorial representations of Boccaccio's tale of Griselda.'

spectator.²⁸ Baskins' warning is important as a corrective when siting the text in terms of social preoccupations as Linda Woodbridge does:

the patient Grissil figure in literature was ... a male wish-fulfilment fantasy appropriate to historical periods when few living wives behaved like Patient Grissil. When women began swaggering the streets in male attire and weaponry, male authors provided male readers and playgoers with a comforting fantasy into which they could retreat.²⁹

To say that this story offers a kind of collective male wish-fulfilment, or conversely to suggest that it represents an ideology which promotes the control and restriction of women, while important both in its attention to the importance of fantasy and in its placing of comedy in the context of social change, is not really sufficient, partly because it implies a somewhat simplified response to the meanings which the visually realised body might offer. The comfort which a narrative assertion of control of femininity might offer is surely complicated by the conflicting meanings which are implicit in the condition of motherhood, including representational traditions which depend for their effect upon an acknowledgement of motherhood as always potentially tragic, but at the same time essential as a means to salvation.

John Phillip wrote his play during the second wave of Protestantism in England. It is a play written probably for schoolboys and is typical of 'youth plays' of the period in its appropriation of a morality structure which is adapted to support a Protestant homiletic argument. Such plays stress family responsibility for education (at school or in the home), and the value of that education for a righteous, satisfying and productive adulthood.³⁰ The moral framework of the

²⁸ For a discussion of the representation of the maternal body by Elizabethan boy actors, see Peter Stallybrass, 'Transvestism and the "body beneath": Speculating on the boy actor' in *Erotic Politics*, Ed. Susan Zimmerman, London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 64-83.

²⁹ Woodbridge, L., *Women and the English Renaissance*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1984, p. 212.

³⁰ Paul Whitfield White suggests that the popularity of these plays can be partly explained by the fact that 'half of England's population of about three million in the mid-sixteenth century was under the age of twenty ...', and that the plays function to 'encourage responsible Protestant elders to spurn idleness in youth and exhort them to pursue vocations profitable to the commonwealth, they share the basic assumption that education is above all else a religious undertaking, that its primary purpose is to engender piety and lead the way to salvation.' Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 112-3. Also see David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962, pp. 62-3 and 272.

play is made explicit in a preface which exhorts the audience to learn with Grissil 'in weale and woe the Lord our God to praise' explaining that this tale is to be read as a parable.³¹ Before the Reformation there had been a clerical tradition of reading the story of Griselda as an allegory which described the relationship between mankind and God with reference to the mediating figure of Mary, so that Phillip offers a Protestant appropriation of an older exegetical tradition for new polemical purposes.³² The heroine, in one of the many songs which separate episodes of the action, sings that, 'God to me hath given such charge/as in his lawe is seen at large', explaining clearly her function as an exemplum and inviting a moralising reading of the action to follow.³³

The heroine's story is emblematised as a series of paradigm states through which Grissil progresses to the play's triumphant resolution, each marked by a song underscoring the heroine's change in status from daughter to wife to mother to banishment. Songs are a conventional way of separating out narrative stages in this genre, but here, sung by a heroine who advertises herself as emblematic, they also serve to draw attention to her generic significance while paradoxically asserting a selfhood, a personal integrity, which individualises her and offers a complication of the typology which familiarly informs the moral play. This assertion of self as separate would be associated by the invited, sympathetic, private audience for whom it is most likely to have been written, with a Protestant emphasis upon individual spiritual and social responsibility and a concomitant promotion of the family unit as the place where an individual sense of duty to the common weal is stressed.³⁴

If Grissil functions as an uneasy combination of morality type and mimetic self, her husband, Gautier, is far more conventionally placed as a man led astray by vice, thereby freed from guilt by being recast as a victim. A conventional Vice figure called Politic Persuasion organises and

³¹ Phillip, A.ii, line 20

³² See J. Wimsatt, 'The Blessed Virgin and the Two Coronations of Griselda', *Mediaevalia* 6, 1980, pp. 187-207, for a discussion of the Griselda story as Christian allegory. Also, Francis Lee Utley, 'Five Genres in the Clerk's Tale', *Chaucer Review* 6, 1972, 198-228.

³³ Phillip, Bii, 239-40.

³⁴ David Bevington discusses this play as a 'children's court play', dating it between 1558 and 1569, Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, p. 62.

sets up the ensuing plot and tempts Gautier into his ill treatment of Grissil.³⁵ Thus the play becomes a kind of psychomachia, with the battle between good and evil fought over the material body of the heroine. Her physical condition first as maid (visually symbolised by her demure dress and the water pot she carries), then as mother, first pregnant, then lactating, emblematises both her virtue and her vulnerability, the visual signals offered by the clothes adding meaning to what we know about the body. The Vice, whose business it is to undermine the authority of Grissil's virtue, imagines her transformation from daughter to wife, from girl to mother, into a thing of physical repugnance:

The pretie foole is puft up, her belly is bigge,
I conjecture the trull will bringe forth some proper Pigge.³⁶

In the scene that follows this, Gautier's order to separate Grissil from her child constructs an idealised image of maternal nursing followed by one of violent enforced separation:

Thou knowest Grissil, my Ladie and wife,
With whom in Love and Feare I have led my life:
Farther, thou knowest my daughter, which shee doth nourish,
And with the mylke of her breastes foster and cherishe,
I will that make semblant, at my commaundiment,
With thy swerde in sonder, to devide that Innocent³⁷

Marriage and motherhood are, importantly, differentiated here; in the first two lines it is the relationship between Gautier and Grissil which is described, in the second two, Grissil and her daughter. The remaining lines refer to the separation that is to ensue. The commons, says Politick Persuasion, do not relish Gautier's heir being the child of a commoner. The Vice's temptation of the husband is thus centred upon the dual identity of Grissil as wife and mother — while at this

³⁵ See Bevington, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10, where he discusses plays which mix abstractions and concrete figures as 'hybrid moralities'. Such drama is discussed more fully by Sylvia D. Feldman, in *The Morality-Patterned Comedy of the Renaissance*, The Hague, Mouton, 1970.

³⁶ Phillip, 901-2

³⁷ Phillip, 1020-5

point in the play her status as wife is acceptable, that of mother is dangerous, and must be made safe.

In this play, Grissil the mother is represented both as idealising symbolically the powers of goodness which the Vice threatens to overthrow, and as embodying a threat which must be contained as part of the working out of the moral of the play. This is demonstrated in a tension between the requirements of duty and desire, configured as a conflict between the demands of wifedom and those of maternity. While it is always clear that maternal desire must be subordinated in order to achieve the important moral resolution of the play and to establish Grissil's exemplary status, her grief is crucial in figuring the psychomachia, articulating both the despair and the resistance to it, which are important to the organisation of a morality play. She acquiesces to Gautier's demands without question, before turning to the other women on stage (and perhaps in the audience) to appeal for support, not in changing her husband's intentions, but in sympathising with her state:

Ye matrons milde deplore my case, take fountaines to your eyes

Oh let your clamours penitrat the hawtie clouded skyes ... (Phillip, 2000-1)

Sacrifice, as the polemic I discussed earlier indicates, is inscribed in the Elizabethan Protestant idealisation of maternity in its relation to wifedom.³⁸ An ideal mother will give up her life for her child, but an ideal wife must subordinate her maternal feelings in deference to her husband's interests, and indeed in practice may have to do so, as Elizabeth Clinton makes clear. Megan Matchinske has shown that in recusant ideology, too, such submission is the ideal: the role of wife is paralleled with that of an obedient servant of God, going so far as to construct martyrdom in terms of wifely sacrifice, seeing this in the light of recusant appropriation of Protestant

³⁸ Though this linking of ideal wifedom and sacrifice might refer to a more generalised ideological shift. Writing on the Catholic martyr Margaret Clitherow, who died in 1586, Megan Matchinske discusses the catholic ideal of the 'domestic saint/martyr' for whom silence and separation become 'a *topos* of ideal female behaviour' in terms of the influence of Protestant ideology on recusant values. Clitherow's final act before being pressed to death was to send her husband her hat as a final gesture of her submission to him, which is interesting if linked to the ways in which costume is so crucial to the visual narrative of submission in Phillip's play. See Megan Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 55-67 and p. 86.

ideals.³⁹ In the dramatisation of such ideals in relation to Grissil's story there is a danger of a complicating clash between ideal maternity and ideal wifehood. Therefore to sustain the value of Grissil's wifely sacrifice, the moral and ethical implications of the removal of the babies from their mother's breast to apparent death is expressed not by Grissil but by the Nurse who accompanies her on the stage.

The version of the Nurse deployed here is familiar from Senecan drama, for example, where the character is often used to assert the voice of reason (informed by what is emotionally appropriate) against madness. The plot of Seneca's *Medea* is constructed as a series of debates between the protagonist and those who oppose her, including, first, a Nurse who, as Costa argues, 'has a bigger role than in Euripides so that she can play a more equal part in her verbal tussle with Medea.'⁴⁰ But there is a link, too, with her precedent in Roman Comedy, in her association with a natural, instinctive world where her role is comic. The Nurse in Phillip's play pleads for the children first by reference to Christian precepts, quoting the commandment against murder, followed by an appeal to what is 'natural' behaviour by reference to wild animals: tigers, lions and bears which instinctively protect and nurture their young. She even offers herself as a version of the foraging, protecting creature-mother which she has described:

I will fead and nourishe hir and take hir as mine owne
 These brestes shall bringe hir up these handes shall fynd hir food
 I will not cease but carefull be to fend hyr guiltles blood (Phillip, 1170-3)

The Nurse is able to plead for the child and to challenge Grissil's husband in a way that the exemplary heroine, bound to obey her husband, cannot do. She functions to reassert a relationship between mothering and 'natural' behaviour, and thus evokes sympathy for her mistress who must suppress instinct in the interests of duty. She contributes to a tightening of the moral argument, which is important for the allegorical significance of what is happening on stage, as she deflects acknowledgement of natural instincts associated with maternity away from Grissil who as a now silent presence emblematises the spiritual qualities of sacrifice.

The Nurse's speech has emotional power as an acknowledgement of the familiar version of the maternal instinct as something life-preserving, intrinsic and unbidden in the female creature,

³⁹ Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State*, pp. 64 and 67.

⁴⁰ See Costa, *Seneca*, p. 98, where he discusses the use of the nurse as a stock figure; and pp. 103-109 where he discusses her function in the *Medea* in particular.

but its dramatic effect is circumscribed by the fact that Phillip's audience is already aware that Gautier has in fact ensured his daughter's safety. Thus, there is always a sense in which the Nurse's plea is redundant. The relationship which she asserts between natural behaviour and human wisdom is appreciated by the audience in rather different terms from those in which she expresses it because the audience has access to Gautier's 'wisdom' and recognises that it necessarily places him in control of the natural state of affairs which she describes. What he has done is to provide his daughter with an alternative mother who, as he assures his companions, will undertake those activities of sustenance and protection (in a controlled and civilised environment) which the Nurse so eloquently describes.

In this scene the mother ideal is dismembered, rendered unthreatening. Phillip fragments notions about maternity and its meaning by creating three potential mother figures, each with a distinct dramatic and discursive purpose. He introduces a scene in which the audience witnesses the handing over of the child to her new guardian, whose enthusiastic reception of her, 'my hart revyves and skipes for joy' and concern for her physical well-being, 'Come on to give it foode' reassures the audience of the child's safety (1274 and 1291). This surrogate mother is evidently able to provide Grissil's child with the kind of environment and instruction which the Nurse, who is of inferior social status, could not, and so to fulfil that function of the mother which Grissil celebrated in an earlier lament for her own mother's death - 'my mother was ... my joy and best instructress' - as well as providing an audience with reassurance by her presence upon the stage (487).

This fragmentation of the mother into three separate female figures reinforces a notion of maternal care as the particular province of women who possess an innate and common knowledge of its processes, an idea which is reinforced by the heroine's desperate appeals to the women around her, on stage and beyond, for support in her distress. Splitting the mothering of his children into Wife, Nurse and Mother leaves Gautier in control (and able, ultimately, to vanquish the Vice), and leaves the dramatist able to keep tight rein upon the potentially destabilising stage presence of the complete mother whose multiplicity of meanings is always in danger of complicating the moral framework of the play. Grissil is left free to enact an emblematic role, allowing the audience to enjoy the moral satisfactions of her sacrifice which she signifies as a silent presence.

At the close of the scene, however, she bursts into a lament in which her lack of power and the pathos of her condition serve only to heighten the moral significance of her grief:

Oh God my God what rigor now, have subiects gaynst us bled
 Alas my woe increaseth much, how is my Lord abused,
 Nay rather how doth Nature urge, me meastfully to waile,
 To see how cruel destinie against me doth prevaile,
 My daughter reft from tender paps, alas my wofull paine
 And causleslie by Tyrants fearce, with bloodie sword thus slaine,
 Fare well swet childe thy mother now shall se thy face no more
 Help spoused Dames help Grissil now, hir fate with teares to plore
 Gush forth your Brinie streames let trickling teares abound
 The earth and fymament above fyll with your mournfull sownd
 My child alas in swadling clouts, bereft and slaine with sword.
 Lord help, Lord ayd, my wofull plight on me take some remord
 Albeit such dirfull hap hath chauncst, graunt pacience to my paine
 That I may seme this crosse of thine, with ioye for to sustaine. (1195-213) ⁴¹

The audience is drawn into collusion with the onlooking Vice through sharing the spectacle of this surrender and the consequent outpouring of grief, and experiences vicariously the pleasures of the power which is seen to be operating on the stage. Such pleasure and power are controlled and contextualised by the morality framework, however, which ensures that both husband and wife are understood as victims of a wider conflict between good and evil, orchestrated by the Vice.⁴² Both the select audience who would have seen this play, and the children acting, knew how they were supposed to interpret both the narrative and the pathos; it was wrong of the Vice to arrange for Grissil's torture, but it was right for her to submit to it. The pleasures offered by both the spectacle and rhetoric of tormented motherhood made safe are subsumed into a reading of the play as edification. The threat that maternity, with its visceral, emotional, overwhelming

⁴¹Megan Matchinske quotes a letter from Margaret Clitherow to her daughter in which she cites the sufferings of childbirth as analogies for the pains of physical illness and separation from family, thus leading to salvation. 'I wyll not feare the colde swet but wyll taketh them as throwes yn chyldbedde by whych our sowle ys broght out of a korrup bodye ynto felycyte.' Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State*, p. 84.

⁴² Despite this being a Protestant play, the tropes of the old Catholic religious drama clearly resonate here in the grief articulated by the mothers of the Innocents, likewise babes in swaddling clothes killed by a tyrant's sword.

aspects always in tension with its idealisation and potential as pleasure, might erupt to destroy what is right, is thwarted. Motherhood in this play serves to figure both threat and pathos; to deflect the threat, the concept of maternity is dismembered into controllable constituent parts. The audience does not see Grissil as a mother again until the end of the play, reinstated when her children are themselves old enough to be married and no longer have claims upon her body. As his mother is at last reinstated as an exemplary wife, Grissil's adult son places her physical maternity as a safe memory — her sacrifice can be safely celebrated and venerated:

Ah dear mother, in whose wombe I was nourished,
 And therein by devine essence, fortie weekes cherished,
 Hast thou suffred for mee, such anguishing tribulacion,
 God graunt I may requite the, with condinge veneration. (1963-6)

Phillip's play was written during a period of religious consolidation, when the autonomy of the individual began to be dramatised at the same moment when the family was reasserted as a Protestant ideal. As family relations are recoded, the conflicting demands of wifeness and maternity are expressed in the drama as a source of anxiety. Phillip's play can then be read as seeking to affirm a consolidating Protestant moral order to an audience which appreciates the point. Caught at the intersection between religious, ideological, dramaturgical and social transformation, the breastfeeding mother is potentially a site of destabilisation, emblematising anxieties which might be explained in part through the historical context of the play. Such a reading has more specific political implications if read as elite drama, perhaps offered at Court, certainly written for a sympathetic and informed audience. At a time when a young Protestant Queen was carefully using the ideological implications of motherhood to promote a sense of political stability after the uncertainties of the Marian years, a play which both celebrates the ideals implicit in the notion of maternity, but renders them safe and controlled, can be read as engaging with and affirming contemporary political preoccupations through its promotion of safe, fragmented motherhood, celebrated in the exemplary figure of Patient Grissil.⁴³

By the time Dekker, Chettle and Haughton collaborated to dramatised their version of the story, first performed in about 1599, the public theatre for which it was written had an established, paying audience for whom theatregoing constituted recreation rather than edification. Theirs is essentially a wife-taming play which celebrates the heroine's exemplary

⁴³ See my discussion of the Marian and Elizabethan appropriation of the image of the mother in Chapter 2.

submissive conduct (which is set against that of a domineering female Welsh relation) while suppressing the allegorical significance of its subject. Where Phillip offers the satisfaction of the working out of a moral tale, the Dekker version offers the pleasures of an exercise in control.⁴⁴

In this version, the husband, Gwalter, is a trickster; he admits to having previously wooed Grissil in disguise, and upon his first official meeting with her asks her to decide between himself and his two courtiers who is 'the properest man' in a parody of the tempting of Paris made grotesque by the imbalance of power between court and poor subject demonstrated on the stage.⁴⁵ Grissil, still emblematically clutching her filled pitcher, is here given a phoney power over her master, despite her clear subjection to him. Her inequality is demonstrated in terms not only of social class but of gender; Grissil is surrounded by male characters for most of the play; the Phillip play, by contrast, has an unusually large number of female roles.⁴⁶ Her subordination, so clearly demonstrated by her simple clothes, hints at the kind of spectacular pleasure with which the play seduces its audience: this is a cruel play where the paying audience finds itself deliciously and safely placed as voyeur.⁴⁷ The spectators become complicit, like Gwalter's male

⁴⁴ The fantasy of total control of wives by their husbands appears increasingly in popular literature as Protestant ideals spread. Valerie Wayne quotes Edmund Tilney as an example: 'The wise man may not be contented onely with his spouses virginitie, but by little and little must gently procure that he maye also steale away hir private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there may be made one onelye hart, which she will soone doe, if love raigne in hir.' Valerie Wayne, quoting from *The Flower of Friendship* (1568), 'Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs' in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 67.

⁴⁵ Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissil*, London, 1603, London, Shakespeare Society, 1841.

⁴⁶ See Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, p. 62, for a discussion of the dispersal of female roles in boys' plays.

⁴⁷ Viviana Comensoli reads this play more generously than I do here, discovering the portrayal of a real psychological struggle in the husband's behaviour. She acknowledges that this analysis cannot account for his excessive violence, however, which she sees as engaging with contemporary discourses: 'While the portrayal of Gwalter's excessive behaviour introduces a psychological dimension rooted in the tensions generated by the ideologies of gender and class, the psychological interest is eclipsed by the commonplace denunciation of violent husbands found in the conduct books and other discourses.' My own view is that the pleasures offered by the spectacle of Grissil's humiliation here undermine this kind of reading. See Viviana Comensoli, *'Household Business': Domestic Plays of Early Modern England*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 58.

companions who watch and occasionally join in with his game, when he expresses his plan to torture his wife in terms which hint at the sexual: 'Yet is my bosom burnt up with desires/To try my Grissil's patience'(2.2, p. 28). He anticipates with relish the exotic confusion of sensation that such a scheme will produce: 'My tongue shall jar, my heart be musical' (2.2, p. 28). The images of violent sexual manipulation which colour his plan — 'when that hand lifts up to strike/It shall fly open and embrace my love' (2.2, p.28) — are asserted as part of a general recommendation to the men watching the play: 'men men trie your wives/Love that abides sharp tempests, sweeteley thrives'(2.2, p.28).⁴⁸ His cruelty is reinforced visually when, as part of her humiliation, Grissil is forced to stoop to pick up the deliberately dropped glove of his companion, and then made to kneel before the same character to tie his shoelaces (2.2, p.30).

Something horrible has happened to the story of Grissil in the forty or so years since Phillip tapped into anxieties about the maternal to render it safe for Protestant family values in his moral tale. Without the morality framework which in Phillip's play allowed Grissil's suffering to be understood in relation to contemporary religious and social preoccupations, the story as developed by Dekker is one of relentless cruelty which is passively, though spiritedly, resisted. Kate McLuskie makes the point that Grissil's frequent assertions of her own personal integrity in the play, which counter her husband's demands, though she still obeys his orders, change the 'feel' of the testing scenes, so that rather than offering the satisfactions of the spectacle of maternal sacrifice, the play offers the pleasurable story of an individual 'who can flout the turns of fortune'.⁴⁹ I would add, though, that at the emotional climax of the play, part of the pleasure of the testing game for an audience is to see how far it is possible to inflict pain, or to resist, before something cracks. Gwalter swings dizzily from eulogising his tormented wife — 'Oh, strange! oh, admirable patience!/I fear when Grissil's bones sleep in her grave,/The world a second Grissil ne'er will have' (2.2, p. 30) — to accusing her of torturing him: 'And must thou, therefore, come to torture me?'(2.2, p. 31), something which is echoed in the dramatic structure

⁴⁸ Comensoli reads Gwalter as 'under profound emotional stress' here which explains why he 'turns Grissil into an object for the court's pleasure.' Comensoli, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 140. Comensoli notes that 'Grissil's rebellion clashes with the homiletic overtones of the testing' and sees this as exposing 'a principal cause of domestic strife, namely, the hierarchical structure of marriage and society which threaten the powerless.' The problem is that her powerlessness is made so attractive in this play, by dint of the pleasures offered by the spectacle of her submission. See Comensoli, 'Household Business', p. 60.

of the play, where the scenes of Grissil's humiliation are juxtaposed with comic episodes which feature a domineering Welsh widow and a henpecked Knight.

Questions concerning the potential pleasures offered by a performance of this text are especially important in the climactic fourth Act of the play, which begins unusually, with the Marquis and his companion carrying a child that they admit to having taken from Grissil while she slept. The visual appropriation of the baby is echoed in dialogue in which the husband seems to wish to eradicate Grissil's maternity entirely:

Marquis:

Furio, behold it well; to whom is't like?

Furio:

You: there's your nose and black eyebrows. (4.1, p.50)

Another courtier is asked his opinion; 'view this child; doth not his lips, his nose, his forehead,/And every other part, resemble mine?'(4.1, p. 50). Gwalter self-consciously dandles his infant, appropriating a conventionally maternal gesture: "A great Romaine Lord/Taught his yong sonne to hobby-horse/Then why should I think scorne to dandle mine? (4.1, p. 50).

The baby is at the centre of a contest, it seems, for a kind of affirmation of self: it looks like me, it comes from me, only I possess it. It is an affirmation which involves absolute denial of the mother, alongside a celebration of the qualities of the wife, whose patience is continually remarked upon by exchanges between her ever-watching husband and his companions which provide a continual commentary upon the extraordinary steadfastness of Grissil's patience. Gwalter's refusal to acknowledge Grissil as a mother — 'You are but nurse to them, they are not thine ...' (4.1, p. 50) — is repeatedly linked with an insistence upon her duty as his wife:

Marquis:

If they [the babies] could speak, what think you they would say?

Grissil:

That I in all things will your will obey.

Marquis:

Obey it then in silence. Shall I not

Bestow what is mine own as likes me best? (4.1, p. 51).

In instructing a courtier to steal the second baby, again the Marquis sets up a voyeuristic image of the wife/mother asleep and vulnerable, in language which expresses both tenderness and cruelty:

Her white hand is the pillow to those cares
Which I ungently lodge within her head. (4.1, p. 50)

The rhetorical construction of the mother here, the image of Grissil sleeping with her baby, offers an image of motherhood at its most peaceful at the very moment before it is to be disrupted by stage action. The sweetness of the image of the vulnerable sleeping girl adds a terrible poignancy to the ensuing violent scene in which she tries unsuccessfully to assert her motherhood and keep her children. The conflict between her desire for her babies and obedience to Gwalter at which the Marquis expresses delight — ‘sweet sound this discord makes’ (IVi, p. 54) — reaches its climax in a sequence where the separation of mother and children takes place. Grissil is first refused permission to hold her babes, then permission to feed them, and finally endures their removal from her and from the stage.

The bittersweet pleasures of this spectacle are derived once again from juxtaposing the image of the nursing mother with the violent intervention of the husband’s agents; the babies are passed between the father and his companions while she stands helpless on the stage. As the torture persists, Grissil literally overflows with grief as tears and milk pour from her:

... see heer’s a fountain
Which heaven into these Alabaster bowles,
Onstiled to nourish them: man theyle crie,
and blame thee that this ronnes so lavishly
[...]
I pray thee let them suck, I am most meet
To play their Nurse: theyle smile and say tis sweet,
Which streames from hence, if thou dost bear them hence
My angrie breasts will swell, and as mine eyes
Let fall salt drops, with these white Nectar teares,
They will be mixt: this sweet will then be brine,
Theyle crie, Ile chide and say the sinne is thine. (4.1, p. 59)

Here the involuntary nature of maternal love is signified not only by Grissil's tears, but by her breasts, so that milk and tears become related images which signify simultaneously the plenitude of the mother's body and her grief. This becomes more deeply inscribed in the image if we consider the contemporary association of milk and blood in both medical and moral texts. Milk is understood as blood which has been physiologically transformed, so that, in a sense, maternal sacrifice is always associated with a mother's willingness to nourish her child. The idea was so fully accepted that the transformation could apparently be experienced as physical sensation:

will she not blesse it [her child] every time it sucks on her breast, when she feels the blood come from her heart to nourish it?⁵⁰

Grissil describes herself emblematically in terms which, in keeping with the necessarily voyeuristic nature of the wife-taming play, take much of their effect from the sexual frisson generated by combining the spectacle of her grief with a rhetorical assertion of the material, brimming, maternal body, spoken by the character humiliated on her knees, surrounded by a stage full of men. The abjection of the mother figure induces both pleasure and guilt in the spectator, who is drawn into complicit pleasure at both sensations by the husband's asides: 'My cheeks do glow with shame to hear her speak./Should I not weep for joy my heart would break' (4.1, p. 55). Grissil's overflowing breasts and eyes, signifiers of maternal abundance and of nourishment, of passion, are both eroticised and transformed here into emblems of women's weakness. Grissil is returned to the condition of girlhood, sobbing and sexily submissive in the thrall of the men who dominate the stage, tested to the point where the mother is broken apart so that the girl is rediscovered.

In this play which engages with contemporary debates and jokes about other aspects of women's power (Gwenthian, Grissil's foil in the play, refers contemptuously to the heroine as a 'ninny pobbie foole'), the heroine's potential to be a mother is appropriated by her husband at every level (3.1, p. 202). His empowering 'knowledge' of women's instinctual behaviour facilitates cynical manipulation: 'She'll return ...', he assures his companions, after he has banished her from sight of her children, 'I know a tender mother cannot part/With such a patient soule, from such sweet soules' (4.1, p. 80). Grissil's battle to control her maternal desire culminates in physical collapse when her children are finally taken away, though she still asserts

⁵⁰ Dorothy Leigh, *The Mother's Blessing*, 14th edition, 1629. Ch 3, p.10.

obedience to her husband who is watching her, in disguise: 'Why should I grieve/To lose my children? no, no; I ought rather/Rejoice, because they are borne to their father' (4.2, p.64).

Dekker's play was written for a diverse, paying audience, whose political and social sympathies might vary. It was clearly popular.⁵¹ The play's fascination with the control of the maternal body, though, can be shown to have analogues in the vast increase in the number of publications which demonstrate an interest in controlling the maternal body, from the expanding availability of a range of obstetric manuals to the publication of conduct books which anatomised the duties of the mother within the family. The period between Phillip's play and Dekker's comedy also saw an increase in the legal penalties for female adultery.⁵² All this, allied with the developing debate, increasingly carried out through publication, concerning the practice of maternal breastfeeding, suggests an anxiety about the mother's body which is hard to explain simply by historicising the play. The development of Puritanism certainly accounts for closer attention to maternity and its responsibilities, and indeed may explain a more profound concern for the physical health of mothers and children, but does not really account for the fascination, in so many different cultural products, with the control of the mother's body and its processes.

Psychoanalytic theory offers a helpful framework here, in E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of what she describes as a twentieth-century predilection for 'foetal imagery and the post-modern fascination with reproductive technologies in cultural products' in film. Kaplan's model of analysis is, despite anachronism, helpful in her theory that such preoccupations might reveal an underlying anxiety:

in [the psychoanalytic] view, such representations would manifest increasing unconscious fear of the mother — indeed a pathological fixation on her displaced into an obsessive need to control and/or erase her very being, to take charge of the very functions that define her and have created individuals' unbearable dependence on her.⁵³

⁵¹ As Harry Keyishian puts it, 'in 1600 Henslowe paid out a substantial sum to stay its printing, an indication that its three theatrewise authors had turned out a commercially successful work on a sure-fire subject.' Harry Keyishian, 'Griselda on the Elizabethan Stage', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 16, 1977, p.254.

⁵² For a full discussion of the punishment of adultery in the period, see Keith Thomas, 'The Puritans and Adultery: The Act of 1650 Reconsidered', in Keith Thomas and Pennington, eds., *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 257-282.

⁵³ E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.68.

When Dekker *et al* wrote their play, Elizabeth was an old Queen with no direct heir, and England teetered fearfully on the brink of political instability. The woman who had presented herself as mother figure to the nation for half a century was the subject of an enduring veneration which had been carefully cultivated through skilful public relations, but also the focus of deep anxiety. Such anxiety found expression, it might be argued, in cultural productions. Gwalter's alternating veneration and torture of Grissil can be understood with reference to Melanie Klein's observation that idealisation is always a counterpoint to persecution, and the play can be read as expressive of tensions generated by the dangerous and always imminent possibility of the Queen's demise, as her 'body natural' threatened to fail the nation.⁵⁴ It is possible to argue, analogously, that while the natural, instinctive, desiring body of the mother visibly breaks down in the play, it is later recuperated as a safe idealisation in the emblematic finale of the triumphant closing scene when Grissil, tamed and no longer displaying the physical markers of maternity, is venerated as the reassuring embodiment of an enduring ideal.

IV.iii: The surrogate mother's body in *Romeo and Juliet*

In both plays discussed above the body of the mother becomes centrally emblematic in relation to issues of control and the construction of the post-Reformation family ideal. The mother remains virtuous despite the most pressing tests, and through her suffering she is able to reconcile the conflict between wifely duty and maternal love. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* however, such an ideal is only present by default.⁵⁵ In this play, there is no mother, only a wife and a nurse, and the absence of a unifying maternal presence is, in part, what turns the play to tragedy.

Romeo and Juliet, though ending tragically, makes use of conventional comic structures and characterisation; as Susan Snyder points out, the play is structured around a familiar comic impulse towards 'marriage and social regeneration' but 'the game turns into sacrifice'.⁵⁶ Snyder quotes Madeline Doran's observation that 'we are in the region where comedy and tragedy are cut from the same cloth', and notes that:

⁵⁴ Melanie Klein, 'A Study of Envy and Gratitude', in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell, London, Penguin, 1986.

⁵⁵ All quotations from the play will be taken from, W. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, New Penguin edition, ed. T.J.B. Spencer, London, Penguin, 1967.

⁵⁶ Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 58.

the very features that distinguish this subgenre from the more dominant fall-of-the-mighty strain move it closer to comedy: its sources are typically novelle ... its situations are private rather than public, its main motive force is love.⁵⁷

Shakespeare's immediate source for the play, Brooke's poem written in 1562, casts the story as a tale of regrettable filial irresponsibility:

a couple of unfortunate lovers, thralling themselves to dishonest desire, neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends, conferring their principall counsels with drunken gossypes and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instruments of in chastitie) attemptyng all adventures of peryll, for thatteynyng of their wished lust, usyng auriculer confession (the key of whoredome and treason) for furtherance of their purpose, abusyng the honorable name of lawefull marriage, the cloke of shame of stolne contracts, finallye, by all meanes of dishonest lyfe, hastyng to most unhappye deathe.⁵⁸

The poem shares, with other literary products of the period, including Phillip's *Grissil*, a concern with children's behaviour. Stories about deviant children were as popular in the 1560s as those celebrating virtuous behaviour, *Nice Wanton* being only one example of a rich vein of material which shares the thrust of Protestant polemic with Brooke's poem.

Nice Wanton is a moral play which firmly places the responsibility for unruly children upon inadequate mothering and demonstrates its awful consequences. Written at about the same time as Brooke's poem, the play mediates a Calvinist assertion of predestination and an emphasis upon the moral implications of good parenting which might enable a child to gain access to God's saving grace:

The Prudent Prince Soloman doth say,
He that spareth the rod, the child doth hate,
He would youth should be kept in awe alway
By correction in time at reasonable rate:

⁵⁷ Snyder, *The Comic Matrix*, p. 56. Snyder quotes Madeline Doran, *Endeavours of Art*, London, Wisconsin University Press, 1954, p. 137.

⁵⁸ G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol 1, p. 284.

To be taught to fear God, and their parents obey,
 To get learning and qualities, thereby to maintain
 An honest quiet life, correspondent alway
 To God's law and the king's, for it is certain,
 If children be nosled in idleness and ill,
 And brought up therein, it is hard to restrain,
 And draw them from natural wont evil,
 As here in this interlude ye shall see plain:
 By two children brought up wantonly in play,
 Whom the mother doth excuse, when she should chastise;
 The delight in dalliance and mischief alway,
 At last they end their lives in miserable wise.⁵⁹

The greatest danger here is that children are 'nosled'. The word is a corruption of 'Nursled', linking it to the abundance of the mother's breast in both its actual and metaphorical significance, and its implication is that there are certain kinds of motherly behaviour which are, albeit unintentionally, dangerous and corrupting. This is not entirely a Protestant idea; the humanist Vives was concerned about its consequences early in the sixteenth century:

Bodies are as much delights as weaknesses: and so mothers damn their children when they nurse them voluptuously. Love as you should, in such a way that love does not prevent steering the young away from vice and instilling them with fear by mild verberations, castigations, and tears so that the body and the understanding are made better, by the strictness of sobriety and food. ... The child the mother holds dearest is usually the worst of the lot.⁶⁰

The Oxford English dictionary shows that 'Nursled' in many of its variants 'had great vogue from about 1530 to 1650' meaning 'to train, educate, nurture in some opinion, habit.'⁶¹ However,

⁵⁹ *Nice Wanton*, ed. R. Dodsley and W.C. Hazlitt, *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, 4th Edition, London, 1876, The Prologue.

⁶⁰ Quoted by Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. Roger DeGaris, London, Souvenir Press, 1981, p. 33.

⁶¹ *OED*, p. 616.

the examples it gives suggest a more specific meaning associated with the condemnation of heresy in Protestant polemic. In 1553 the propagandist John Bale wrote of ‘people nusled up from their youth in calling upon dead men and yimages’ and in 1587 Holinshead, in his post-Reformation rewriting of English History wrote of those ‘nuzled in papistrie’.⁶² The 1573 Interlude *New Custom* has the Protestant figure Light of the Gospel accuse his enemy, Perverse Doctrine, of being ‘Born to all wickedness, and nusled in all evil.’⁶³ Always implicit in such use of the word, too, is its association with bestial activity, associated with maternal tenderness but also with sex and death.⁶⁴ And, of course, the word has clear and traditional links with the act of nursing, nuzzling at the breast.⁶⁵ I have explored these meanings at some length because they indicate the complexities of the idea of nursing in this period; its implications are at once sensual, emotional, religious and political; they signal both comfort and danger. Without the modifying possibilities offered by that other aspect of motherhood which is demonstrated as a duty to civilise and socialise the child, it becomes an unstable and worryingly un-Protestant concept.

A moral play like *Nice Wanton*, with a Calvinist agenda, demonstrates that bad mothering is caused not necessarily by parental viciousness but by a lack of enlightenment. The errant mother in the play is utterly bewildered by the causes and effects of her children’s behaviour:

My children or I be cursed, I think;
 They be complained on, wherever they go,
 That for their pleasure they might drink.
 Nay, by this the poor souls be come from school weary;

⁶² OED, p. 616. There are many examples of this use in Reformation and post-Reformation propaganda. For example, in 1545, ‘Thus for greasy lukers sake the greasy canonistes nosel the people in idolatry’.

⁶³ Anonymous, ‘New Custom’, in *A Selection of Old English Plays Originally Published by Robert Dodsley in the Year 1744*, 4th edn., London, Reeves and Turner, 1876, p. 44.

⁶⁴ OED, p. 615. Nashe writes for example of ‘The Dogge nussling his nose under the necke of the Deare’ in 1594, and Shakespeare deploys the word in a glorious and complex image in *Venus and Adonis*: ‘And nousling in his flanke the loving swine/Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groine’ (1115).

⁶⁵ There are, again so many examples of this that details of such usage are unnecessary. A nice figurative and sexy use of the word in this sense comes in the Prologue to Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1602), where a character is ‘nuzzled twixt the breastes of happiness.’

I will go get them meat to make them merry.⁶⁶

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nurse, whose motives, like those of the mother quoted above, are clearly well-meaning and loving, plays a determining part in facilitating the tragic outcome of the story. The play can be read as demonstrating a collapse of maternal authority. If this is so, it is because maternity itself has been turned upside-down in a story where destabilising maternal desire is separated off from, and more privileged than, the corrective and civilising effects of wifely duty. As an embodiment of dangerous destabilisation in this play, the Nurse's function is paramount. The comic Nurse figure is a dramatic character with clear classical antecedents in Greek and Roman comedy, mediated through later Italian novelle to merge with the unruly woman figure such as Mrs Noah, familiar from popular Catholic religious drama.⁶⁷ Susan Snyder suggests that the figure recalls 'comedy's ancient roots in fertility rites' in her conventional association with female sexuality and bodily excess.⁶⁸ Her links with earlier unruly female figures in drama links her with the medieval notion of the world-turned-upside-down where women have power over men, and servants control their masters, connecting further with Bakhtin's description of carnival and the importance of the grotesque body in figuring and containing subversion. The grotesqueries of the maternal body, its bestial qualities, are celebrated in the Nurse figure in drama as comic because they can be separated off from other, more serious, aspects of the maternal paradigm.

In the play, the Nurse's own iteration of her function confirms this link with the grotesque. She refers to her breast as 'the dug', a term only ever used with reference to lactation, and then most commonly in association with beasts.⁶⁹ Attention is drawn repeatedly to her

⁶⁶ R. Dodsley, and W.C. Hazlitt, eds., *A Selection of Old English Plays*, 4th edition, London, Reeves and Turner, 1876, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Snyder, *The Comic Matrix*. Roman comedy thus offers a different model to the Senecan figure discussed in relation to Phillip's play.

⁶⁸ Snyder, *The Comic Matrix*, p. 64.

⁶⁹ See J. Barry Webb, *Shakespeare's Erotic Word Usage*, Hastings, Cornwallis Press, 1989, p. 36, where he describes 'dug' as primarily referring to animals. Obstetric texts on wet-nursing stress the importance of appropriate physical qualities when selecting that elusive creature, the ideal nurse. Guillemeau stresses the value of assessing her material characteristics. Her birth and parentage must be discovered, her person and behaviour observed, her milk and children inspected for health. Redheads are considered risky because of a traditional link with lascivious behaviour. The breasts, especially, must be closely examined; nipples 'ought to be somewhat eminent and with a ruddie colour like a strawberrie.' The choice is entirely in terms of her

material body, usually with a bawdy association which confirms the grotesque, subversive aspect which is always implicated in her stage presence: 'Now afore God, I am so vexed that every part about me quivers (1.4.158). More delicately, the intimacy of the language in which her relationship with Juliet is constructed affirms an instinctive, natural basis for affection (What, lamb! What Ladybird! etc.) which is enhanced by her memories of physical bonding with her charge: 'Thou was the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed' (1.3.60). Her detailed account of Juliet's weaning reiterates this closeness while at the same time disclosing its limitations; her coarse amusement at the memory of the thwarted child's frustration at the wormwood trick is ominous, its significance perhaps underlined by the familiar quality of that herb as an emblem associated with grief and bitterness.

As in Phillip's moral play, motherhood is divided into constituent and conflicting parts in this play, but this time not in an organised way from a moral point of view. It is the very structures of the social world of the play which creates a gap between the wifely concerns of Lady Capulet, whose social and political duty is to facilitate her husband's dynastic ambitions, and the Nurse's emotional and physical relationship with Juliet which recalls the maternal intimacies which so worried Vives. The division of motherhood is indicated in Lady Capulet's difficulty in recalling her daughter's birthday, something the Nurse knows well and recalls through a train of affectionate and personal memories which establish a history to her relationship with Juliet which is missing from that between Juliet and her mother.⁷⁰ As Gail Kern Paster says, Lady Capulet becomes 'a more or less secondary effect of patriarchal rule once her womb is vacated and responsibility for her baby's survival given over to a servant'.⁷¹ Sasha Roberts sees this fragmentation of the family in the play as a engagement with contemporary

bodily potential. For example: 'Now in choosing a Nurse there is foure things observable ... First, concerning her parentage, she must come of good kindred, and honest parentage, that is not stained with any vice, for often times we see that although the Father and Mother be healthy and strong, and ready witted, yet oftentimes the children are weak and sickly, or else fools. ... Touching her person, for her Age, she should be at her full growth, about 22 yeare of Age, and she will continue good until she be forty years.' Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix*, p. 65.

⁷⁰ Gail Kern Paster rightly describes how the nursing relationship 'calls a quintet of actors into being: the two "blood" parents, the two surrogate "milk" parents of nurse and husband, and the infant girl in their care.' Paster shows how in this scene the Nurse's story about Juliet's fall excludes Lady Capulet to the extent that her role is 'distinctly diminished and occluded.' Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 221.

⁷¹ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 225.

social anxieties about the collapse of family structures, and Rachel Trubowitz writes of contemporary 'cautionary tales about wet-nurses that link non-breast milk with social instability.'⁷² Certainly maternal estrangement through sending children to nurse was a staple tenet of the argument for maternal nursing in the period.⁷³ *Childbirth, or The Happie Deliverie of Women* warns that:

though it were fit, that every mother should nurse her owne child: because her milk ... will bee alwaies more naturall and familiar unto him, than that of a stranger: and also by nursing him her selfe, *she shall be wholly accounted his mother* [my italics].⁷⁴

Maternal authority is always severely compromised in *Romeo and Juliet*; first because motherhood is always figured here through two characters — no one woman can be *wholly* accounted Juliet's mother — as a division between the impulses of wifely duty and maternal desire, and secondly, because maternal authority is always in fact a version of patriarchal authority. Lady Capulet's wifely function is to re-articulate her husband's dynastic concerns to marry his daughter to the right man, in a private and romantic language designed to suit them to her personal aspirations for her daughter, and to her daughter's emotional needs. Roberts shows how interpretations of the mother/daughter relationship offer a variety of possibilities, from the vilification of the mother as uncaring and absorbed in the patriarchal concerns of her husband, to recovering her as another victim of those concerns. In the latter analysis, she is unable to express her maternal anguish at the circumstances in which she is unwillingly complicit, so she is made, in performance, to demonstrate it through movement and gesture.⁷⁵ Either interpretation, though, stresses her ultimate inadequacy; her lack of engagement with the details of Juliet's childhood

⁷² Rachel Trubowitz, 'Nursing Mothers and Others' in Naomi J. Miller, and Naomi Yavneh, eds., *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p. 83.

⁷³ Sasha Roberts, p. 25. Anxieties about the effect of estranging a mother from her children are raised by Elizabeth Clinton in her tract promoting the values of maternal nursing: 'This she may feign to do upon a Covetous Composition, but she frets at it in her Mind, if she has any Natural Affection', op. cit. 31. Badinter also discusses the possible effects of wet-nursing on the estrangement of mothers from their children. Badinter, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Guillemeau, *Childbirth*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ Sasha Roberts, *William Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, Plymouth, Northcote House, in association with the British Council, 1998, p. 29.

and the continuous assertion of the powerful emotional bond between the girl and her wet nurse upon the stage suggest a lack of maternal resource in the real mother — these details undermine any attempt to read her silence as that of a wifely sacrifice of her maternal desires. Grissil, in both plays, articulated her lack of access to her children as a physical and emotional loss; Lady Capulet never speaks of it, so that her inadequacy is enigmatic.

A nurse's function is physiological, her body is her *raison d'être*, a substitute for the mother's body but, crucially, not the mother. As a substitute she is never quite adequate. Partly this is because she is of a different social class from that of the child with whom she is so intimate. Much of her comic value was, by tradition, based upon that difference, so that not only the plot but the very conventions which inform her construction bar the Nurse from any serious maternal function. The limitations of her class are evident in Act I Scene 3, where her comic interventions are at odds with the seriousness of the prospect of marriage being discussed. The scene is interesting because it is set up in such a way that Juliet at first appears to be securely supported by both mother figures in the safety of a domestic, private space where women can talk freely about love and sex. Nevertheless, the gaps are evident. The Nurse's poignant reference to her dead daughter, Susan, offers a brief, pathetic glimpse of a social world where poverty and grief are associated with the demands of those who are socially and economically more privileged. The context of the bawdy joke of the child falling on her back involves the Nurse recalling a world away from that of the court in which she is presently situated; a memory of lower class family life which includes a surrogate daughter for whom there is much affection (they nickname her 'Jule') but in whom the step parents are allowed no investment other than emotional interest, which in the play becomes itself problematic. The Nurse can only joke about Juliet's planned future; her status permits her no power to determine its outcome.

The fact that she *does* become involved in Juliet's plans promotes disaster: her overstepping of her designated role is integral to the chain of events which shift the narrative from comedy to tragedy. Her efforts to bring Romeo and her charge together are temporarily effective but also pathetically comic — in Act 2 Scene 4, for example, she is clearly out of place in the sparky public world of Romeo and his gallant friends. The scene where Mercutio teases her is both funny and pitiable as she is outwitted and ridiculed by the young men, unable to speak of Juliet except in terms of inappropriate intimacy — 'Well, sir, my mistress is the sweetest lady. Lord, lord! When t'was a little prating thing' — and only able to demonstrate her frustration at the treatment she gets from the gallants by reference back to her body grotesquely 'quivering' with rage. Julia Kristeva suggests that comedy in this play is always compromised: 'are not all

comic scenes dominated by fury rather than joyous laughter?’ Her analysis explains why the comic figure here is always somehow out of place; it is at that disjunction between two genres of comedy and tragedy that the pathos of the story becomes especially poignant.⁷⁶

The Nurse’s limitations are recognised even by Juliet. When she is forced to agree to marry Paris, it is to her real mother that Juliet first appeals (‘O sweet my mother cast me not away’ (3.5.198)), only to turn to the Nurse when her mother has rejected her plea.⁷⁷ Certainly at this point in the play the Nurse is all that Juliet has, and her final inadequacy at this desperate moment provokes an outraged response — ‘Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend’ (3.5.235)— which draws attention to the subversiveness and grotesquerie of the figure, whose powerlessness and limited understanding becomes a kind of unintentional cruelty as the play turns inevitably towards a tragic closure.⁷⁸

As Protestant ideals are absorbed into mainstream culture and practice, then, the mother figure acquires a new social meaning in plays where the family and its configuration and control is a central concern. Traditions associated with the representation of motherhood are adapted to articulate new concerns in the change from a theatre, both popular and elite concerned with religious and moral edification which predominated at the beginning of the Elizabethan era, to a commodified entertainment which generates pleasures through its engagement with contemporary social and political concerns. Dramatists are able to exploit the problematics of maternity already being explored in other contemporary discourses; to make use of the tensions which developments the idealisation of the roles of wife and mother generate to create new narratives. The mother figure offers an opportunity to take risks with the fusion of genres as Shakespeare does in *Romeo and Juliet*, or the sexualising of spectacle in order to elicit a complex emotional reaction from an audience, which is pleasurable without necessarily being linked to the satisfactions of the working out of a moral dilemma. It is the bittersweet pleasures of the

⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, ‘Romeo and Juliet: Love-hatred in the couple’ in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. J. Drakakis, London, Longman, 1992, p. 301.

⁷⁷ Rachel Trubowitz argues that Juliet’s estrangement from her family is compounded by what her father sees as ‘the likeness she bears to the bawdy Nurse – who suckled her.’ Rachel Trubowitz, ‘Nursing Mothers and Others’ in Miller and Yavneh, *Maternal Measures*, p. 84.

⁷⁸ A psychoanalytic reading of this scene might read this as a replay, for Juliet, of what Adelman calls ‘two psychic sites of intense maternal deprivation’, in that she is rejected for the second time by both the mother who bore her but gave her away to be nursed and the nurse who weaned her with wormwood. See Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 5.

irreconcilability of the ideals which inform notions of the complete mother, the potential for tragedy at the heart of maternity, which create the pleasures engendered by the representation of maternity in the plays discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Motherhood and the household : domestic tragedy and city comedy

The picture of a crime presented in the right stage conditions is something infinitely more dangerous to the mind than if the same crime were committed in life.¹

V.i: The household in context

From the material mother's body which was the subject of the previous chapter, this chapter moves to a consideration of the spaces she occupies. It focuses upon two categories of plays that situate themselves not in some imagined other place, and do not adapt existing literary narratives, but emerge out of an engagement with contemporary society, and, often represent real events within it.

Domestic tragedies and city comedies emerge in the period between 1590 and the second decade of the seventeenth century, arising from the consequences of specific social and political circumstances. The 1590s, especially, were a period of social and economic stress, when a variety of adversities including poor harvests and related social and political unrest provoked a series of legislative measures that mark the period as particularly troubled.² There is a consensus between historians that the evidence offered by both contemporary discourses and the statistics gleaned by historical analysis, indicate that disorder was greatly feared.³ The increasing numbers of dispossessed poor, combined with the bad harvests of the 1590s, provoked a sharp rise in the population of the cities, especially London, as people looked for work, leading to increased anxiety about the maintenance of order.⁴ The Poor Laws of 1576 represented an early attempt to engage with the variety of social problems that arose out of this, but in terms which tended to

¹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti, London, Calder Productions, 2001 (reprint), p. 65.

² See J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760*, London, Edward Arnold, 1987. Sharpe discusses many of the contributory factors to the problems of the period, including plague (18,000 died in the inner parishes of London in 1593), crop failures in the 1590s, political and social symptoms of unrest such as the Essex Rebellion of 1601. He charts attempts to control what was perceived as increasing social instability in the Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601 and more particular legislation such as the Bigamy Act of 1604. Legislation concerned with the regulation of personal conduct, also a feature of the period, will be discussed later in the chapter.

³ J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, pp. 149-151, and Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1982, pp. 121-48.

⁴ Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, pp. 149-151.

view disorder as associated with the conduct of the individual rather than in terms of social need. Legislation was therefore largely concerned with a perceived need to regulate personal behaviour.⁵ This perception, as Joan R. Kent has shown, was influenced both by moral anxieties expressed by the more Puritan members of Parliament, but also by practical considerations:

A study of the statutes and surviving draft bills, debates on them, and other comments on personal regulation by members of the Lower House would suggest ... that a 'moral reformation' was not the only object of the legislation; and that social, economic and political considerations were equally, and perhaps more, important than religious and moral considerations among those who supported the bills. Members often seem to have been less concerned about personal morality than about the implications for society of the conduct of the individual. There is some evidence that moral reform, in itself, was regarded by many members as insufficient ground for penal laws regulating men's conduct.⁶

Nevertheless, Protestant emphasis upon individual responsibility to uphold 'God's Law and the King's', and the tendency of this idea to be associated with the regulation of family, inevitably placed an emphasis upon the consequences of personal conduct.⁷ This included the need for the heads of families to set a clear moral example for, and to take responsibility for, the wives, servants and children in their care.⁸ Such dominant ideas engaged with what Keith Thomas calls 'a growing idealisation of married love and domestic life', placing responsibility for social stability with the family, and encoding its regulation in legal proclamations.⁹ Regulation of what

⁵ This is convincingly discussed as a contributing cause for bastardy in Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803*, New York, New York University Press, 1984, Chapter I.

⁶ Joan R Kent, 'Attitudes of Members of the House of Commons to the Regulation of "Personal Conduct" in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* XLVI, May, 1973, p. 42.

⁷ See quotation from *Nice Wanton* in the previous chapter, from which this is taken.

⁸ Joan R Kent, as above, pp. 55-6. Kent discusses, for example, proposed bills to make masters answerable for the offences of their children and servants (1610); and to make husbands responsible for the conduct of their wives (1601). This kind of debate seems to have recurred throughout the first decade of the seventeenth century.

⁹ Keith Thomas, 'The Puritans and Adultery: The Act of 1650 Reconsidered', in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in honour of Christopher Hill*, eds. Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas, Oxford,

we would now call 'private' behaviour was also understood to be a right of the local community, demonstrated in, for example, the 'skimmington', which involved the public humiliation and punishment of husbands and wives suspected of disruptive behaviour. As Karen Newman points out, such events are interesting in that they offer evidence that neighbours and local people assumed that they had a right to interfere in personal matters, and that their intervention was necessary.¹⁰

Motherhood, in such drama, becomes important in terms of its situation within a world in which social and economic considerations are shown to predominate. Maternity is here still a concept constructed out of moral and religious principles, but such principles allude to maternity as a fundamentally *social* function that is important in ensuring stability in the wider world represented by the play. The complex social structures in such a world are clearly adumbrated, with the family as the smallest unit of an integrated social world based upon the importance of geographic locality and economic interdependence.

Locale in these plays is created through reference to recognisable neighbourhoods, to the length and time it takes to move around them, to the kind of people who might be typically found working or moving within them. These realised geographical worlds always have at their centres a household, where the main events of the play are situated. This household is signified both by the material things it contains, its rooms and furniture, and by the people within it, the family, servants and visitors, who serve to link it with the world within which it exists and which impinges upon it.¹¹ Martin Ingram argues that 'Domestic relations were ... on the borders of public and private morality in the period', and this understanding of the links between public and private practice informs their representation in the drama.¹² In Phillipe Ariès' analysis the

Oxford University Press, 1978 (rep. 1982), p. 259. While acknowledging the influence of Protestant ideas, Thomas stresses that 'Protestants and Catholics alike laid increasing emphasis on the blessings of mutual society and companionship' in marriage, suggesting caution against reading this new emphasis as an exclusively Protestant phenomenon.

¹⁰ Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1981. She discusses the social implications of this kind of local ritual, pp. 28-9.

¹¹ For a discussion of the composition of family households see Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 126-7. Much of my understanding of the representation and significance of the contents of the household, especially in domestic tragedies, has arisen from discussions with Catherine Richardson, and from her work which is to be published as *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, forthcoming, 2004.

¹² Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 142.

negotiation of these borders generated both potential tensions and opportunities:

One of the individual's primary missions was still to acquire, defend or increase his or her social role within the limits of the community's toleration. As communities gained new wealth ... and as the inequalities between people in different walks of life grew more pronounced, there was greater room to manoeuvre within those communal boundaries.¹³

The wider world thus exists as both threat and control; the potentially disruptive dangers of the outside exist alongside the comforts offered by a supportive social network which functions to restore stability, if it is threatened.

Protestant conduct books associated good motherhood with wifely duty, hence their promotion of maternal breastfeeding as a benefit to the family. Potential tensions between the roles of wife and mother were addressed in such texts by confirming that a woman's first duty was to her husband, but they also emphasised the importance of mutual love and respect in marriage. Such texts, however, also insist that a wife and mother acts as a kind of physical signifier of her husband's wealth, status and piety. This is manifest in her behaviour, her speech, the way she dresses, the way she manages her household and how she brings up her children. For example, in 1591 Phillip Stubbes celebrated his wife's governance of her household, 'Shee would suffer no disorder or abuse in her house, to be either unproved or unreformed.'¹⁴ The wife and mother is thus an ambassador for her husband's household: a signifier of the social and economic stability which is associated with both the ideal home and the ideal Protestant family.¹⁵

The idea that the roles of wife and mother are complementary, indeed integral to one another, informs the representation of social relations in domestic tragedies and city comedies. The tension between maternity and wifhood that offered a fruitful organising dynamic for the romantic and comic narratives discussed in the previous chapter is replaced here by an emphasis

¹³ Phillipe Ariès, Introduction to *A History of Private Life III: Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier, Cambridge, Mass., and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 3.

¹⁴ Quoted in Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osborne, *Lay by your needles Ladies, Take the Pen: Writing Women in England 1200-1700*, London and New York, Arnold, 1997, p. 58. They show that the later work of William Gouge (1622) offers much more specific and prescriptive advice on, for example, 'sobriety', 'modestie in apparell', 'mekeness in their speeches' advice, pp. 112-118.

¹⁵ 'Household' is used here to indicate the social and economic unit which comprises a family, their servants and their guests. 'Family' refers to the network of relationships between the people who inhabit the household.

on a woman's social meaning. In particular, she becomes a signifier of her husband's social and economic status and success, of his household and his family. Being a good wife is being a good mother in these plays, and so the maternal body is not a threat. It is, however, threatened. These plays stress the vulnerability of the mother — the potential perils that threaten her, and that thus threaten the fragile stability of the social structures which depend upon her.¹⁶

V.ii: Motherhood and domestic space

Domestic tragedies typically advertised themselves as a satisfying combination of reportage, titillation and moralising.¹⁷ These plays, which usually purport to represent actual, more or less recent events, depend for this exotic mix of effects upon the evocation of a world which is recognisable and familiar to an audience in terms of dominant ideas and perceptions, if not actually known through material experience. They tend to construct an audience which *knows better* than the unfortunate individuals impersonated on the stage, by deploying a clear moral dynamic, abetted through the use of convention and typology. In such a context the consequences of social and economic upheaval are recast in terms of sensational events and the sensational quality of the story is made safe; the titillation is pleasurable but contained within a moral context. The traditional notion of motherhood as a vulnerable condition for a woman, and the conventional dramatic operation of the mother figure as the locus of emotional tension, offers the dramatist a set of conventions around which to organise the emotional and moral concerns of the play.

A Warning for Fair Women represents for the stage the notorious events of 1573,

¹⁶ Catherine Belsey associated an anxiety about the fragility of the household and the mother's place within it as symptomatic of 'a direct connection between the emergence of family values and the increasing perception of the loving family as a place of danger'. While Belsey's argument is more thoroughly addressed in Chapter 7 of this thesis, it is worth commenting here that the assumption that 'family values' – in any case a problematic concept (what is a family? Whose values?) – emerged at this time, is, at least, debatable. See Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p. 23.

¹⁷ For example, the 1592 edition of *Arden of Feversham*, for example, claims itself to be:

'The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent

Who was most wickedlye murdered, by the meanes of his disloyall and wanton wyfe, who for the love she bare to one Mosbie, hyred two desperate ruffins Blackwill and Shakbag, to kill him.

Wherein is shewed the great malice and discimulation of a wicked woman, the unsatiable desire of filthie lust and the shameful end of all murderers.'

Title page to the 1592 edition, printed by Edward White, reproduced in *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, ed. Keith Sturgess, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985.

recorded by Holinshed, which culminated in the hanging of a minor merchant's wife, the mother of his three small children. Ann Saunders was allegedly involved in the planning of her husband's murder. Ann was accused of an affair with the murderer, Browne, but there appears to have been a financial motive behind the murder; in fact its planning and execution allegedly involved several transactions between the parties involved. Ann denied knowledge of the murder right up to the last moment before finally confessing her guilt before her execution.¹⁸ In this play, typically of plays that operate in terms of the social and moral context I have described, there is no conflict between a mother's duties to her children and those she has to her husband. Motherhood is shown to be part of what it means to be a good wife, acting as a signifier for her function both within her husband's household and in the wider social context of the play.

For example, when Ann first meets the man who will be her lover, she is sitting outside the door of the house she shares with her husband, the doorway becoming a metonym for the household which she presides over as a wife.¹⁹ She is sitting on the threshold playing with her small child: 'Enter Ann Saunders with her little sonne' (321). The scene thus begins with an emblematic tableau which links the mother with the household and with the social stability implied in the presence of the small boy who will inherit all that the household represents. The importance and the vulnerability of Ann's situation is implied by the liminality of her placement both literally — at the doorway which divides the household from the street, and figuratively — as the mother entrusted with realising the stable transfer of social and material status from one generation to the next, for as Nicole Castan has pointed out, 'the woman was ... both the servant and mistress of the household.'²⁰ The domestic space she should occupy is rhetorically drawn as she discusses the timing of supper with her son when his father returns from 'th'Exchange' and asks him to 'go bid your sister see / My Closet lockt when she takes out the fruite,' the dialogue evoking a homely sense of a comfortable and well ordered house where everything is in its place (323-341).²¹ But the privacy of the house, signified yet again by the doorway, is placed in the

¹⁸ *A Warning for Fair Women*, ed. Charles Dale Cannon, Mouton, The Hague, 1975. All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁹ Nicole Castan emphasises the importance of the doorway as a signifier of proximity between private and public space, drawing upon contemporary images to make the point. See Nicole Castan, 'The Public and The Private' in Chartier, ed., *A History of Private Life*, p. 409.

²⁰ See Nicole Castan, 'The Public and the Private' in ed. Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, p. 408.

²¹ Ceremonies and practices associated with food and feasting are used to draw attention to the efficient and proper operations of the household in a number of domestic tragedies, notably Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, as Catherine Richardson has shown in some detail. See Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life*

context of the public street where the mother and her child are vulnerable to the threats and infringements of the outside world. Such a threat is present in the person of her future lover, Browne. The dialogue between them reinforces this sense of threat; there are references to Browne coming to 'drive her from her door', and Ann herself refers to the dangers of women sitting alone 'at any doore.'²²

There is a dramatic tension between the public aspect of the positioning of mother and son, and the private intimacy of the affectionate banter between them, which opens the scene. The boy is only on stage for ten lines, which is enough to offer up a pleasurable glimpse of motherhood at its most ideal before Browne appears to disrupt the scene and the plot begins the push to its gloomy conclusion. The child is symbolic here, suggesting innocence and promise set against potential parental misdemeanour, threatened by the accidents of fate. By showing Ann as a wife vulnerably positioned both in terms of her function as mother and housekeeper, before her fall, the dramatist is able to set up both a moral and emotional dynamic which will inform an audience's reading of her subsequent behaviour. The moment is recalled in a later scene where the murderer is stirred to guilt by the sight of the child (1614-5). Child and house become related signifiers of the downfall of the adulterous mother, implying the family and household that have broken apart because of her crime.

H.H. Adams sees these plays as overtly homiletic. He has described the typical structure of domestic tragedy as following a clear pattern, 'the sequence being: sin, discovery, repentance, punishment, and expectation of divine mercy', in which the moral framework is predominant and extends to characterisation, asserting that Ann's son is 'drawn from life'.²³ While the latter

and Domestic Tragedy. Also see Viviana Comensoli, 'Household Business': *Domestic Plays of Early Modern England*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, pp. 70-72. In *A Warning for Fair Women*, the innocuous mention of 'supper' links with the later spectacle of the 'bloody banquet' in the first dumbshow creating the disturbing effect that Comensoli describes as 'the dramatisation of the household not as the seat of civility, as it appears to be in the play's opening scenes, but of distortion and incongruity.' Comensoli, *Household Business*, p. 95.

²² See lines 375 and 396. The fragility of the doorway and its association with the intervention of the public into the private is well illustrated in Karen Newman's account of a skimmington in Wiltshire in 1628, where a crowd first 'pressinge hard' against the targeted house, eventually 'brake open [the owner's] chamber door upon his wife' before dragging her out into the street to assault her. See Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 28. It is telling in this play that in the first dumb-show the malefactors are invited through the 'fatall doore' to act out their crime — Tragedie and Lust bring them in to the house. *A Warning*, 797.

²³ H.H. Adams, *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy 1575-1642*, New York, Blom, 1965, pp. 7 and 124.

statement is not explained further, its inadequacy suggests that an analysis which sees such plays as offering a new kind of religious moral drama ignores the importance of the social setting and the 'truth' of the subject matter. This, I would argue, makes these plays primarily *social* dramas. Even motivation towards crime is given a clear social context. Ann's accomplice, Mrs. Drurie, explains in an aside that she is helping the murderer because she wants to make money for a dowry for her daughter, complicating morally reprehensible acquisitiveness by associating it with a mother's desires for the wellbeing of her child (464). A sense of financial desperation socialises the event of the murder; motivation might be the result of sin but it is also a consequence of social need. Conversely, it would be wrong to deny that the conventions of the morality play do not play a part in structuring the narrative: Ann is shown to be already fallen by reference to conventional signifiers of feminine malignity in an early scene: her vanity, as well as her greed, is demonstrated by a desire for expensive clothes (590).

That the narrative shifts between the structures of morality form and a story taken from life is evident in that the narrative is punctuated by a series of allegorical dumb-shows which are a startling contrast to the more homely visual image of the mother and son discussed above. Kate McLuskie says that this indicates how 'the tension between true reportage and the need to set a moral example was difficult to achieve in the theatre'.²⁴ She shows how, in this play, such tension is resolved by 'separating the two into parallel actions which contrast the true story of Ann Saunder's adultery with a series of allegorical dumb shows depicting the conflict between Lust and Chastity', and concludes that 'the author of *A Warning for Fair Women* was only partly successful in resolving the conflict between morality and style'.²⁵ McLuskie sees this conflict as generated by the different expectations of a heterogeneous audience. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the allegorical scenes which punctuate the narrative work by heightening the sense that the story itself is true, and not only more shocking but more theatrically satisfying because of it. The allegory serves to set the action against a moral framework, and, as McLuskie shows, to fill in some difficult gaps in the narrative not accounted for by the sources, but the conventions it utilises also engage with the social concerns of the play.

The first dumb show has Ann and Browne asleep together, offering a visual confirmation of their sinful lust, but also using the image of them asleep at their feast as a material signifier of the household, setting an evocation of the social consequences of their actions alongside the moral operation of conventional allegory (845).²⁶ This is especially interesting because of what

²⁴ Kate McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood*, English Dramatists series, London, Macmillan, 1994, p. 85.

²⁵ McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood*, p. 85.

²⁶ This effect is confirmed in the ensuing scene where Saunders and some companions, on their ways home

the play barely mentions: that the real Ann Saunders was heavily pregnant at the time her husband was killed, and in childbed shortly afterwards.²⁷ This fact does not emerge in the play until Ann's trial, where in the narrative it serves as an affirmation of her guilt. The drama prepares for the revelation through the dumb-show, so that it is possible to make a visual link between Ann's symbolic sleeping with her lover, her real lying-in and her crime, something which is confirmed rhetorically by the lords who examine her at her trial. When she denies that she received a token confirming the murder because 'I kept my childbed chamber at that time' she is warned to 'clog not your soule / With new additions of more heinous sinne' and told that she is suspected of adultery. The household's vulnerability is signified by the image of the sleeping couple at their feast; the home is infiltrated by the adulterer, and the family it embraces is polluted by adultery. The body of the mother and the household thus become entwined in meaning, the one signifying the other, the one destroyed with the other.

Viviana Comensoli has explored this analogy in some detail with reference to Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, where the adultery of Anne Frankford is condemned by her husband in terms which suggest that 'the contamination of Anne's body is one and the same with her 'infect[ion]' of Frankford's property. Comensoli goes on to show how 'Heywood carefully maps the refuges of civility and privacy that have been corrupted, Frankford's entrance of his house paralleling Wendoll's [the lover's] penetration of Anne's body.'²⁸ *A Warning for Fair Women* does not sexualise its subject matter to the same extent. The analogy is there, but the sexual sin is enacted in the dumb-shows while the main narrative deals with its consequences — the murder, grief and illegitimacy that follow it. The moral content shifts uneasily between an exhibition of family disintegration (and its social implications), and a bleak morality, heightened by the dumb-shows, which demonstrates the consequences of sin for the individual sinner.

Ann's final repentance scene manages to combine both when her three children are brought to say goodbye to her before her execution. Her process of repentance is demonstrated by her confessing to *her children*, responding to their cries of 'Oh mother, mother' to repudiate her motherhood — 'Oh my deare children! I am unworthy of the name of mother' — before turning to the audience to offer herself up as an example of the consequences of crime; the loss of maternal identity evidently an inevitable consequence of the adultery of the wife (line reference?). She asks her children to learn by 'your mother's fall', 'to follow vertue and beware of sinne'.²⁹

from work, talk of households and hospitality and of their wives.

²⁷ *A Warning*, Appendix D, p. 219. Ann uses childbirth in her defence in *A Warning*, line 2344.

²⁸ Comensoli, *Household Business*, pp. 73-74.

²⁹ All this happens in the sources, too, with the interesting added comment that the clerics who brought Ann

Throughout this play, Ann moves further and further out into public space as her adultery and its consequences propel her away from the intimate spaces of the home and into the public arena. The farewell scene is public, both because it is set in prison and the farewells take place before onlookers, and because Ann's address to the theatre audience mimics an actual scaffold speech (and is taken from accounts of Ann's last words). There is a terrible tension between the intimacy of her farewell to her children and the space in which it happens. The children become, however unwillingly, an aspect of the moral here; their distress is another indication of the perversity of a crime which has brought down the household.³⁰

The theatrical nature of Elizabethan judiciary executions is here appropriated by the theatre in a kind of dramatic ritualising of ritual itself. J.A. Sharpe identifies a change in the significance of executions in the sixteenth century:

Public execution was no longer a prosaic demonstration that crime did not pay. It also emphasised the whole structure of earthly and divine authority which had been offended. The person being executed became the central actor in a theatre of punishment, and his or her willingness to play the allotted role tells us a great deal about the nature of authority in Tudor and Stuart England. The condemned was expected to show obedience, penitence, and contrition on the gallows. He or she was also expected to make a speech in which a full confession was usually made to the offence in question, and expressions were made of sorrow, of the hope that they would serve as a deterrent example to others, and that the monarch under whose laws death was being suffered would enjoy a long and prosperous reign. The speeches also customarily contained a long confession of youthful sin, which was seen as leading inevitably to the serious offence for which death was being suffered. The public execution, so often treated by historians simply as yet more proof of the brutality of past ages, was in fact a highly structured ritual in which the authority of the state was demonstrated in a dramatic fashion, to the public at large.³¹

and Mrs. Drurie to repentance were horrified at the lack of religious understanding of both women and had to work very hard to extract and to create suitable confessional material. Golding's 'A Brief Discourse', one of the sources for the play, says that the Dean of St. Pauls, together with three assistants 'laboured very painfully to instruct them aright: for (God wote) they founde all the three prisoners very rawe and ignorant in all things perteyning to God and to their soule health, yea and even in the very principles of the Christen religion.' *A Warning*, Appendix D, p. 223.

³⁰ Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* makes similar use of children to make a moral point.

³¹ Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, pp. 111-12.

These grim rituals dramatised a personal story of corruption through the condemned person's forced iteration of their own sinful past, situating themselves and their transgression within the context of the social world that they have wronged. Translated into drama the public rite creates a frightening clash between the private family — the mother and her children — and the society which has condemned her, revealing their terrible isolation.³² The presence of Ann's children adds further resonance, not only creating emotional tension, but emblematising the social consequences of the adultery which led to murder; the shattered family disintegrates publicly as the doubly bereaved children receive their mother's final embrace:

So God send down his blessing on you al:
 Farewel, farewel, farewel, farewel, farewel.
 (she kisses them one after the other)
 Nay stay not to disturbe me with your teares,
 The time is come sweete hearts, and we must part,
 That way you go, this way my heavie heart. (2710-15)

Ann's final act is to present her children each with a book of 'holy meditations', and exhort them to 'Sleepe not without them when you go to bed, / And rise a mornings with them in your hands' (2708-9). In this, she imagines the children in some new beds protected by the meditations that will keep them 'safer than in faire buildings.' Thus she re-places them, in her imagination, at the secure heart of some new home.

In *A Warning for Fair Women* the mother, by sitting at her open door, talking in the street, becomes the means by which corruption enters and pollutes the home. In the anonymous *A Yorkshire Tragedy* a mother again is destroyed and familial and social relations disintegrate. But here the mother is not corrupted by crime, but attacked where she should be most safe, by one who should protect her. The play is based upon the true story of the Calverley murders, where in 1605 a Yorkshire gentleman killed his wife and two of his children, set off to kill the third, a baby at nurse, but was apprehended before he reached the child. The story is also the subject of a comedy, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, written by George Watkins in 1607, where the course of events is altered to provide a happy ending.³³ In both plays there is again an emphasis upon social and family relations which is crucial to the plot in that Calverley broke off an

³² According to the sources, the streets and houses around the gallows were crowded with spectators.

³³ George Watkins, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, 1607, published by the Malone Society, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963.

engagement before his eventual prudent marriage to a relation of his guardian, and his unhappiness has made him profligate and criminal and, as Comensoli puts it, ‘a source of profound distress.’³⁴

The play at first appears to present the story of the crime as a kind of dismal celebration of the household and of the cohesive forces created by its place in a wider social context. Comensoli points out that ‘the principal characters are named according to their domestic or social roles (Husband, Wife, Maid, Gentleman, and so on)’ and that the word ‘home’ or ‘house’ is repeated throughout the play, reinforcing its focus on the household.³⁵ There is an emphasis upon the place of the household in a wider context — the Calverley marriage is shown to be welcomed by the society to which the husband belongs. Friends and family continually admonish Calverley for not treating his wife as they know she deserves, and a sense is created of a society working hard to contain and to support a relationship which is under strain because of the aberrant behaviour of the husband. Though he accuses his wife of being a whore who has bred him bastards, and refuses to recognise her, the household and the social network into which it is embedded work to support her.³⁶ For example, when Calverley physically threatens his wife with a dagger, it is a servant who enters the room hastily to intervene (Scene 72). There is a sense here of the household acting to protect the wife and mother who is literally and metaphorically at its centre.

Calverley’s wife demonstrates an understanding of her proper place as a wife and a mother in the power structures of the family. While she hints at the emotional turmoil that her husband’s behaviour has caused her as a mother, she subjugates it to the demands of duty:

If thou suspect it but a plot in me
 To keep my dowry, or for mine own good,
 Or my poor children’s (though it suits a mother
 To show a natural care in their reliefs)
 Yet I’ll forget myself to calm your blood. (Scene iii 63-7)

However, she qualifies this, bringing together the desires of the mother and the duties of a wife, by associating her desires to protect her children with a commendable sense of duty to the

³⁴ Comensoli, *Household Business*, p. 98.

³⁵ Comensoli, *Household Business*, p. 99.

³⁶ *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Anon, in *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, ed. Keith Sturgess, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983, p. 158. All subsequent references are to this edition.

household and the obligations associated with it, including dynastic concerns. Her concern for her children is linked with their social standing and the importance of continuity and household:

What shall become of me and my poor children,
 Two here and one at nurse, my pretty beggars?
 I see how ruin with a palsy hand
 Begins to shake the ancient seat to dust. (Scene iii 88-91)

The mother's love for her children is thus integral to her wider concerns and duties as a wife, an integrity of family and household that is broken apart in the climactic murder scene (Scene v) which, like the play previous discussed, uses a mix of realistic and emblematic moments to signify both the social, and the moral and emotional implications of the murder.

The stage direction at the beginning of the scene suggests: 'Enter a maid with a child in her arms, the mother by her asleep' (173). The scene thus begins with a *tableau* signifying both domestic harmony in the sense of a household quietly operating as it should, and vulnerability — the women inhabit a private space, protected by the house they should be safe to sleep and to nurse. This static, emblematic moment is broken by frenzied action, started by the entrance of Calverley with a weapon. The mother wakes at the crying of her children and leaps from bed to 'catch up' the younger, who is stabbed in her arms. As this happens, she is injured and sinks down — creating for a moment the ghost of a *pieta* — before her husband wrenches her child from her. The traditional associations of the maternal body with sacrifice and division are recalled here in a new context in which the mother stands for a social ideal, and demonstrates the fragility of that ideal in her suffering. But at the same time she demonstrates a practical resilience which compromises — or perhaps extends — that image. For, as Comensoli has argued, her effort to retain something of what has been lost is demonstrated in the play by her continued loyalty to her husband, for whose life she pleads, and from whom she says parting is the worst suffering of all:

More wretched am I now in this distress
 Than former sorrows made me (Scene 61-2).

The Wife works to uphold social and family structures, apparently subordinating her emotions and her children to the demands of her mad husband, and then her wishes for her husband's life to the law. But, Comensoli says, she is no passive victim. She has taken steps to ensure that a transfer of family land prevents her destitution, and in doing so effectively retains her status as

the centre of a home. And for Comensoli, the Wife's declaration of love and forgiveness has a strategic function in that it 'preserves not only her reputation but her lands.'³⁷

Motherhood is shown here operating at an axis which is social in its orientation, in which the conservation of land is as integral to the wife's role as the care of her children. In this play the mother is threatened by a different kind of corruption from that of *A Warning for Fair Women* and her loss is that of a victim, albeit a canny one, rather than a felon. Both mothers figure the vulnerability at the heart of a household, and the significance that such vulnerability has for the good order of the society in which it is situated. But if Comensoli is right, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* adds a hard edge to that vulnerability in the mother's calculated determination to protect herself and her surviving child. It also demonstrates a practical concern for economic survival which can be set against the preoccupations of the conduct books which advocate the careful regulation of both household and family for both spiritual reasons, and as a means by which wider anxieties about social order and the good management of society should be addressed. Margot Heinemann sees the drama of this period presenting 'a society changing from one regulated by inherited status to one ruled increasingly by the power of money and capital, with much greater social mobility and, hence, with an increasing sense of opportunity and insecurity.' The Wife in this play acts pragmatically in response to potential insecurity in the face of change and in doing so her representation shifts away from the paradigm of ideal, tragic motherhood which is emblematically asserted at the moment of her husband's attack, towards that of a practical and organised housewife.³⁸

V.iii Motherhood and domestic economy

City comedies, too, offered their audience a satirical representation of a familiar, rather than ideal, world, in which the economic preoccupations of a young, mercantile and ambitious group are embedded in their social and family relations and ambitions.³⁹ Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in*

³⁷ Comensoli, *Household Business*, 102.

³⁸ See Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Oppositional Drama under the Stuarts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 66.

³⁹ Wendy Griswold has argued that the specificity of the geographical location is crucial in setting up the social concerns of city comedies: 'The London orientation of the plays is as much a matter of social semiotics as of geographical setting. Urban sites present urban manners and morals, offering the playwright a code through which he could efficiently communicate his characters' reputations and plans. Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre 1576-1980*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 17.

Cheapside, written in 1613, has at its heart a plot which, like *Romeo and Juliet*, pits the aspirations of romantic love against the material and social demands of parents.⁴⁰ The story is of an avidly upwardly mobile goldsmith, Mr Yellowhammer and his equally ambitious wife Maudline, who want to enrich themselves further through the advantageous marriages of their children. Their daughter Moll is intended for Sir Walter Whorehound, a philandering knight. Sir Walter already has a mistress, Mrs Allwit, whom he keeps, along with her husband who boasts that he need do nothing, not even impregnate his own wife, so generous is Sir Walter on his behalf. Sir Walter's continued good fortune depends upon the sterility of his relative Sir Walter Kix. Moll Yellowhammer, meanwhile, is in love with a young man whose older brother, Touchwood Senior, is happily married but produces too many children and so is forced to live apart from his wife, satisfying his desires instead by impregnating country wenches in startling numbers.

As is clear from this synopsis, this is a play which focuses upon kinship and sexuality, placing both within the context of the economic strategies of the urban middle classes. In this play, marriage is a market and children are commodities or liabilities, in a world where, for the most part, affective relations are subordinated to the desire for material gain. Middleton uses the bare bones of the comic romance to produce a witty travesty of the family ideal promoted in the conduct literature discussed earlier in this chapter.⁴¹ The wife is, indeed, the 'helpmeet' so popular in the conduct books, but this role is debased in the play, where the promotion of household economy primarily involves the selling of her children.⁴² The mother is turned into a

⁴⁰ Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, in *Thomas Middleton: Five Plays*, ed. Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor, London, Penguin, 1988, pp. 163-238. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴¹ Griswold discusses the problematics of attempting to discover a moral argument in this play which can be read either as an engagement with the cynicism and amorality of the social world it describes, or as an abhorrence of it. Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals*, p. 25. From a rather different perspective, Heinemann makes the point that an early seventeenth-century audience would be at the centre of a conflict of authority and that it is not possible to position them in relation to the play's morality: in the early seventeenth century, audience feeling often pulled one way (or two or three ways, since there were several audiences), patronage and censorship another. Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, p. 15.

⁴² The notion of the wife as 'helpmeet' is turned to a joke by Swetnam who says that the extent of their help is to 'spend and consume that which man painfully getteth,' See extract from Swetnam, 'The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women', 1615, in Trill, et al, p. 82. The joke here is, as Diane Purkiss points out, not about women so much as about the 'morally earnest discourse which glosses helpmeet more diversely.' See Diane Purkiss, 'Material Girls: the Seventeenth Century Women Debate', in

kind of bawd, hounding her daughter into marriage by way of sexual jokes and parental pressure.

We are honour'd then, if this baggage would be humble,
 And kiss him with devotion when he enters.
 I cannot get her for my life
 To instruct her hand thus, before and after,
 Which a knight will look for, before and after.
 I have told her still, 'tis the wavings of a woman
 Does often move a man and prevails strongly. (1.1.36-42)

In the previous chapter it was argued that in *Romeo and Juliet*, the maternal is estranged and inadequate, polarised into the roles of the wife and the nurse. In this play, Mrs Yellowhammer embodies both those roles at their most extreme, which makes her a kind of anti-mother. She is unwittingly bawdy but without the balancing affective qualities that constructed a sense of an emotional relationship between Juliet and her Nurse, and her wifely dynastic ambitions have degenerated into a grasping materialism which values her daughter as 'baggage,' an economic transaction:

you are dull, nothing comes nimbly from you, you dance like a plumber's daughter and
 deserve two thousand pounds in lead to your marriage, and not in goldsmith's ware.
 (1.1.13-16)

Her conspicuous lack of the traditional qualities of motherhood are, of course, what makes Mrs. Yellowhammer such a comic success. When she retrieves her daughter from an attempted elopement and enters the stage, dragging Moll by the hair, the effect is funny rather than distressing because the dramatic pleasure offered by the character is in a *frisson* of shock at her increasingly outrageous un-maternal behaviour. Even when pursued by a remonstrating waterman who tells her that she is a cruel mother, and with her husband enjoining her to 'Hold, hold' she relentlessly pursues her aim of promoting her family out of the citizenry and into the nobility and presents her bedraggled, weeping daughter to her suitor — 'I have brought your jewel by the hair'(4.3.25). Her husband's ineffectuality is, of course part of the joke, but the joke has its black side, reminiscent of Noah's relationship with his wife before the Flood, or indeed of Hamlet's

Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, eds., *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 73.

nostalgic longing for a time when his father kept his mother 'safe' in all senses of the phrase.⁴³

The Waterman's appeal to Mrs. Yellowhammer's maternity is ironic in the rapacious world of the play, where parents sell their daughters for economic and social gain, and the joke runs on through the play. Even Maudline's grief at her daughter's supposed 'death' is comically coloured by her preoccupation with its financial significance, 'We'll not lose all at once, somewhat we'll catch' (5.3.115). Gail Kern Paster says that this play represents a society where 'social authority — here represented by the older generation — uses the discourses of nature oppressively to serve its own selfish ends.'⁴⁴ Certainly, the mother here is a grotesque incarnation of the topsy-turvy values displayed in the play, not so much an emblem as a counter-emblem, not radiating meaning but inviting condemnation, the site where ideal maternity collapses into travesty.

Travesty had a traditional function in religious ritual and drama, making use of a Manichean version of psychomachia which reminded an audience of the presence of evil even when the word might seem at its brightest, for example at the moment of Christ's birth. Though written well after the Reformation, *A Chaste Maid* appears to incorporate this tradition into its structure, sometimes offering startling similarities to earlier texts, not necessarily because these plays were known by Middleton, but perhaps because the thrust of such narratives had become part of a widely available dramatic vocabulary associated with a form of satire which emphasised the gaps between religious and moral ideals and the actual shortcomings of human conduct.⁴⁵ The childless Lady Kix laments, like the Biblical Rachel, or the mothers of the Innocents, for the children she does not have, but the symbolism of her lack of 'blessings' is undercut by a bawdy joke which privileges the sexual and economic implications of her condition: 'Can any woman have a greater cut?' (Iii 139) When Touchstone Senior bewails, in an aside, the consequences of his alarming fertility, he does so in lines which are almost exactly those expressed by the Sheep stealer, Mak, in the Towneley *Second Shepherd's Play*, for example:

Life, Every year a child, and some years two,
Besides drinkings abroad, that's never reckon'd;

⁴³ The long-suffering husband is, of course, a familiar character in city comedies, as in, for example, Touchstone in *Eastward Ho!*

⁴⁴ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Griswold writes of the City Comedies as constructed out of a mix of 'both the medieval and modern world pictures, both images of organic community and of acquisitive individualism', which she argues are brought together in these plays. Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals*, p. 54.

This gear will not hold out. (1.2.15-17)⁴⁶

There are also tropes in *A Chaste Maid* which are very like those in the earlier play. For example, there is a scene in which an unmarried country wench tricks two Promoters who are invigilating observance of the rules of Lent (the season in which the play is placed), into taking her unwanted baby by concealing it in a basket under a loin of mutton.⁴⁷ The Towneley play has at its dramatic climax a sequence where the sheep-stealer and his wife conceal a stolen lamb, swaddled in a cradle, pretending it is their own new-born child, in a subversive imitation of the Nativity scene which will end the play. The play on such conventional symbolism in *A Chaste Maid* brings together grotesquely the helplessness and the promise of a new-born child and its unwantedness in a world which is so governed by material preoccupations that motherhood no longer carries any emotional or spiritual significance. The girl who plays the basket trick is proud of her 'wit' in devising the game, celebrating it in an aside to the audience, but its resonance goes further than a practical joke, both reducing the baby to the status of the meat she pretends to be selling, and elevating it to the status of a sacrificial victim.⁴⁸ In an earlier scene, Touchwood Senior is confronted by a wench carrying his latest illegitimate baby, who pushes him into negotiation over its upkeep. There is a connection between illegitimacy and whoredom in the play, which consistently places the mothers of bastards as tricksters, something unlikely to reflect social reality but which, nevertheless, appears to be engaging with a contemporary problem and perceptions arising from it.⁴⁹ The historian Keith Wrightson discusses the peculiar statistical blip

⁴⁶ Compare Mak's complaint:

'And ilk year that comes to man / She brings forth a lakan - / And, some years, two.

But were I now more gracious, and richer by far, / I were eaten out of house and of harbour. /

Yet she is a foul dowse ...' *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, Ed. A.C. Cawley, 'The Second Shepherds Pageant', lines 241-6, p. 90.

⁴⁷ This similarity has been noted by, among others, Alan Brissenden, in his New Mermaid edition of the play, *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, London, Benn, 1968, Introduction, p. xxi.

⁴⁸ Again, this is very similar to a moment in the Towneley play where Mak's wife turns to the audience to boast of her cleverness in devising the ruse to conceal the stolen sheep.

⁴⁹ Hoffer and Hull offer an extensive analysis of the incidence of infanticide in the period, and of contemporary social and legal responses to it, drawing attention to a gradual broadening of the definition of infanticide, which made it more difficult for women to defend themselves. This law, they argue, reveals an assumption that mothers (overwhelmingly likely to be poor and unmarried) would attempt to disguise their crimes and to trick their way out of prosecution. See Peter C. Hoffer, and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and new England 1558-1803*, New York, New York University Press, 1984,

at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where there is a sharp temporary rise in bastardy.⁵⁰ This he links with economic decline which, he argues, led to instabilities in the courtship of the poor.⁵¹ In this play it is poor country girls who produce properly illegitimate offspring, but the association of their plight with whoredom repeats the premises which are evident in the moral literature of the period. Wrightson reminds us that, 'to the religious moralists of the period, illegitimacy was merely a sub-category of the general and perennial problem of 'whoredom', and that unmarried women who had babies were severely punished:

Some girls, however, became ... the mothers of bastards. There tolerance ended. They were likely to be brought before the church courts, questioned and ordered to do penance in public. If there was a danger that their children would fall upon the parish poor rates, they might be brought before the Justices of the Peace, and perhaps committed to a house of correction. ... it is scarcely surprising that some girls faced with these terrors concealed their pregnancies, bore their children alone and then exposed, abandoned or deliberately killed them.⁵²

An ideological narrative which linked bastardy with promiscuity and the selling of sex is reinforced in other literature of the period, for example in ballads such as *No Natural Mother but a Monster*, which tells the story of a servant girl's impregnation by her master, the abandonment and subsequent death of her baby, and her consequent execution for infanticide, as one of her 'unbridled will', and 'wild carriage'. Told in the first person, the ballad resembles the first song of Phillip's *Grissil*, though here the girl falls despite good parenting, rather than learns virtue from it:

My parents me vp brought,
carefully, carefully,
Little (God wot) they thought,

especially chapters 1 and 4.

⁵⁰ Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, London, 1982, pp. 84 and 145.

⁵¹ The *Second Shepherds' Play* to which I refer above, is similarly situated in a time of dearth, 'for the tilth of our land lies fallow as the floor', where the oppressions of the poor by the State are keenly felt: 'we are so hamyd, for-taxed and ramyd, we are made hand-tamed by these gentlery-men'. *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, Ed. A.C. Cawley, 'The Second Shepherds Pageant', lines 23-26.

⁵² Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 86.

that I should euer
 Haue run so bad a race,
 To dye in such a place,
 God grant all Maidens grace,
 To take example.⁵³

Protestant ideas about the function of family are here mediated through Calvinist notions of election and grace to explain the girl's transgression. Her inability to marshal what is 'natural' to her condition, either in terms of stifling wild sexual impulses or of summoning proper maternal feeling becomes malignant; the threat always implicit in a woman's potential for maternity is carried through and ends in murder.

In his play, as in the ballad, Middleton represents a similar ideological thrust to that of Puritan narratives on the regulation of maternity. The play engages with contemporary concerns by presenting a particular ideological position which is mediated through reference to the traditions and conventions of earlier moral and religious dramatic narratives. It thus displays a powerful moral base (but not a prescriptive one) against which an audience is encouraged to appreciate the satiric comedy.⁵⁴ Situating *A Chaste Maid* within the frame of a religious festival contextualises the narrative within it which operates to offer not a series of universal and dogmatic truths like the old catholic drama, but to invite an audience to test what is enacted before them against a moral dynamic, informed by Protestant ideals. If, as Phillippe Ariès says, 'living became a way of externalising one's inner life and virtues. Hence a great deal of attention was paid to what went on in routine home life and daily intercourse' then this play humorously exposes the aspirations and values of the world it satirises.⁵⁵ This is crucial in the famous scene where the christening of Mrs Allwit's latest baby by Sir Walter is attended by gossips and Puritan well-wishers, well described by Alan Brissenden as a 'mockery of true spiritual values ... where a whoremaster stands godfather to his own bastard, Puritans get drunk and a cuckold beamingly takes the credit for a child not his own.'⁵⁶ Here, maternity as any kind of idealised condition is conspicuously missing.

⁵³ Reprinted in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. W Chappell, London, The Ballad Society, 1869-99; 9 vols., pp. 425-430.

⁵⁴ Middleton was married to Ann Marbeck, granddaughter of the famous Calvinist musician John Marbeck, and there is speculation as to his religious sympathies. (Loughrey and Taylor, *Five Plays*, p .x.)

⁵⁵ Ariès, Introduction to *A History of Private Life*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Brissenden, p. xxi.

The opening stage directions ask for ‘a bed thrust out upon the stage, Allwit’s Wife in it. Enter all the Gossips.’⁵⁷ It is the spectacle which is crucial here. The new mother appears before the audience in her bed, and is immediately surrounded by gossips, making this the representation of a social event rather than a celebration of maternity, something which is emphasised in a curious prelude to the scene where the baby, carried by the midwife across the stage and off again, is followed by the gossips who are jostling one another, arguing hotly about precedence. This nice juxtaposition of images works in the same way as the sleeping scenes in the domestic tragedies discussed earlier tended to, offering a visual emblem of an ideal before undercutting it with a noisy reality. The same personnel, the mother, the nurse, the child, apply. The scene occupies the same domestic space. But the emblematic prelude serves to show that the ritual here is spiritually and morally redundant: important to the participants only in economic and social terms. Mother and baby are not shown together — instead there is an ostentatious over-preponderance of nurses, a Wet Nurse and a Dry Nurse whose jobs presumably combine to make the mother redundant. It is tempting to read them as dramatised incarnations of what Janet Adelman has described as ‘psychic sites of separation’ from the maternal, emphasising the emotional and literal distance between the mother and her offspring.⁵⁸ Mistress Allwit’s ‘lying in’ becomes merely an opportunity for pretentious display. The talk is of the expense of the gifts, the quality of the food (and the guests’ greedy consumption if it), the price of marriage.⁵⁹ A travesty of the spiritual values implicit in the christening ritual is thus organised around the figure of the redundant mother whose bedroom has become the site of conspicuous consumption.

Like the domestic tragedies discussed earlier, this play makes a link between the destruction or the debasement of motherhood and the abuse of spaces, from the degenerate christening party in Mrs. Allwit’s bedroom where the material excess is the point and where Puritans literally get pissed, through to the impregnation of Lady Kix in the seclusion of her coach, thus ensuring that her husband’s inheritance will be retained. In contrast to these homely

⁵⁷ Act 3 Scene 2. Ariès stresses the increasingly special place of the marriage bed in the early modern household. Ariès, Introduction to *A History of Private Life*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p.5. Adelman refers to the point of handing over to the wet nurse and the point of weaning, as detailed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁹ A reference to Mistress Allwit’s lying in ‘like a countess’ has a contemporary reference to ostentation as it seems to refer to the famous and extravagant lying in of the Countess of Salisbury at the beginning of 1613 : ‘the Countess of Salisbury lies in very richly, for the hanging of her chamber, being white satin, embroidered with gold (or silver) and pearl is valued at fourteen thousand pounds’. John Chamberlain, *Letters*, ed. N.E. McLure, Philadelphia 1939, I, 415-6, quoted in Brissenden footnote, p. 50.

(albeit abused) spaces, the unmarried girls scrambling for money to keep their children occupy the same streets and public places where crime and corruption are exposed and dealt with by the State.⁶⁰ Households, along with the rituals and the routines that organise them, are shown to be threatened by the corruption that inhabits the public places in which they are situated. In all the plays discussed in this chapter, the disjunction between a social ideal and a grimmer reality, based in a realised geographical area, is mirrored by a structural tension between recurring significant images — of rooms, of sleep, of food, of children — and a story which shows how the ideal is undermined by the demands of living in a society where the pressures are changing and increasing, and where the mother's place within the family and as keeper of the household, as an upholder of morality, is the focus of increased attention.

⁶⁰ In contrast, Moll, the play's romantic heroine, who is pulled unwillingly and violently in to her parents' house at the beginning of the play, gets there on her own terms at the end.

Chapter 6: Typology and subjectivity in *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*

...these men

Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect

Being Nature's livery or Fortune's star.¹

O mother

What shall I cry?²

This chapter explores the representation of two canonical mothers, both from Shakespeare's Jacobean work. Both mothers have been perceived by countless critics as stamping what the first quotation above implies is the 'defect' of femininity upon the actions of their sons. The relations between mothers and sons in these plays is constructed over a narrative which allows them to change through time, and which thus repudiates, even as it acknowledges, the fixed meaning offered by typology. Bearing in mind Jonathan Dollimore's discussion of Jacobean tragedy as exhibiting a move from what he calls 'idealist mimesis' to a mimetic drama which was essentially 'realist', a change that he illustrates with reference to Renaissance literary theory, I wish to argue that the theatrical function of motherhood, is here transformed (rather than informed) as part of a change in the relations between ideology and typology which have been adumbrated in the argument of this thesis so far.³ Such a shift creates possibilities in the development of what Janet Adelman calls 'a fully developed subjectivity' which she describes as the 'illusion that a stage

¹ *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 4, 23-6. All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the edition of the play in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988.

² T.S.Eliot, 'Coriolan II', in *Collected Poems 1909-1967*, London, Faber & Faber, 1974, p. 143.

³ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1984. Dollimore does not discuss *Hamlet*; nevertheless his compelling discussion of Jacobean revenge tragedy is clearly important in any subsequent work on plays covered by the definitions of the genre. In Chapter 4, 'Renaissance Literary Theory: Two Concepts of Mimesis' he sets out the argument I refer to in my text: 'on the one hand didacticism, inherited as dramatic conventions from the morality tradition, demanded that the universe be seen to be divinely controlled; that justice and order be eventually affirmed, conflict resolved, and the individual re-established within, or expelled from, the providential design (idealist mimesis). On the other hand, drama was rapidly progressing as a form with empirical, historical and contemporary emphases — all of which were in potential conflict with this didacticism (realist mimesis). See p. 71.

person has interior being, including motives that he himself does not fully understand.⁴ Such moves make possible a change of perspective in the dramatic representation of maternity: whereas in the drama addressed so far in this thesis children have functioned as extensions of the meaning of the mother, the plays in this chapter demonstrate the meaning that motherhood has for the child.

VI.i: Gertrude

As Janet Adelman puts it, '*Hamlet* stands as a kind of watershed, subjecting to the maternal presence the relationships previously exempted from that presence.'⁵ It is inevitable that a thesis such as this should eventually come to discuss this play, in which the mother has been most thoroughly vilified both by the protagonist himself, and by many of the critics who have come to address the problems posed by the play. Conversely, it is a play where the hero himself has also been most examined, if not always condemned, in terms of that relationship. Here, I wish to take account of that body of criticism as an adjunct to suggesting that this is a play that displays, in its complex dealings with the son's response to his mother, the reworking of typology to take account of ideological change.

The representation of motherhood has long been recognised as a critical issue in the play, and it is worth tracing some of the key discussions here in order to situate the argument of this chapter. In the early twentieth century, A.C. Bradley took a moral view of Hamlet's predicament in which, despite an alarming over-identification with the situation of the hero, he raises the problem of the relationship between Hamlet and his mother as central to a proper understanding of the narrative structure of the play:

It was the moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true nature, falling on him when his heart was aching with love, and his body doubtless was weakened by sorrow. And it is essential, however disagreeable, to realise the nature of this shock. It matters little here whether Hamlet's age was twenty or thirty: in either case his mother was a matron of mature years. All his life he had believed in her, we may be sure, as such a son would. ... she married again, and married ... a man utterly contemptible and loathsome in his eyes; married him not for any reason of state, nor even out of old family affection, but in such a way that her son was forced to see in her action

⁴ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 1.

⁵ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 11.

not only an astounding shallowness of feeling but an eruption of coarse sensuality, 'rank and gross', speeding post haste to its horrible delight.⁶

Despite Bradley's cavalier misreading (Claudius clearly states that his marriage to Gertrude was, whatever else it might also have been, part of a political strategy), his attention to the issue is important.⁷ Subsequent readings of the play inevitably return to the intractable difficulties posed by the protagonist's account of his mother's behaviour; an account which, as has been frequently pointed out, has little support from Gertrude's own behaviour in any of the extant versions of the play. Conversely, *Hamlet* has achieved a kind of mythic status, appropriated by psychoanalysts, for example, as an analogue through which it is possible to explain the workings of the psyche.⁸

Trying to pick a path through the vast range of critical discussions of the play is daunting. It is no longer possible to assume either Bradley's romantic identification of the hero as poet, nor his sense of moral outrage. Writing before the popularising of psychoanalysis, Bradley sees Hamlet's crisis in terms of 'moral shock', a clash of ethical and emotional concerns that brings about an inevitable breakdown; 'is its result anything but perfectly natural?'⁹ This emphasis upon a link between morality and emotion recalls the functions of motherhood in earlier drama and Bradley's embellishments looks like an attempt to reformulate the play in terms of a straightforward typological reading. In fact, Bradley had touched on the heart of the problem — that Gertrude frustrates conventional readings of maternity, good or bad. T.S. Eliot acknowledged this when he famously redirected attention away from character to consider the play as artifice: '*Hamlet* the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary' and described *Hamlet* as 'most certainly an artistic failure', concluding that while 'the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother', the play lacks the 'objective correlative' to account for it:

Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains

⁶ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, Macmillan, 1904, p. 118.

⁷ *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2, lines 15-17. Claudius emphasises the political importance of the marriage by stressing that the court has 'freely gone / with this affair along' (lines 14-15).

⁸ See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 4. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, Chapter V.

⁹ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 119.

to poison life and obstruct action. ... To have heightened the criminality of Gertrude would have been to provide the formula for a totally different emotion in Hamlet; it is just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing.¹⁰

For Eliot the play is thus structurally flawed, incomplete in achieving its aims. This, he speculates, might be due to Shakespeare's reworking of an older revenge play which proved difficult to adapt to the dramatist's chosen focus upon the guilt of the mother, visited upon her son. Eliot contends that 'Shakespeare was unable to impose this motive [guilt] upon the "intractable" material of the old play.'¹¹

The structural gap suggested by Eliot is not, however, so much that between what Gertrude says and what she means (in other words, the mother is not emblematic in the way that I have used the word in this thesis), as between what the Queen is heard to say and seen to do, and what she means *to her son*. The resulting disruption to narrative consistency, this chapter argues, provokes both the pleasures and the frustrations created by the play.¹² Jacqueline Rose implies this when she takes up Eliot's analysis, showing how he 'suggests that the question of the woman and the question of meaning go together.'¹³ Suggesting that, for Eliot, 'emotion must be controlled by meaning, and an always potentially chaotic and fragmentary reality must be ordered by art', she finds instead that the 'dangerous excess' of female sexuality which is no longer contained when a woman is widowed, and which Hamlet finds so disturbing, contributing to a breakdown in dramatic structure:

Femininity thus becomes the focus for a partly theorised recognition of the psychic and literary disintegration which can erupt in any moment into literary form.¹⁴

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, London, Methuen, 1920, reprinted 1972, pp. 96-7 and 101.

¹¹ Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p. 98.

¹² As Adelman puts it: 'the Gertrude we see is not quite the Gertrude they see' and suggests that what we see is 'a woman more muddled than actively wicked.' Adelman reads the disjunction that Eliot identifies psychoanalytically as symptomatic of 'the struggle ... to free the masculine identity of both father and son from its origin in the contaminated maternal body.' Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 15 and 17.

¹³ Jacqueline Rose, 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, Volume I, ed. John Drakakis, London, Routledge, 1985, pp. 95-118.

¹⁴ Rose, 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare', p. 103.

Rose's rebuttal of criticisms centred on Gertrude shows, as she says, that 'failing in a woman, whether aesthetic or moral, is always easier to point out than a failure of integration within language and subjectivity itself', and argues for a closer critical attention to matters of form, suggesting that,

if we try to read Shakespeare in terms of the second however, it might be possible to lift the onus off the woman, who has for so long now been expected to take the responsibility, and to bear the excessive weight.¹⁵

Rose's contention that the sexuality of the mother is made to 'bear the weight' of her son's guilt in the play places an emphasis upon widowhood and its destabilising potential, threatening, through remarriage, to disrupt and complicate issues concerning inheritance and family. Dorothea Kehler, in a study of the First Quarto of the play, interestingly associates this with structural differences between the First Quarto and the Folio versions, arguing that the First Quarto might have been written for touring venues in the north of England where audiences were likely to have recusant sympathies and so be particularly receptive to a representation of the mother which operates in the traditional, iconic, romantic mode, figuring through maternity the tension between duty and desire:

Questions about playing venues for Q1 are, I suggest, linked to the characterisation of Gertred, the cultural production of a particular historical moment. To that end, my essay contextualises Gertred's representation, seeing her as a quasi-allegorical object lesson in the consequences of rejecting celibate widowhood.¹⁶

In Q1, argues Kehler, Gertred is 'all mother', committing herself 'unequivocally to Hamlet's cause, promising to keep up connubial appearances only to deceive Claudius' once she discovers that he is a murderer.¹⁷ Such an analysis of the First Quarto yet again confirms the importance of the construction of the mother for the meaning of the play. For Kehler, the Gertrude of Q1 is designed with a particular audience in mind, figuring anxieties about remarriage in the context of recusant sympathies and the cultural ideals associated with that:

¹⁵ Rose, 'Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare', p. 118.

¹⁶ Dorothea Kehler, 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertred', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, p. 399.

¹⁷ Kehler, 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet*', p. 398.

Even after the Reformation stripped marriage of its status as a sacrament, many sixteenth-century English writers were loath to abandon earlier attitudes. John Webster, the probable author of the thirty-two New Characters appearing in the sixth edition of Overbury's *Characters* (1615) set 'A vertuous Widdow' in opposition to 'An ordinarie Widdow'. Shunning remarriage, the 'vertuous Widdow' whose celibacy is a second virginity, garners up her heart in her children and her Maker. Of particular importance to Hamlet, neither her children's persons nor their inheritance is at the mercy of a new husband or step-siblings.¹⁸

Whilst Kehler may be right in recognising in Gertred a mother figure whose function is essentially emblematic, as are the figures in Overbury, her analysis nevertheless does not account for the disturbing way in which the son describes his mother. Kehler offers an interesting historical context for this version of the play and demonstrates that in Q1 the mother's behaviour is perhaps less ambivalent than in the other texts, but her argument can finally do little more than reiterate the problem of the gap between the mother as represented by the play, and as represented by her son:

While the play's audience, familiar with the trope of the 'lusty widow' and positioned to identify with the protagonist, may accede to the assessment of Gertred they hear from Hamlet and the Ghost, the queen they actually witness is apt to strike them as a basically decent, rather ordinary woman, able to accept guidance from her son and willing to mend her ways.¹⁹

Readings of the play have tended to account for Hamlet's description of his mother by seeing the hero as projecting male anxieties (about widows, about sexuality, about the power of women generally) upon his mother, again with reference to contemporary discourses that typify the mature woman in terms of corruption and lust.²⁰ This analysis is often linked with the ascription to such figures of a dramatic function that tends to associate feminine freedom with disaster. Lisa Jardine describes as a critical given that 'it is the male characters who perceive free

¹⁸ Kehler, 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet*', p. 403.

¹⁹ Kehler, 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet*', p. 407.

²⁰ See, for example, Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 128.

choice on the part of the female character as an inevitable sign of irrational lust, and as the inevitable prelude to disorder and disaster.²¹

It would appear, then, that any critical assessment of the relations between mother and son in this play would find itself working with two crucial elements of construction. First, the gap — that Bradley tried to bridge — between what the mother appears to be and what her son says she is, presents a problem for critics, directors and actors who have to justify readings of the play which depend to an extent upon speculative recourse to either historical or psychoanalytic contexts. Secondly, the problem is associated with a perceived disjunction in narrative structure; the mother is crucial to the successful operation of narrative while at the same time, if we accept Eliot's position, unequal to it as she is written.

I wish to take both these problems together to suggest that *Hamlet* is one of a number of Jacobean tragedies which develop complex narrative strategies to establish a conflict by setting the ideal against what is realised through dramatic action, so that the disjunction that was perceived by Eliot as a failure is in fact the very subject of the drama. This is the dynamic identified by Dollimore in Jacobean tragedy:

it eschews the kind of structure which effaces conflict by formally resolving it; instead the play's structure incorporates and intensifies the sense of social and political dislocation which is its subject.²²

Tragedy, for Dollimore, occurs at this point of dislocation. For Elizabethan dramatists, the Senecan and Aristotelian models of drama predominate, focussing upon a heroic crisis, and the effects of catharsis. In these later plays, however, tragedy is produced out of theatre itself, it becomes the effect of a disjunction between what we know as spectators and what we are told, and the impossibility of reconciliation between conflicting experiences. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, quoting Walter Benjamin's assertion that in *Hamlet*, 'the generality of its time is not mythical but spectral. It is intimately bound up with the mirror nature of the play', characterises this as the breakdown of an allegorical schema:

In the face of such power, the total or totalizing world of 'beautiful' syntheses breaks into fragments. It is the endless fragmentation of allegory as frozen portrait of horror, as enactment of an ultimate difference which displays a world of ruins.²³

²¹ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 72.

²² Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 29.

For Buci-Glucksmann, the effect of fragmentation occurs in drama as the consequence of a conjunction of the aesthetic with the metaphysical:

Allegory thus consigns reality to a permanent antinomy, a game of the illusion of reality as illusion, where the world is at once valued and devalued. Hence the peculiar seductiveness of the baroque: the primacy of the aesthetic — of appearance and play — joins up with metaphysical wretchedness on the ground of grief or melancholy. The metaphor of the world as theatre expresses this specific temporality ... but the gulf between reality and illusion cannot be bridged: theatre now *knows* itself to be theatre.²⁴

As I have made clear throughout this thesis, the allegory embedded in the stage appearance of the mother figure is crucial to determining her meaning. In *Hamlet*, as Adelman points out, the traditional duality is fundamental to the hero's construction of his mother.²⁵ In the case of Gertrude (in all extant versions of the play) her meanings are, in fact, irreconcilable in terms of a three-way tension between what a traditional, idealist reading might wish to make of the dramatised mother, the maternal utterances of the stage figure, and her son's construction of her for most of the first three acts, in the context of a play which draws attention to itself as artifice.

Claudius' opening speech in I.2 of the play confirms what has already been made visible to an audience by the heralded procession of the entire court on to the stage. His immediate affirmation of Gertrude as Queen, 'Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state', is separated by four lines expressing the ambivalent circumstances in which the union has taken place, from his description of her as 'wife' and the important addition that the court has approved the marriage. It is Hamlet's aside, 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' (65) and his ambiguous response to his mother's remonstrance that death is inevitable, 'Ay, madam, it is common' (74) that begins to undermine the stability which has been established both visually and rhetorically in the opening moments of the scene. Hamlet's brief verbal interjections are either comments addressed directly to his mother, or pointed references to his own status as a royal son. Embedded in this first scene, then, is a tension that will inform the entire play: that between Gertrude's role as Claudius' Queen

²³ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: the aesthetics of modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London, Sage, 1994. I am indebted to Brian Dillon for drawing my attention to the significance of this work for my argument.

²⁴ Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, p. 71.

²⁵ 'The alternatives that govern the imagination of his mother's body are the familiar ones of virgin and whore, closed or open, wholly pure or wholly corrupt.' Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 19.

and her role as Hamlet's mother. Most simply this can be read as a version of the romantic trope which pits wifedom against maternity, offering the edifying moral spectacle of a woman struggling between her desires and duties, as in the plays about Patient Griselda discussed in Chapter 4. But unlike Griselda, Gertrude is never shown to articulate that struggle, so that the play, rather than being *about* that struggle, uses the struggle itself to engage with the preoccupations of the tragedy, especially the working out of the revenge trope through the psychic crises of the hero.

In this scene, Gertrude's attempts at a kind of maternal intimacy with Hamlet are confined to brief exchanges, circumscribed by longer controlling speeches in which Claudius takes control of both the substance of discussion between mother and son, and of the pacing of the scene, interrupting dialogue between Hamlet and his mother with his own extended answers.²⁶ In this way, a disturbing dynamic is set up which reveals Gertrude's position as doubly complex. Her politically consolidating position as Queen, so clearly described in Claudius' opening speech, and Hamlet's obvious antipathy to it makes it necessary for her to reconcile the demands of both family and state:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. (68-69)

Throughout the scene, maternal solicitude sits uneasily alongside the demands of Gertrude's role as 'imperial jointress', which is again complicated by the fact that she is Claudius' wife. Her plea 'Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. /I pray thee stay with us' (118-9) combines the royal pronoun with the singular emotions of a parent; the plural pronoun itself operating complicatedly to refer to the married couple, Claudius and Gertrude, as well as to Denmark.

It is impossible for an audience to read Gertrude here, beyond what I have said. As a character, her speech offers no more clues; as a figure she is overburdened with the competing typological demands of Queen, wife, widow and mother. It is left to Hamlet to construct for us a single narrative line, developed during the soliloquy that follows the exit of the court from the stage. Without the complicating stage presence of his mother and the multiple meanings that her visibility generates, her son can re-cast her in simpler terms by referring to conventional and familiar images of the remarried widow:

²⁶ See, for example Claudius interruption at line 87, "'Tis sweet and commendable ...' or later at line 121, 'Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.'

Must I remember? Why she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on; and yet within a month-
 Let me not think on't; frailty thy name is woman-
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body
 Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she-
 O god, a beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer — married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
 She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets. (143-7)

The ideas informing this speech, the hints about untrammelled lustiness, false tears and deception, 'frailty', are redolent of traditional and conventional antifeminism, offering no reference to the Queen's complex situation as exhibited in the scene that has just passed. Hamlet's speech constructs an account of the Queen as worthy of blame, and sets her against a version of her earlier self where his father's love and protection kept her chaste.²⁷ But it is important to recognise that this speech is also an articulation of profound grief. Hamlet's expression of personal misery resorts to the use of traditional typology here and begins the establishment of a conventional pattern of revenge which is typical of a Jacobean reconstitution of the revenge genre. It is a dramatic structure which brings together metaphysics and dramaturgy:

Shakespeare, like Marston, explores the way in which the disintegrating effects of grief are resisted not through Christian or Stoic renunciation of society, but a commitment to revenge — a vengeful re-engagement with the society and those responsible for that grief. As in Marston, it is a society which has fallen into radical disharmony.²⁸

²⁷ Adelman suggests that Gertrude's sexual and maternal meanings were thus 'contained' by her former husband's protective control. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 20.

²⁸ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 40. Dollimore is writing about *Troilus and Cressida*, but his remarks apply equally to this play. 1.2 of *Hamlet* indicates this disharmony through the dynamics of rhetoric and

Hamlet's commitment to revenge, and his articulation of grief, once avowed on stage, colours an audience's subsequent response to Gertrude in ensuing scenes of the play. The typologising of his mother contributes to the revenge schema, but an audience is aware of a simultaneous narrative — that the Gertrude he describes is different from the Gertrude who has just left the stage — so that there are two competing readings of her — the audience's and her son's.

This conflict that she embodies is reinforced in a tension between what she says and how she appears on the stage. She is consistently presented as companion to the king, their entrances always part of a court ceremony usually heralded by a flourish; thus she is primarily visible as an adjunct to the functioning of State and public matters. But there is always a gap between the political power exhibited by the full representation of the court and the personal subject matter that is Gertrude's only topic — both her brief exchanges with Polonius and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern demonstrate her personal concern to discover what it is that is hurting her son. In contrast to this, Claudius, surrounded by his court, appears only to pay lip service to the personal; there is always a sense in which his enquiries are political, in the way that he ensures that what should be intimate matters are inappropriately discussed publicly, as in his ceremonial welcome to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where he discusses Hamlet's 'transformation' (2.2). Gertrude's maternal solicitude is thus doubly contextualised; first because her personal anxieties are displayed only as public (or semi-public, if we are to consider them as articulated *sotto voce* or as asides) and so visibly inappropriate, and secondly because she is, as Claudius' wife, linked in with both the consequences of fratricide and treason, and simultaneously, as Hamlet's mother, associated with her son's desire for revenge.

Circumscribing all this is a sense of her powerlessness, both in the narrative — her lack of knowledge of the circumstances of her late husband's death — and dramatically in her inability to speak personally and privately to her son, the theatrical impossibility of breaking away from Claudius so that she can discover for herself, rather than through political agents, the cause of her son's malady. Gertrude's relentlessly public function as Queen disallows her personal role as mother; thus she is forced to delegate, ordering servants to lead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern offstage 'to visit / My too much changèd son' (36), or seeing off her husband and Polonius to spy upon her son in a moment of private meditation (159-68).

It is possible to argue here that both queenliness and motherhood become conditions of abjection in Gertrude, both in the sense that this describes 'a state of misery and degradation'

dramaturgy as I have described them here; by choosing to constitute his mother as a type of lusty widow, the son begins the dynamic towards revenge which will consolidate and be given proper narrative focus when the Ghost appears later.

which builds upon the meaning of 'abject' as 'degraded, self-abasing', and in Kristeva's development of the term: 'I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other', and to connect this construction of an abject mother figure to Dollimore's argument, cited earlier, in particular.²⁹ In the 'closet scene' (3.4) Gertrude, on stage for the first time without her husband, is able to summon her son to her chambers, potentially acquiring a kind of dramatic and rhetorical authority and autonomy that has been previously denied her.³⁰

The importance of Gertrude's personal relationship to her son in this scene is emphasised by Hamlet's call from within: 'Mother, Mother, Mother.' His calling of her offers a tantalising brief glimpse of the comforts of maternal authority and filial intimacy and then disallows them when Gertrude's first words, 'Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended' appear almost to shrink back from motherhood, placing her foremost as a wife and, insofar as she is referring to the public play performance that disturbed Claudius, as Queen. The stichomythia which characterise the initial exchange between mother and son offer first a discomfiting parallel of utterance between them, and then the lines break up to destabilise the very over-identification present at the beginning of the exchange. Meaning here is constructed through a rhetorical patterning, which indicates first Hamlet's insistence upon identifying Gertrude as primarily his mother before demonstrating the impossibility of that status. The exchange culminates in a telling revelation of the incompatibility between the meanings that Gertrude embodies:

²⁹ The definitions are from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ninth edition, ed. Della Thompson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 3. The essay by Kristeva to which I refer is, of course, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982. The quotation is from p. 2.

³⁰ The sense of this encounter taking place in a private space is constructed, as I suggest, through rhetoric, convention and dramaturgy and also through the furnishings indicated in the text, a place to sit, 'Come, come, and sit you down,' (line 19) and pictures. The presence of portraits of Old Hamlet and Claudius (if we take them to be wall-hung and not miniatures) seem to indicate that the space is intended to be seen as more personal. Catherine Richardson has pointed out that portraits were most usually found in chambers and parlours in the late sixteenth century, functioning as part of a construction of the private self as opposed to the public person. More public displays were likely to exist in halls in the form of the exhibition of arms. Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, forthcoming, 2005. The visual effect of both portraits (if this is how they are presented in performance) would enhance their significance in terms of Adelman's argument that whatever Hamlet's original intentions in approaching his mother in 3.4, 'his most immediate need ... is to force her to acknowledge the difference between the two fathers.' Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 22.

Hamlet:

Now, Mother, what's the matter?

Queen:

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet:

Mother, you have my father much offended.

Queen:

Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

Hamlet:

Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

Queen:

Why, how now, Hamlet?

Hamlet:

What's the matter now?

Queen:

Have you forgot me?

Hamlet:

No, by the rood, not so!

You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,

And, would it were not so, you are my mother. (3.4.9-17)

Gertrude seems to deny herself a voice, 'Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak', allowing her son to take both rhetorical and physical control of the scene: 'Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge' (18).³¹ Hamlet then sets before her the metaphorical 'glass' in which she will be made to see herself in terms of what Kristeva calls 'the shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery'; she is talked at, more or less, until she is forced to admit to her own repugnance.³² In Q1, she can only interject into his accusations with pleas to him to 'speak no

³¹ Q1 is unique in containing a description given by Hamlet's mother of his behaviour in the closet scene: 'But then he throwes and tosses me about, / As one forgetting that I was his mother' though whether this should be read as a kind of retrospective stage direction, or as the reformed Gertrude exaggerating her account of Hamlet's madness to convince the King is difficult to ascertain. Q1, 4.1, 2554-6.

³² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2. It is at this point that Polonius is killed, so that the whole of the ensuing scene is enacted in the presence of the dead body of Claudius's closest adviser. This visible reminder that

more', though both other texts allow her rather more to say, to express a sort of indignation, to attempt an assertion of self, 'What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?' which quickly breaks down before the torrent of her son's abuse:

O Hamlet, speak no more,
 Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
 And there I see such black and grained spots
 As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.89-92)

Her son's immediate response,

Nay, but to live
 In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
 Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
 Over the nasty sty ... (3.4.92-5)³³

refigures Gertrude in terms of bestiality and filth, her femininity only significant as a kind of malign debasement, which threatens to contaminate all that comes close. Here, to continue to use Kristeva's discussion of abjection, the feminine,

precisely on account of its power, does not succeed in differentiating itself as *other* but threatens *one's own and clean self*, which is the underpinning of any organisation constituted by exclusions and hierarchies.³⁴

Rhetorically (symbolically and formally) both united and opposed at the beginning of this scene, Hamlet and his mother engage in a kind of transformative ritual, that, as it plays out, enables

Claudius is thus diminished underpins the change in the relationship between Hamlet and his mother that is being worked through here.

³³ Kristeva's comment that 'The abject confronts us ... with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*' is interesting here. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 12.

³⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 65. Here she is discussing the analysis of Georges Bataille who discusses the abject in connection with what she calls 'the logic of prohibition'. Kristeva develops Bataille's analysis to link it specifically to the production of mother as object.

Hamlet to proceed in his movement towards revenge.³⁵ The abjection of the maternal here provokes Gertrude's capitulation, which in turn brings about the release of intense emotion in Hamlet. The seated mother figure, undermined and rendered more or less speechless, is rhetorically made the locus of all that is literally rotten in the State of Denmark, her private room a place where Hamlet is able to express freely the grief that cannot properly be articulated in public.

In this scene Gertrude operates at the conjunction between the idealist and realist modes of mimesis described by Dollimore, as a mother and queen whose over-determined symbolic function is played out alongside a representation of familial intimacy that appeals to an understanding of the personal, emotional dynamics of the mother-son relationship. This dynamic gains ground as the scene proceeds, and the exchanges between mother and son become more intimate, particularly after the intervention of the Ghost: 'How is it with you, lady? / Alas, how is't with you?' (106-7). But it also increases in verbal violence until Gertrude can no longer contain her conflicting roles and her broken, abject cry 'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!' is in clear contrast to his overwhelming control of her, 'I must be cruel only to be kind'.³⁶ Reading the scene from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Adelman notes that 'female sexuality in Hamlet is always maternal sexuality' and that only when its threat has been removed and she has thrown away 'the worser part' can the mother and son refigure their relationship (148).³⁷

But in throwing off her partnership with Claudius, Gertrude is simultaneously separating herself from the political and dynastic role that went with it. 'Denmark' worked doubly as metonymy for the King and the State in the first scene of the play ('let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark' (1.2.69)) and in relinquishing the worser part, Gertrude is also repudiating the 'something rotten' (1.4.67) at the core of the State. Assured of his mother's reform, Hamlet is able to restore her in his imagination (and in the play) as an ideal of mother love and, ultimately, maternal sacrifice. Having separated her from the rotten State, he can excise the rot, personified by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, those courtier 'sponges' that soak up 'the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities' (4.2.14-15) and dispose of it away from Denmark. Thus a purifying action on a wider scale which will culminate in the bloody revenge at the end of the play begins here with Hamlet's killing of the corrupt old statesman and his separation of Gertrude from her public and sexual functions as Claudius's wife. Hamlet, in reasserting a proper relationship with

³⁵ See Adelman: 'the main psychological task that Hamlet seems to set himself is not to avenge his father's death but to re-make his mother'. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 31.

³⁶ *Hamlet*, 3.4, lines 158 and 179

³⁷ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pp. 27 and 32.

his mother, is able to re-make himself in new terms as an avenging son. Gertrude, in all versions of the play, is stripped of competing allegiances and reworked in terms that recreate a traditional and unproblematic ideal.

VI.ii: Volumnia

Gertrude is forced to the point where she has to make a personal choice between conflicting claims upon her. The competing ideals of motherhood in terms of the responsibilities as a wife, motherhood in terms of responsibility as a subject of a State and motherhood in terms of responsibilities to the child, pull her three ways, and, made aware that she cannot contain all of them, Hamlet's mother acquiesces to her son. In *Coriolanus* the maternal is configured to a similar model, in that the play acknowledges competing ideological constructions of maternity, and tests them in a similar narrative shift towards consideration of the mother's influence upon the character and motivation of her son. There is a difference in the way this is structured, though, so that whereas in *Hamlet* there is a clarification and re-negotiation of the mother's role in the drive towards a satisfactory working out of the revenge plot, *Coriolanus* creates tragedy by exposing jarring disjunctions between conflicting versions of what motherhood might mean, in a play which concludes by raising political questions about the relations between State and subject, by reference to the depiction of the relationship between the hero and his mother.

In the Introduction to a recent edition, Lee Bliss has suggested that 'for much of the play's history [Volumnia] has been seen as an ideal', citing Sir William Cornwallis, writing in 1601 of his regret at a contemporary lack of 'hardiness' in mothers, who in tougher times might have put their sons' glory before their safety.³⁸ Sir William's ideal mother positions her at the service of the State and sees her function in terms of its political value.³⁹ It is this version of motherhood which informed Shakespeare's representation of Margaret of Anjou who, it was argued in Chapter 3, excites both horror at her lack of 'natural' maternity in her abuse of York, and admiration for her championship and loyalty to her own son.⁴⁰ In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare

³⁸ Lee Bliss, Ed., *Coriolanus*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare series, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 48. All subsequent references to the play will be taken from this volume unless otherwise stated.

³⁹ Volumnia was a popular example of ideal maternity for this reason in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century England, but as Bliss points out, the play was often re-written or altered in production in order to ensure that she could be unproblematically celebrated. See Bliss, ed., *Coriolanus*, pp. 71-5.

⁴⁰ This response is acknowledged by Coppelia Kahn, in a discussion of Plutarch's *The Sayings of Spartan Women*; 'the implied reader is expected to shudder at but nonetheless admire' such women. She

revisits the idea of the ‘hardy’ patriotic mother, but this time to explore the implications of such maternity for her child.

For the First Citizen there is not necessarily a direct link between pleasing Volumnia and pleasing the country as he sets out alternative explanations for Coriolanus’s valour: ‘Though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother and to be partly proud, which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue’ (1.1.28-30). By placing ‘country’ and ‘mother’ in the same sentence, Shakespeare makes an association between them which distinguishes a patrician understanding of motherhood as associated with patriotism from the Citizen’s plebeian reading of the two as separate and indeed unconnected. Volumnia is similarly subject to competing readings. To her patrician associates she is a ‘noble lady’ (3.2.70) whose dedication to the country she calls ‘our Rome’ (2.1.176) is at one with her dedication to her son. Her role is highly public and political — apart from the first scene in which she appears, her interlocutors are male, and her conversations take place in the civic arena, away from the domestic spaces that Coriolanus’s wife, Virgilia, prefers to inhabit. Sicinius, on the other hand, thinks that she is ‘mad’ (4.2.11), which, whether meaning furious or insane, suggests a mother out of the control of reason. This tension between these versions of Volumnia — the patriot mother and the mad mother — creates one of a series of disjunctions in which competing claims upon the maternal offer an organising framework for a dramatic dynamic which creates its tragedy out of incompatibilities and contradictions.

This dynamic is evident in the first scene in which Volumnia appears. It opens with an emblem of iconic femininity, the wife and the mother as one in domestic harmony:

Enter Volumnia and Virgilia, mother and wife to Martius. They set them down on two low stools and sew (1.3).

Such needlework scenes had emblematic value signifying ‘virtue in temporal life’, and tended to celebrate a commendable feminine withdrawal into private and domestic space. The necessary stance involved — seated, head bowed — is essentially modest; the idea of productive work is commendable in both Catholic and Protestant constructions of ideal femininity, and is associated

acknowledges the contradictions in representations of mothers in wartime: ‘the interaction between mothering and warmaking has a social and literary history that begins in ancient Greece: typically it is oppositional, hierarchical and complementary.’ See Coppelia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 145-6.

with quietitude as the woman is absorbed in her work.⁴¹ What an audience hears in this scene, however, conflicts with what it sees — the emblem and the rhetoric operating an opposition that jars against convention and forces attention upon the disjunction it presents. Volumnia opens the scene by speaking in garrulous prose which in itself implies a kind of crudity (the only previous prose speakers in the play have been citizens) when set against the elegance of the pentameter spoken by the patricians and the tribunes in the preceding scenes, and which conflicts with the visual image of a high-class Roman matron. What she actually says furthers the disjunction between what she appears to be and what she speaks — a mother, presiding over a domestic activity, who repudiates the ‘comeliness’ of her ‘tender-bodied’ son, and celebrates instead his warlike manliness (1.3.3-5). But the most extreme dislocation happens when she shifts into verse to imagine her son in action. Amidst the rituals of domestic life — sewing, having female visitors to the home: ‘Madam, the Lady Valeria is come to visit you’ (1.3.21) — Volumnia realises rhetorically a scenario which has no place in such a setting:

Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
 ‘Come on you cowards! You were got in fear,
 Though you were born in Rome.’ His bloody brow
 With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes,
 Like to a harvestman that’s tasked to mow
 Or all or lose his hire. (1.3.27-32)

Both visual and rhetorical narratives are disrupted as Volumnia not only breaks decorum to imitate her son’s gestures and battle cry, but also shatters the visual composition of the emblematic sewing scene by physically stamping as she assumes the imagined actions of her battling son. The effect is a queasy merging of mother, son and wife (‘If my son were my husband’ 1.3.2) as Volumnia’s absorption in her role implies a connection so intimate with his masculine, martial life, that her son’s actual wife is reduced to the status of spectator, only able to react in fright and horror to the story that her mother-in-law acts out before her.⁴² For Lee Bliss this suggests that Volumnia has a ‘curiously abstract’ idea of her son, ‘identical with the one

⁴¹ Martha Hester Fleischer, *Iconography of the English History Play*, Salzburg, Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974, p. 117.

⁴² As Coppelia Kahn has noted: ‘The play dislodges “mother” as a representational category ... making it a contestable term that cannot be placed securely on either side of a male/female, public/private, warmaking/mothering binarism.’ Kahn, *Warriors, Wounds and Women*, p. 147.

function for which she bred him; hence the man and his reputation are interchangeable.⁴³ Certainly her words suggest this. But the effect of her combined words and gestures — of her vocally and rhetorically becoming her son here suggests the opposite, a total absorption in his physical and emotional self: the desire to embody him.⁴⁴

There is a jarring bringing together of the domestic and the martial which is so extreme that its effect is darkly comic when Volumnia's most violent juxtapositioning of images is contained within the undisturbed and unremarkable rituals of domestic hospitality:

The breasts of Hecuba,
 When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier
 Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
 At Grecian sword, contemning. Tell Valeria
 We are fit to bid her welcome. (1.3.35-9)⁴⁵

Valeria's exclamation on entering: 'you are manifest housekeepers. What are you sewing here? A fine spot, in good faith. How does your little son?' (1.3.46-8) disturbs especially because it is an eruption of the ordinary into the extraordinary. But the return to domesticity is incomplete as the new guest brings a story of Volumnia's grandson killing a butterfly, recounted as the women prepare to visit a 'good lady that lies in' (1.3.70).

Volumnia is contrasted in the scene with her daughter-in-law who presents a conventional version of wifhood and maternity, anxious about her husband, affectionate and practical in relation to her young son. In terms of contemporary discourses about motherhood, Virgilia is an appropriately modest and industrious wife and mother, which raises the problem of how an audience is supposed to read Volumnia against her. The figure of the patriotic hardy mother and that of the dangerous mad mother are situated along a continuum which is juxtaposed

⁴³ Bliss, ed., *Coriolanus*, Introduction, p. 49.

⁴⁴ The degree of her intimacy with her son's body is revealed in 2.1.119-29 when she and Menenius enumerate his scars. Of course she is assessing their effectiveness in his application for a place in the Senate here; nevertheless the effect of the extent of her knowledge blurs the distinction between what she knows for political reasons, and what is excessive maternal intimacy, a point exacerbated by the silent presence of his wife — who should know his body but says nothing — throughout the dialogue.

⁴⁵ Kahn offers a wonderful analysis of Volumnia's words here, particularly in her discussion of the site of Hector's wound, which means, Kahn says, that Volumnia nursed her son 'in contempt, as it were, of erotic options'. Kahn, *Warriors, Wounds and Women*, p. 151.

against a model of contemporary domesticity, a celebration of ordinariness, where Volumnia's worrying boast that her grandson would 'rather see the swords and hear a drum than look upon his schoolmaster' is at odds with prevailing notions which stress education rather than martial prowess as a means by which a man might serve his country. Writing later in James's reign Dorothy Leigh makes clear her own understanding of a maternal obligation to ensure that her children learn as part of their training as good and useful citizens:

I am further also to entreate you, that all your Children may bee taught to reade, beginning at foure yeeres old or before, and let them learne till ten, in which time they are not able to doe any good in the Commonwealth, but to learn how to serve GOD, their King and Country, by reading.⁴⁶

This is not to make a crude point about the similarities between dramatic discourse and the very different form of the advice books, but rather to raise the question of Volumnia's representation and whether her maternity is to be understood — at this point in the play — as malevolent or heroic. An answer might be that in the breaking of decorum there is a kind of theatrical heroism about a character that evokes a thrill by a dangerous defiance of convention. But simultaneously, in the story, the mother who refutes maternity for a vicarious delight in slaughter, signals tragedy. The tensions embodied by Volumnia — the widow who impersonates a butchering soldier, the high-born matron who speaks like a plebeian, the mother who repudiates conventional maternal feelings — engender a sense of the impossibility of reconciliation or of containment. This construction of motherhood is one that refuses traditional meanings, and by doing so prepares the narrative for a hero who is always driven away from the maternal.

There is a third reading of Volumnia in the play, which complicates those described above. Just as Hamlet rhetorically constructs a version of his mother that seems at odds with what an audience sees, so, in opposite terms, does Coriolanus in this play. At their first encounter, his reaction is both affectionate and respectful, his exclamation 'O!' when he sees her implying tender recognition (2.2.143). He imagines her praying on his behalf — 'You have, I know, petitioned all the gods / For my prosperity' — which is presumably understood with a certain amount of irony by an audience, given what they know. What is impossible to discern from the text, of course, is the intended tenor of Coriolanus's delivery of the line, which can either imply

⁴⁶ Dorothy Leigh, 'The Mother's Blessing' excerpted in Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osbourne, *Lay by Your Needles, Ladies, Take the Pen: Writing Women in England, 1500-1700*, London, Arnold, 1997, p. 110.

an uncomplicated appreciation of his mother's concern, or a knowing acknowledgement of her political ambitions. Certainly, later in the scene, he understands and dismisses his mother's plans: 'Know, good mother, / I had rather be their servant in my way / Than sway with them in theirs' (2.2.177-9) in a manner which suggests that he is aware of her motives. Whichever, his affectionate and informal treatment of both his wife and mother ('Your hand, and yours' (2.2.168)) suggests that he appreciates them in terms of the traditional domestic roles which were implied at the beginning of the 'sewing scene' discussed above. He approves his wife's modesty: 'My gracious silence' (2.1.148); and certainly, the spectacle here, the hero welcomed by the maid, the wife and the mother, situates Coriolanus — at this point in the play — in terms of an implied rich, domestic, personal world. There is an irony here in the disjunction between what Coriolanus appears to understand by what he sees and what that means to him, and what an audience already knows about his mother's preference to 'rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour' (1.2.3) and thus what the three women signify.⁴⁷ Janet Adelman acknowledges the significance of the insufficiency of motherhood in her assertion that '*Coriolanus* begins in the landscape of maternal deprivation' and there is a sense of that in this scene, where the rather traditional and ordinary domestic aspirations of the hero appear to be unmatched by an audience's experience of the play thus far.⁴⁸

Such aspirations are only half realised, however. A sense of the unattainability of 'home' as a signifier of domestic content for Coriolanus permeates the text, as the hero is always precipitated away from the private into public action: 'Ere in our own house I do shade my head / The good patricians must be visited' (2.2.169-70). As in the first part of *Hamlet*, the mother is only available in public spaces. But, unlike Gertrude who constantly tried to solicit information about Hamlet's private state of mind, Volumnia, seems not to desire — or to recognise the absence of — an intimate understanding of her son. The turning point of *Hamlet*, the point at which he can start to 'set it right', is the moment at which he is able to negotiate a new relationship with his mother in the intimacy of a private space. But Coriolanus is always driven back into the public arena. Home is merely the place for the briefest of unwilling retreats after the

⁴⁷ This scene of welcome is, of course, paralleled at the end of the play when the same trio visit him to plead for the safety of Rome. The visual trope of the three women recalls, of course, the visit of the three Marys to the tomb of Christ, and its typological reworking in medieval depictions of birth, where the mother is accompanied by both a nurse and a midwife, and of death, where three women conventionally attend to the laying out of a corpse.

⁴⁸ Adelman makes a link between the preoccupations of the play and the food shortages in England in 1607. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 147.

first fight with the plebeians — ‘I prithee, noble friend, home to thy house’ (3.1.236) — and a place which offers little sanctuary in the eyes of his enemies: ‘We’ll hear no more / pursue him to his house, and pluck him thence’ (3.1.314-5). At the heart of this play, as in *Hamlet*, there is a confrontation between mother and son, but here the house offers no opportunity, and Volumnia creates no space, for intimacy within the family home. She sends her son back out into the city (‘Go and be ruled’ (3.2.91)) with the full force of patrician approbation behind her.

This scene offers almost the obverse of the ‘closet scene’ in *Hamlet*. In *Coriolanus* the mother refuses to offer either intimacy or sanctuary. Coriolanus has to force her attention — ‘I talk of you’ (3.2.14) — on a crowded stage where the mother’s presence and thus her significance is visually foregrounded because she is the only woman present. This arrangement of figures on the stage — soldiers, patricians and the mother — signifies the potential for intimacy between mother and son, even as the dialogue makes clear that there will be no opportunity for such intimacy. Jonathan Dollimore says that ‘what Volumnia signifies here is not motherhood so much as socialisation’, and in her consistently public role, as well as what she says and does in this scene, this is certainly true.⁴⁹ But by dint of who she is, she also signifies motherhood, and it is again a tension between what she signifies as a mother and what she means in terms of this story that jars both for an audience and for Coriolanus, whose bewilderment at her determination to override his concerns for the sake of office is clear: ‘Why force you this?’ (3.2.53). What happens between mother and son here is a kind of contest of wills based, as Dollimore points out, upon a conflict between Volumnia’s understanding of *virtus* ‘not as essence but as political strategy’ and her son’s essentialism: an uneven contest because, as he says, ‘it is she who has nurtured Coriolanus in his essentialist consciousness.’⁵⁰ Volumnia quickly gets the upper hand. As in *Hamlet*, this central confrontation with the mother is pivotal in determining the outcome of the plot, but here, rather than facilitating resolution, the scene, in Dollimore’s words ‘generates both for and in *Coriolanus* the tensions which will break him.’⁵¹

What Coriolanus finds particularly difficult is his mother’s insistence upon a kind of duplicity. Her argument that policy requires him to ‘dissemble’ to the citizens is at odds with his own understanding of honour in terms of truthful representation:

Would you have me
False to my nature? Rather say I play

⁴⁹ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 220.

⁵⁰ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 218.

⁵¹ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 219.

The man I am. (3.2.15-7)

Volumnia uses the language of maternal familiarity to her son, but as an aspect of policy, in public and to public and political ends. She chides him, cajoles him, obliterates any distinction between Coriolanus's domestic life and public reputation — 'I am in this / Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles' (3.2.66) — and infantilises him:

I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said
 My praises made thee first a soldier, so
 To have my praise for this, perform a part,
 Thou hast not done before. (3.2.108-11)

Coriolanus is doubly diminished: Volumnia's words recall for an audience the childhood she evoked in the 'sewing scene', and at the same time reduce him in this scene to the status of a child. She maintains that infantilisation in a way that proffers the succour of continued attachment to the mother, but which also threatens rejection: 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me, / But own thy pride thyself' (3.2.130-1). Volumnia both consoles and warns here, first asserting intimacy in the image of the baby at the breast, and then threatening separation, in her differentiation of her qualities from his.

Volumnia uses the idea of 'play' repeatedly in her efforts to persuade Coriolanus, and he uses the word when referring to her for comments upon his actions.⁵² In the quotation above, she has, she implies, taught him his warrior qualities through play, just as she attempts to persuade a new performance from him in peacetime. She offers a double-edged performance of policy in this scene, simultaneously demonstrating to Coriolanus how to persuade the citizens, while persuading him to do as she asks. As she teaches him to plead with his knee 'bussing the stones', assuring him that 'in such business / Action is eloquence, and the eyes of th'ignorant / more learnèd than the ears' (3.2.76-8), she is prefiguring her own actions before him at the end of the play, when she will be a more consistent and persuasive performer than he. In the practice and demonstration of policy in this scene, Volumnia is rehearsing the scenario that will destroy her son at the end of the play, even as she offers the advice which should create a new identity for him. Volumnia's gift to Coriolanus is also his destruction; her love has an integral greed to it, as Janet Adelman finds:

⁵² Alexander Leggatt draws attention to the way in which Volumnia coaches her son in play-acting. See Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Political Drama*, London, Routledge, 1988, p. 193.

A cannibalistic mother who denies food and yet feeds on the victories of her sweet son stands at the darkest centre of the play, where Coriolanus's oral vulnerability is fully defined. Here talion law reigns: the feeding infant himself will be devoured; the loving mother becomes the devourer. In this dark world love itself is primitive and dangerous ... to be loved is to be eaten.'⁵³

This engulfing maternity, which insists upon its pre-eminence, and appropriates even the child's physical actions — 'Go to them with this bonnet in thy hand' — is inescapable in this scene, where the patricians and the nobles likewise insist that Volumnia is right in her demonstration that 'Action is eloquence' (3.2.77). In *Hamlet*, the hero was able to transform the power of the maternal when he made his mother recognise his difference from her and from 'Denmark' so that she was forced to acknowledge his new, separate authority: with her abject, defeated question, 'what shall I do?' (*Hamlet* 3.4.164). Coriolanus is instead forced to cede authority to the combined demands of his mother and the State, when he similarly asks, defeated: 'What must I do?' (3.2.37) in an acknowledgement that he has no separate individualised authority. His efforts to return his mother to a more traditional relationship within the intended family structure, 'Commend me to my wife' (3.3.136), are inadequate in the fact of his capitulation to her; even as he tries to refigure the link between mother and son, his capitulation is made clear.⁵⁴

The emphasis upon play as both a way of constructing identity and a way of pleasing mother builds upon the image of the small boy mutilating a butterfly in 1.3.52-8 and links the child's play with the man's violence in battle; as Volumnia says: 'One on's father's moods' (1.3.59). The scenario, in which the child's apparent independent action is circumscribed by the surveillance of the watching woman (Valeria stands in for the maternal here) offers an image of Coriolanus's predicament. On his victorious return from Corioli, the hero has, as Janet Adelman says, experienced a kind of rebirth — a renewal on his own terms:

'the assault on Corioli is ... a rebirth ... the fantasy of self authorship is complete when Coriolanus is given his new name, earned by his own actions.'⁵⁵

⁵³ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 158. Adelman is here analogising from Menenius's characterisation of Rome as an unnatural mother who consumes her own in III.i.296-9.

⁵⁴ Coppelia Kahn notes that because Volumnia is so closely identified in the play with every aspect of her son's identity 'any social recognition of Coriolanus as a man, warrior or civic leader also re-inscribes him as her nursling.' Kahn, *Warriors, Wounds and Women*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 152

But such self-authorship, such apparent independence of action, is compromised in at least two ways. First, the audience has seen Volumnia ‘ghosting’ her son’s battle actions, taking them on as her own, thus dramatically creating a link between her son’s martial attainments and her own victory. Secondly, despite Coriolanus allocating his mother a traditional role in his family when he returns following the battle, he cannot sustain the authority over her that he initially claims. There is no escape from the mother’s control in the Rome to which her maternity is bound.⁵⁶

Battle offers a temporary retreat, however, away from Rome and from Volumnia and into the world of play which so absorbed Coriolanus’s son in his attack on the butterfly. The companionship of war offers a male environment where, for Coriolanus, the mother has no place, though the audience, having seen Volumnia’s account of his actions, is aware of a kind of surveillance from a distance, so that his actions are circumscribed by our understanding of her approval. Coriolanus’s deadly war games work as ‘playing’ does in Isobel Armstrong’s formulation, in which it offers the opportunity for separation from the mother:

A mode of release from, not a fetishistic encounter with the mother’s body, not at the mercy of the mother’s functions, but attentive to its experiences, moving from continuity to contiguity, to non-omnipotent relations and to the re-negotiation of boundaries.⁵⁷

The problem for Coriolanus is that such a release is illusory. He returns from Corioli confident that his victory and re-naming have reworked boundaries to relegate the maternal to its traditional role, but as he approaches Rome and his mother, the former configuration is reasserted and he is

⁵⁶ The close ties between an idea of Rome in Shakespeare’s plays, and that of a pervasive and cannibalistic motherhood was explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Rome is nowhere personified in this play as it is in *Titus Andronicus*, but Volumnia is the champion of the city, embroiled in its civic and political affairs, donating her maternal body and her maternal care to raising her son as a champion for the city’s defence. Yi-Fu Tuan has characterised ‘the city’ as a symbol of ‘transcendental and man-made order as against the chaotic forces of terrestrial and infernal nature’ and of ‘an ideal human community’ and Volumnia’s Rome aspires to both. Two natural, uncivilised forces threaten the city: the uncivilised vengeance of Coriolanus, a ‘thing of blood’, and the starvation of the plebeians, and both are provoked by the patricians. See Alan R.H. Baker ‘Introduction: on ideology and landscape’ in *Ideology and Landscape in historical Perspective*, eds. Alan Baker and Gideon Biger, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 4, where Tuan is quoted.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, Isobel, ‘So what’s all this about the mother’s body?: the aesthetic, gender and the polis’, *Women, A Cultural Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1993, p. 184. Armstrong is reading the idea of play through Winnicott here.

as subordinated as ever. The link is made clear by Adelman who sees Volumnia and Rome increasingly closely identified while he remains in the city until 'Rome and his mother are finally one ... in exiling Coriolanus, Rome re-enacts the role of the mother who cast him out.'⁵⁸

Adelman suggests that 'the union with Aufidius is for Coriolanus a union with an alter-ego; it represents a flight from the world of Rome and his mother towards a safe male world.'⁵⁹ But it is also, importantly, to an alternative home, to which Coriolanus is welcomed:

Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart
 Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
 Bestride my threshold. (4.6.113-5)

Antium is a place in which wives are referred to with sufficient regularity to construct a sense of a traditional social world where marriage follows familiar rules; ordinariness is evoked both in Aufidius's conventional assertion of his response to his wife quoted above (perhaps less conventional as a response to Coriolanus, however) and in the routine, easy, antifeminist humour that precedes Coriolanus's entrance into the city.⁶⁰ But it is a world without mothers, where all the power — martial, social and domestic — is in the hands of men. When Coriolanus enters Antium he eschews the convention of describing the consequences of war as 'mothers who lack sons' (2.1.152) that served him when he returned to Rome after the battle of Corioli. Repudiating his mother city (and thus the mother who lives there) — 'my birthplace hate I' (4.4.23) — he discovers instead a 'goodly' city where femininity is not maternal:

A goodly city is this Antium. City,
 Tis I that made thy widows. Many an heir
 Of these fair edifices 'fore my wars
 Have I heard groan and drop. Then know me not,
 Lest that thy wives with spits and boys with stones

⁵⁸ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 157. Ronald Knowles pursues the link between Volumnia and Rome back to the mythological beginnings of the city, so that the she-wolf that nursed Romulus and Remus is refigured in a construction of Rome in terms of maternal nurture and maternal demands. See Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, p.155.

⁵⁹ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 156.

⁶⁰ IV.iii. 25-7: 'I have heard it said the fittest time to corrupt a man's wife is when she's fallen out with her husband.'

In puny battle slay me. (IV.iii.1-6)

Antium is a city where embraces are between men — ‘Let me twine / mine arms about that body’ (4.5.103-4) — and where passionate fantasies are of masculine, martial intimacy. It is a world where the comforts of home — the welcoming threshold; the ‘upper end’th’table’ (4.5.187) — denied him in his mother city, are presented by men, and where the deference a man should traditionally expect from his womenfolk, is given by a man:

Our general himself makes a mistress of him, sanctifies himself with’s hand, and turns up the white o’th’eye to his discourse (4.5.188-90).

The welcome here is personal, not political; the plans offered in Antium are not to do with policy or civic concerns, but with making war. In this martial world, where the commoners are comic rather than threatening, it is understood that war creates love between men because they need one another. There is no sense of the complexities of the civilities of Rome, or the motherhood which embraces and embodies them.

For Roman civilities are themselves threatened from within, as the Tribunes attempt to represent the interests of the hungry civilians. It is another of the jarring complexities of the play that, as Dollimore acknowledges, ‘the plebeians are presented with both complexity and sympathy.’⁶¹ The conniving of the tribunes throws the concerns of the commoners into sympathetic relief just as the patrician insistence upon the processes of power and policy reveals Coriolanus as a figure of integrity, despite his limitations. It is possible to discern another alignment of interests in the play, which posits both Coriolanus and the plebeians in tension with overwhelming and controlling maternity. Diane Purkiss discovers a similar trope in Swetnam’s pamphlet which she suggests seeks to define: ‘a youthful and essentially plebeian masculinity over and against the coercive discourses of morality as well as over and against femininity.’⁶² Quoting Swetnam’s *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Woman*, she highlights his distinction between male and female worlds:

Is it not strange that men should be so foolish to doat on women who differ so farre in nature from men? For a man delights in armes & in hearing the rattling drums, but a

⁶¹ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 224.

⁶² In Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 82.

woman loves to hear sweet musicke on the lute ... a man rejoices to march among the murdered carcasses, but a woman to dance on a silken carpet.⁶³

For Purkiss, this figures a 'self-constituted shift from the household of childhood ... in gender terms, their emergence from a feminised sphere into a masculine one.'⁶⁴ The problem for both Coriolanus and the plebeians is that neither Volumnia nor mother Rome will allow such a shift, so that they could only briefly experience the possibilities of such a world during the banishment to Antium. The mother and the city are as warlike as their men. The tragedy is thus born out of the impossibility of differentiation and separation; not only the man of integrity is destroyed, but the threat of war undermines the claims of the citizens, whose interests are almost fused with those of the patricians and the tribunes at the end of the play. The celebrated scene in which Volumnia persuades her son not to attack Rome thus begins a process where policy confronts 'instinct' (5.3.34), and triumphs; the power games of the patricians win over the citizens.

Because Volumnia has shown how well she understands the politics of persuasion, of gestures like kneeling, of the rhetoric of policy, her actions in this scene, as Lee Bliss rightly points out, are open to contradictory interpretations.⁶⁵ The text does not allow for a reading of her motivation, and this is perhaps the point of the scene. To an audience, the significance of the mother's effect upon her son is evident both in the running commentary he makes of the progress of his family towards him: 'My wife comes foremost, then the honoured mould / Wherein this trunk was framed, and in her hand / the grandchild to her blood' (5.3.22-4), in which, as Adelman points out, the emphasis is upon Volumnia as genitrix:

'Coriolanus does not acknowledge the child as his and his wife's: he first imagines himself in his mother's womb and then imagines the child as an extension of his mother.'⁶⁶

Such imaginings are addressed in Volumnia's famous assertion to her son that 'thou shalt no sooner / March to assault thy country than to tread — / Trust to't, thou shalt not — on thy mother's womb / That brought thee to this world.' Perhaps because her speeches — and her gestures — in this scene are so closely reliant upon Plutarch, or perhaps because she is playing at

⁶³ Brant and Purkiss, *Women, Texts and Histories*, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Brant and Purkiss, *Women, Texts and Histories*, p. 77.

⁶⁵ Bliss, *Coriolanus*, 56-8.

⁶⁶ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 161.

policy for all she is worth, there is a sense of conventionality about Volumnia's persuasion. The scene can be read as a final confrontation between the hardy politic mother and the son struggling against instinct in an effort to be 'author of himself' (5.3.36). But, as Adelman puts it, Coriolanus 'ends fully subject to the place of origin', all actions circumscribed by the surveillance and control of an omnipresent mother.⁶⁷ Unlike Hamlet, who broke his mother's heart in two and then re-made her so that he became her author, and was thus able to authorise his own subsequent vengeful actions, Coriolanus struggles against a maternity which refuses to conform to traditional typology, despite his efforts to constrain it. That the struggle is lost is signalled by the uncontrolled hyperbole with which he reads his mothers greeting gesture: 'My mother bows, / As if Olympus to a molehill should / In supplication nod' (5.3.29-31). The disproportion in the image anticipates his final capitulation and abjection, as Adrian Poole points out:

He transfers her gesture into one of the most memorably invidious comparisons in the play ... this would be laughable if it were not so pathetic — to find a man wishing or needing to believe that such a vertiginous scale of comparison could possibly measure a human relationship.⁶⁸

In *Hamlet*, Gertrude's dramatic meaning is constructed out of silence and a lack of movement because her role of Queen always constrains her so that what she means is as important as what she says, in conformance with the demands of traditional typology. Volumnia's dramatic meaning is created out of language and gesture, the expression of a tension between meaning and speaking. When she persuades her son to stop his assault she finally asserts the emblematic potential that her maternity endows:

Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile. (5.3.94-6)

Volumnia, who understands the politics of playing so well, is able to present herself in terms of the traditional silent suffering mother, even as she belies them, in favour of public speech and the ritual gestures of public courtesy. She reasserts this image after, and in spite of, over eighty lines

⁶⁷ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 162.

⁶⁸ Adrian Poole, *Coriolanus*, Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, p. 69.

of speech: 'I am hushed until our city be afire, / And then I'll speak a little' (5.3.181-2). In this play, typology is absorbed into Volumnia's rhetorical strategy. She dramatises herself in terms of traditional constructions of motherhood, creating a visual and verbal image of pathos which her son finds impossible to resist. Volumnia verbally and visually (by kneeling) performs the very terms of maternal vulnerability and female homeliness that Coriolanus has wishfully constructed for her throughout the play: at last he sees her as he has cast her. The effect, signalled by the famous direction 'holds her by the hand, silent' (5.3.183) is the collapse of his attempt at self-authorship in the face of his mother's will, the annihilation of the son by a mother who is able to control her own maternal meaning.

Chapter 7: The mother enshrined

'let me go

Perfect and undeformed to my tomb.'¹

'deare child, reade here my love'²

7.i Representing 'family values'

In *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* Jean Howard warns against the assumption 'that theatrical representations have an ideological significance which is fixed and unchanging or which is unaffected by the conditions in which the representations are produced and consumed.' As this thesis has argued, the meaning of motherhood can indeed be shown to be affected by shifts in ideology, but it is also determined by the mother's function in dramatic narrative, and by links between conventions of representation and genre.³ In addition, and perhaps paradoxically, as this thesis has suggested, there continued to be an emphasis upon tradition and the significance of the mother as a locus of consistent values in changing times. In an analysis of the representation of motherhood, then, it is important to acknowledge both possibilities — the persistence of traditional meaning alongside the receptivity to shifts in thinking about religion, or culture, or politics, of such meaning. This final chapter assesses the productive tension between tradition and change at a time when religious and cultural pressures upon ideas about the family were increasing.

Addressing these pressures, Catherine Belsey has argued for an 'emerging ideal of the affective nuclear family in early modern England', discovering that 'English family values' emerged out of the religious, political and economic upheavals of the early modern period.⁴ Belsey argues that this change found expression in the cultural products of the period, and focuses upon Jacobean funerary architecture and contemporary English drama for her discussion. She sees the Protestant valorisation of the family, which imagines it as a nexus of affective ties, contributing to a new interest in family values and argues that this interest is

¹ Thomas Heywood, 'A Woman Killed with Kindness', in *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, p. 65, lines 95 - 6.

² Elizabeth Joceline, from *The Mother's Legacie to her Unborn Child*, quoted in Betty Travitsky, *The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*, New York and Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 61.

³ See Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 83.

⁴ Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the loss of Eden*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, pp. xiv and xvi.

expressed in the representations of family in some of Shakespeare's plays, notably *The Winter's Tale*.

This chapter engages with Belsey's discussion to argue that although the family as an ideal indeed received a new kind of attention in Jacobean Protestant England, this attention was perhaps far less straightforward than she suggests, and that the idea of a loving mother at the centre of an affective family — as a modern audience might know her — was neither new, nor unproblematic, for an early modern audience. Further, it argues, the dramatic function of the figure of the loving mother was substantially affected by ideological shifts in the Jacobean understanding of the meaning of the family.

Protestantism had no special claim upon the assertion of family affections; in fact its emphasis upon the control of personal feeling in so far as emotional expression should be directed towards God rather than to other people, tended to stress the need to restrain the expression of emotional attachment. For example, Chapter 4 of this thesis discussed the use of the metaphor of indulgent maternal nursing or 'nusling' as a means of expressing the malign effects of Catholic heresy from the early sixteenth century onward, suggesting a Protestant antipathy (at least in theory) to overt demonstrations of maternal affection. Moreover, celebrating the affective family was not a new, nor an especially Protestant, development. The Catholic mother, Elizabeth Grymeston, who died in 1603, had no problems expressing the strength of her attachment to her child in her popular advice book:

My dearest sonne, there is nothing so strong as the force of love; there is nothing so forcible as the love of an affectionate mother to hir naturall childe: there is no mother can either more affectionately shew hir nature, or more naturally manifest hir affection, than in advising hir children out of hir owne experience, to eschue evill and encline then to do that which is good.⁵

Betty Travitsky points out that Grymeston's work is characterised by reference to both canonic and contemporary Catholic writers.⁶ Grymeston, therefore, self-consciously places herself within a religious tradition which, it seems, can comfortably incorporate emphatic expressions of maternal affection and subjective experience into a wider discussion about spiritual concerns. For example, she associates the expression of her love for Bernye her son

⁵ Quoted in Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 268.

⁶ Betty Travitsky in *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works. Series 1: Printed Writings, 1500 — 1640. Volume 8: Mothers' Advice Books* selected and introduced by Betty S. Travitsky, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, p. x.

with her last illness in a way which suggests more than just the routine deployment of a rhetorical gesture: 'Thou seest my love hath carried me beyond the list I resolved on, and my aking head and trembling hand haue rather a will to offer, than abilitie to afford further discourse', and her insistence upon the mother's love which informs her work suggests that she perceived no problem in situating a passionate expression of her personal affection for her son within the discourses of traditional Catholicism.⁷

For Grymeston, maternal love provided the impetus for a discourse which, she hoped, would lead to the betterment of Bernye's spiritual prospects. While her acknowledgement of a mother's responsibility to act as a spiritual and moral mentor to her children was in sympathy with contemporary Protestant discourses — which will be discussed later in this chapter — her approach to the demonstration of affection is very different from that of the Puritan minister William Gouge, whose later (1622) conduct book promotes family love as a consequence of religious and moral rectitude. In one of his many somewhat disconcerting analogies, Gouge appears to understand familial affection as the consequence of respect and duty:

If the worlds proverbe holds true (*love me and love my dog*) how much more true is this Christian rule, *love me and love my child*: or *love me and love mine husband*: or *love me and love my wife*.⁸

Gouge demonstrates a generally disapproving preoccupation with the social manifestations of personal feelings, urging, for example, the wife to affect modesty in both gesture and speech, so that her behaviour does not cause confusion to onlookers:

lightness ... in a wife, is not so much a mutuall familiarity with her husband by his good liking, as a wanton dallying with others to his grieffe and disgrace.⁹

⁷ Quoted by Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, p. 268.

⁸ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises*, London, Printed by John Haviland for Willian Blayden, 1622, Treatise 6, Duties of parents, p. 581.

⁹ Quoted in Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osbourne, eds., *Lay by your needles Ladies, Take The Pen: Writing Women in England, 1500 — 1700*, London, Arnold, 1997, p. 114. Hilda Smith has recognised a change in attitudes to women over the Jacobean period: 'In the seventeenth century, tracts concerning women's nature took on a scurrilous tone during the early reign of James I and evinced Puritan overtones later on in the 1620s.' See Hilda L Smith, 'Humanist Education and the Renaissance Concept of Woman' in Wilcox, Helen (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain 1500 - 1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 12.

He is similarly insistent upon the need to control the physical and verbal expression of affection within the family, notably demonstrations of parental love, which he sees as potentially bestial: 'Is this not mere Apish kindnesse? For Apes kill their young ones with hugging.'¹⁰ 'This is no love', he says, 'but plaine dotage'.¹¹

Thus the emphasis upon the affective family in the early modern period — or 'family values' — as discerned by Belsey, is highly qualified. Puritan affection is, according to Gouge, ideally expressed through godliness and restraint and through a proper sense of priorities which are exemplified, he says, in the proverb 'better be unfed than untaught'.¹² Such calls for restraint, from the address to parents in the sixteenth century moral play *Nice Wanton* discussed earlier in this thesis, to Gouge's polemic above, suggest that the affectionate family unit was widely accepted as the norm in the sixteenth century and indeed earlier, and that Protestant attention to the family demonstrates, in fact, an attempt to *control* that unit, to codify its significance, to celebrate familial affection only within the constraints of a particular moral and spiritual view.¹³ The tombs and monuments depicting familial grief which Belsey sees as evidence of affective ties might thus be read as attempts to reinforce visually an ideal which has less to do with actual affective practice than with conformity with a Protestant discourse which reveres affection only in so far as it is circumscribed by godly moderation. As Ann Rosalind Jones puts it: 'the Protestant definition of marriage gave new importance to family relations, but it shaped those relations according to a newly elaborated theory of patriarchy' rather than, as Belsey sees it, 'a culture that chooses to ground the family on romantic love'.¹⁴

This new focus on family relations was expressed in an increased emphasis upon the duties and roles of family members in the conduct books that proliferated in the period, of

¹⁰ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, The Sixth Treatise: The Duties of a Parent*, p. 500.

¹¹ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*. Indeed, such demonstrations are potentially extremely dangerous, Gouge implies, with the ensuing sentence: 'But what may be said of those that are so hellishly enamoured with their children as to commit incest or buggery with them?'

¹² Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 529.

¹³ Gouge himself admits that there was some resistance to his preaching on the necessary subordination of women, manifest by the 'squirring' and 'murmuring' amongst the female members of his congregation. See Tristan Marshall's review of Comensoli in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999.

¹⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones 'Nets and Bridles: early modern conduct books and sixteenth-century women's lyrics' in *The Ideology of Conflict*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, London and New York, Methuen, 1987, p. 59. Belsey, *Shakespeare and the loss of Eden*, p. 127.

which Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*, first published in 1622, is an example.¹⁵ Such prescriptive texts offer evidence for a growing, Puritan-inspired concern with the regulation of the family unit in the later phase of the Protestant State. This interest in the control of social roles, according to the new patriarchalism described by Jones above, was also manifest in the operation of law as it related to maternity. Unmarried mothers came under increasingly tough legislation at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. The punishment for mothering a bastard in 1576 was whipping; in 1610 this was changed to imprisonment and whipping, though in 1593 the Commons had rejected a proposal that the fathers of illegitimate children should be punished.¹⁶ At the same time there was increasing pressure for the laws governing infanticide to be tightened (most women committing this offence seem to have been unmarried young women or widows disposing of illegitimate offspring) and in 1623 an Act 'to prevent the destroying and murdering of bastard children' was passed.¹⁷ Motherhood appears to have been increasingly expected to conform to a model of wifehood, of selfless restraint, of unstinted but carefully moderated affection which aspired to an ideal rather than which reflected the realities of social and personal relations.

Advice books for mothers, written by mothers, also flourished in the period, though Patricia Crawford's detailed analyses show that although the amount of women's writing that was published increased throughout the seventeenth century (especially in the second half), the nature of the work changes.¹⁸ Those written by mothers are a phenomenon of the early Jacobean period. Women themselves contributed to the increase in advice books, particularly in the first quarter of the seventeenth century with the publication of several writings by women which focused particularly upon the maternal role. These were evidently popular, (Valerie Wayne describes them as 'bestsellers').¹⁹ Elizabeth Grymeston's *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratives* ran to at least four editions between 1604 and 1618 and Elizabeth Joceline's *The Mother's Legacie to her Unborn Child* was, according to Betty Travitsky, reprinted seven times during the 1620s and 1630s.²⁰ Dorothy Leigh's *A Mother's Blessing*

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of conduct books see Valerie Wayne, 'Advice for women from mothers and patriarchs' in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 56-79.

¹⁶ Keith Wrightson, 'Infanticide in Early Seventeenth Century England', *Local Population Studies* 15 (1975), pp. 10-21. Also Keith Thomas, 'The Puritans and Adultery' in *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, cited above.

¹⁷ C. Damme, 'The Worth of an Infant under law', *Medical History* 22, 1978.

¹⁸ Patricia Crawford, 'The Sucking Child', *Continuity and Change* 1, 1986. pp. 23-54.

¹⁹ Wayne, Valerie, 'Advice for women from mothers and patriarchs' in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500 — 1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 56.

²⁰ Travitsky, *The Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. xii.

was even more consistently popular, first appearing in 1616 and running to sixteen editions which spanned the seventeenth century. All of these appeared posthumously, though Patricia Crawford shows that Leigh, at least, clearly intended her work for publication. The writers' exemplary piety and humility (celebrated, for example, by the introductory Approbation to Joceline's work) and the appealing pathos engendered by the notion of deceased motherhood surely contributed to the attraction of these books which offered the reader the opportunity to engage, through reading, in an act of contemplative devotion enhanced by a sentimental appreciation of the circumstances of the writer.

The popularity of works by righteous, dead mothers is in contrast to the reception of publications by more robust, living women who were less interested in piety than practical parenting. The Countess of Lincoln published a treatise in support of breastfeeding in 1622, and the fact that this text only ran to one edition might be an indication of the comparative unpopularity of this work.²¹ As a living, and perhaps problematically forthright writer (she explains her own decision not to breastfeed, 'not for want of Will in myself, but partly I was over-ruled by another's Authority, and partly deceived by some ill Counsel'), her work was possibly less ideologically and emotionally satisfying, while the notion of an advice book written by a woman on a subject which was being thoroughly covered, albeit far more equivocally, by the authoritatively male writers of conduct books and obstetric manuals was perhaps somewhat unsettling for the buyers of such works, whoever they were.²² It seems that for women writing as mothers in Jacobean England, success depended to some extent upon their ability or willingness to accommodate the familiar traditional ideas about what motherhood should mean, and upon a fashion for the celebration of the dead pious mother as a symbol of the Protestant ideal.

VII.ii: Drama and the ideal mother

The high point of the production of advice books coincided not with a theatrical celebration of the affective family, but rather with a repeated focus in the theatre upon the plight of abused, lost, dead and dying mothers. In Chapter 4 of this thesis, the transformation of the Griselda story into a Jacobean wife-taming play which offers the visual thrill of the heroine's humiliation is one example. In another kind of reworking, the domestic tragedies discussed in Chapter 5 gave Thomas Heywood the structure for his Jacobean fiction, *A*

²¹For much of the information here I am indebted to Patricia Crawford, 'The Sucking Child', p. 222, also Appendix I.

²²Elizabeth Clinton, Countess of Lincoln, *The Countess of Lincoln's Nursery*, Oxford 1622, Harleian Misc, Vol. 4, p. 25.

Woman Killed with Kindness, which offers as its climactic spectacle a mother starving herself to death before her family (and the audience) to atone for an adulterous affair.²³

Like the writers of mothers' legacies, the mothers in both these plays, and also the plays which are the focus of this chapter, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, demonstrate an awareness of their own symbolic importance: they function not only to draw attention to the emblematic status of martyred or abused motherhood in their individual narratives, but to use that status to reinforce a moral point.²⁴ In *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, for example, the adulterous Anne Frankford turns to the audience to exhort them to read her moral meaning:

Oh, women, women, you that have yet kept
Your holy matrimonial vow unstained,
Make me your instance.²⁵

Anne has been discovered *in flagrante* in her nightclothes, her attire visually reinforcing the discovery and the significance of her sin. In such scenes, the mother figure functions in these plays as a 'speaking picture' in the Renaissance sense of the term as defined by Michael Bath: what she says, and how she appears, combine at crucial moments to create meaning which resonates beyond the narrative of the play itself.²⁶ Such scenes appear to engage with the discourses which inform the conduct books and advice books which see motherhood as exemplary, as sacrificial and as iconic, as does 'the 'new interest in the depiction of emotional relationships' that Belsey discerns in tombs of the period:

Plasticity develops alongside a desire for mimesis, and mimesis becomes an object of desire when there is a motive for setting out to reproduce the illusion of what the eye actually sees.²⁷

²³ Thomas Heywood, 'A Woman Killed with Kindness', in *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, pp. 287-326.

²⁴ Elizabeth Josceline ordered her shroud in advance of her confinement, for example; a touching example of an awareness of the material possibilities of her impending childbirth (that she may not physically survive) co-existing with an understanding of the symbolic weight of maternal death, and the spiritual significance of a 'legacie', all movingly mediated through the growing terror of the young mother-to-be.

²⁵ *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. Kinney, p. 318, lines 137-9.

²⁶ Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*, London, Longman, 1994, pp. 53-56.

²⁷ Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, p. 13.

The ‘new interest’ in affection as Belsey describes it, in a newly mimetic representation of the family, is not necessarily associated with the depiction of an expressively affectionate family life, as she suggests, but, in the case of mothers, with the pathetic representation of sacrificial motherhood. The function of the mimesis, the focus upon the physical likeness, is to render the representation still more pathetic, the symbolic meaning more resonant. The details of material, corporeal actuality — the evidence of an individual life — paradoxically serve to emphasise the spiritual triumph of the individual, particularly in their continued influence, through memory and legacy, upon the living. Thus the mimetic representation of maternal and familial affection, it might be argued, operates, not as an engagement with a novel enthusiasm for familial affection, but as a means by which the moral (Protestant) meanings of the loving family might be promulgated or — in the case of the two plays to which this chapter will now turn — explored.

VII.iii *The Winter’s Tale*

In *The Winter’s Tale* the tensions between an idealised reading of motherhood and the material experience of it are explored in the context of a folk tale. In this play the symbolic operates alongside the mundane as Hermione’s capacity for maternal nurture and affection is simultaneously iconised and materially realised by the visual and rhetorical construction of Hermione’s pregnant and later lactating body. Hermione’s removal from her family and her apparent death at the point where her children most need her renders their plight pathetic and idealises her status as a fantasy of perfection and sacrifice, emblematised in Antigonus’ dream, at the centre of the play. But like the mothers of the advice books who ensured the continuance of maternal care even after their death, Hermione attends to the practical realities of her maternity and ensures her own afterlife as a caring mother by preserving herself as a parent, if not (in terms of what her final declaration implies) as a wife.²⁸

As has often been noted, *The Winter’s Tale* has much in common with the Griselda story: a blameless breastfeeding mother is lost to her family through the cruelties of an aberrant husband, and is reinstated only when her children are themselves old enough to be married. Just as the Jacobean dramatisation of the Griselda tale discussed in Chapter 4 offers the old story alongside the contemporary pleasures of a wife-taming play, Shakespeare’s wronged mother is more than the tale of a mother lost and found. It is a play which celebrates affective maternity, certainly, but which also emphasises the iconic power of motherhood as something which is ultimately beyond the reach of patriarchy, a husband-taming play,

²⁸ William Gouge stresses that parenting should last for the life of the child, and has advice upon last words and the importance of wills in ensuring that the parents’ influence is felt long after the physical death of the parent.

perhaps, and certainly a play which associates the figure of the mother with a governing, overarching morality which concerns the greater good. In the same way that maternal responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of the child is emphasised in conventional Protestant rhetoric the mothers in *The Winter's Tale* take responsibility for the moral wellbeing of the family despite the tyranny that threatens it. It is made clear that Hermione and Paulina both occupy the moral high ground from the beginning of Leontes' rage, for example, and together they control the illusions of both Hermione's death and of her reappearance. The two women simultaneously exploit the affective and iconic value of the good dead mother and preserve the Queen so that she is able to continue her physical maternal role.²⁹

Hermione's determination to see her daughter celebrates the affective tie between mother and child in all its poignant ordinariness while at the same time the play endows her with supernatural qualities: the support of the Delphic oracle, for example, or the power to inform the dreams of people far away. Her address to Perdita at the end of the play links these aspects of Hermione, the interpreter of oracles and the concerned mother:

Thou shalt hear that I
 Knowing by Paulina that the Oracle
 Gave hope that thou wast in being, have preserv'd
 Myself to see the issue. (5.3.125-8)³⁰

Such pervasive power both reassures and influences the patriarchal world that creates and desires it. And that patriarchal world both welcomes and resists its influence. Like *Coriolanus*, *The Winter's Tale* addresses the troubled dynamics of its central family by exposing a male desire for an alternative, a masculinised space which is experienced by the male characters as untroubled by the complicating presence of the feminine and the maternal.³¹ What characterises this space, as in *Coriolanus*, is that it functions as an arena for play, though in *The Winter's Tale* this space is recuperated through nostalgic recollection,

²⁹ See Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 546, for a consideration of the crucial importance of the mother in teaching and nurturing children.

³⁰ All quotations from the play are taken from The Arden Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford, London and New York, Routledge, 1989.

³¹ In a discussion of gendered spaces instigated by a consideration of Edgar's reference in *King Lear* to the 'indistinguished space of women's will' Corinne Abate recognises a similar male flight from 'a couolded region where patriarchal codes and values – the reality of fathers and sons alike – is obscured, a place of unregulated desire as well as anomie'. See Corinne S. Abate, *Privacy, Domesticity and Women in Early Modern England*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, page 2.

rather than as an adult experience. For example, at the beginning of the play Polixenes nostalgically recalls an uncomplicated boyhood with Leontes:

We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i'th'sun,
 And bleat the one at th'other: what we chang'd
 Was innocence for innocence: we knew not
 The doctrine of ill-doing, not dream'd
 That any did. Had we pursued that life,
 And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
 With stronger blood, we should have answer'd heaven
 Boldly 'not guilty', the imposition clear'd
 Hereditary ours. (1.2.67-74).

Polixenes' sentimental recollection here clearly offers a flawed, incomplete ideal. This is intimated in Hermione's wry response, 'by this we gather / You have tripp'd since (1.2.75-6), which provokes a confirmation that it is indeed the feminine that has contaminated such 'unfledg'd' innocence. But Polixenes has playfully, if unintentionally, evoked a world where maternal influence *for the good* is missing; where he and his friend revelled in boyish ignorance as much as innocence. Frivolous though this intercourse is, it exposes an inadequate ideal, and thus the inadequacies of those who imagine it to be sufficient. It is an ideal which Leontes, struck by jealousy, tries to create in his relations with his son, using language which takes the tone of childish banter, 'Why, that's my bawcock. What! Hast smutch'd thy nose?' (1.2.212). This playfulness is the corollary to a serious concern, 'art thou my boy?' (1.2.118) that the father is properly replicated in the son, untainted by the corruption of adultery. Leontes seeks assurance that a clean, masculine honesty can be perpetuated despite the necessity of a mother to the production of a son.³² For Leontes, playing offers a way back to the untainted boyish world that Polixenes had earlier described and in which he sees his son, 'Go play, Mamillius; thou'rt an honest man' (1.2.211).³³

³² As Stephen Orgel notes in his edition of the play, 'The return to childhood here is also a retreat from sexuality and the dangers of manhood exemplified in unmuzzled daggers.' See Stephen Orgel, ed., *The Winter's Tale*, The Oxford Shakespeare Series, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 23.

³³ The link between this nostalgia for a boyish, untainted past, the desire for the uncomplicated replication of the father in the son, and the dangers of maternal corruption are brought together in Leontes' response to Hermione's concern that Leontes appears mov'd (1.2.149): Looking on the lines / Of my boy's face, methought I did recoil / Twenty — three years, and saw myself unbreech'd, / In my green velvet coat; my dagger muzzl'd / Lest it should bite its master, and so prove, / As ornaments oft do, too dangerous' (1.2.153-8).

Polixenes gives an account of his relationship with his own son which offers a glimpse of a similarly exclusive male world where fathers and sons play together:

He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter:
 Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;
 My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all.
 He makes a July's day short as December;
 And with his varying childness cures in me
 Thoughts that would thicken my blood (1.2.166-71).

For Leontes and Polixenes, playing is something which happens outside the dramatised present — in the past or off the stage or back in Bohemia — and offers an imagined and nostalgic contrast to what is visually insisted upon in the play: the physical, moral and emotional importance of maternity to the construction of the successful family and to a successful and fulfilled adult life. Simultaneously, the men's references to play expose the limitations of such boyish regression in an adult world where Hermione — and later Paulina — have to ensure that rectitude and proper social accountability ultimately prevail.

The visual and rhetorical centrality of maternity is fundamental to this play, organising an emotional dynamic which places the mother as the point of reconciliation and mediation between opposites: innocence and corruption, living and dying, losing and finding. Act 1 Scene 2 sets up this dynamic, with the visually striking image of the pregnant Hermione signifying both the sexual and emotional link between husband and wife, and the physical and spiritual link between parents and children. Her success in persuading Polixenes to stay longer is indicative of her mediation between the King and his friend. The scene stages a visual history of the royal family, with Polixenes, the king's childhood friend, figuring Leontes' princely past and the son, Mamillius, signifying the royal future. Hermione is both a friend to his childhood friend and a mother to his own son. She links past and future and functions as the heart of the family and of the household (including its guests), bringing its members together.

However, Leontes' distorted perspective interprets this central role as divisive — a corruptor of both his precious friendship with Polixenes (so precious that he cannot bear his friend to leave) and of the link between the king and his son. Hermione's body is read by the audience as an image of physical and spiritual nurture, but Leontes imagines his wife's corrupting influence in intensely physical and material terms as a too-ready exchange of blood: the friendly gestures between Hermione and Polixenes are rhetorised as 'mingling

bloods' (1.2.109) just as he later fears that his wife has 'too much blood' in his son (2.1.58).³⁴ Katharine Hodgkin has discussed the notion of an excess of blood as a contemporary metaphor for 'a commitment to the flesh and to fleshly desires' and this is what Leontes appears to discover here — that his wife's affectionate behaviour to her son and to her husband's friend demonstrate her corruption rather than her exemplary wifely and motherly love. As Gouge was later to warn in the quotation cited earlier in the chapter, demonstrations of family affection are potentially dangerous both because they may mislead (as Leontes is misled) and because of their potential to corrupt (as Leontes fears they have).

The play maintains a resolute dual focus upon the material reality of the mother's body and upon the iconicity of that body, and in doing so repeatedly challenges Leontes' tendency to see the fleshly and material as separate from (or dangerous to) the moral and spiritual. In Act 2 Scene 1 Hermione's pregnant body is repeatedly referred to with anticipation and approval by her waiting-women: 'The queen your mother rounds apace' (2.1.16), 'She is spread of late / Into a goodly bulk' (2.1.20). But for Leontes her body signifies her corruption and her pregnancy implies disease: 'tis Polixenes / Has made thee swell thus' (2.1.62). When he invites his court to read the meaning of his wife's pregnant body according to his own interpretation, his isolation — as the only character reading her this way — is clear:

Look on her, mark her well: be but about
To say 'she is a goodly lady,' and
The justice of your hearts will thereto add
'Tis pity she's not honest, honourable. (2.1.65-8).³⁵

Because the audience, like the court, knows better than Leontes, of course, the effect of his rhetoric is to ensure that this episode is read in terms of the abuse of Hermione, the child she carries, and of her relationship with her son. The authority of the patriarch, however sincere his belief here, is undermined by a common appreciation of the meaning of the mother, and of her place at the centre of the family. The familiar dramatic trope of the separation of mother and child works both rhetorically and visually to transform Hermione's

³⁴ See Katharine Hodgkin, 'Dionys Fitzherbert and the Anatomy of Madness' in *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing*, eds. Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 78. Leontes is happier with the image of his son as his own, paternal flesh, referring to him as 'my collop' (1.1.137).

³⁵ Leontes goes on to denigrate Hermione's 'without-door form' as out of keeping with her real nature, recalling the link between family and household that was discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

pregnant body to a signifier of sacrifice and suffering as her young son Mamillius is removed from the stage:

Give me the boy: I am glad you did not nurse him:
 Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you
 Have too much blood in him. (2.1.53-6)

This concern about too much blood, about the threat posed for Leontes by Hermione's physical link to her child, is thus shown by the dynamics of the scene to be a mistake on the part of the protagonist; the truth, as the audience recognises it, is that the blood link is emblematic of love and it reinforces the agony of the mother's sacrifice in this scene. The conventional early modern relation between blood and milk has been well documented, of course, and is recalled in Hermione's later accusation that Perdita has been taken from her 'the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth' (3.2.100). The two images of separation of mother and child that the blood/milk analogy figures in this play (Hermione and Mamillius; Hermione and Perdita) intensify the conventional idea of maternal blood as nourishment, in its transformation into mother's milk, by reference to its sacrificial significance. Nursing as a kind of willing, loving bleeding was formally symbolised in the popular emblem of the pelican wounding her breast in order to nourish her young with her blood, a practice fabulously attributed to the bird.³⁶ An emphatically practical and literal corollary to such an image is offered by Gouge's argument that 'soreness' should not prevent a mother nursing:

A mother with enduring a little more paine may safely give the childe sucke. Many mothers have given their children sucke when blood hath runne by the mouth of the childe.³⁷

A conventional link between motherhood and suffering has been a recurring *motif* in this thesis, offering an image of pathos, an emblem capable of communicating the complexities of religious controversy or civil war. The difference in *The Winter's Tale* (and a

³⁶ The 'pelican in her piety' was, for this reason, often a symbol of charity, or a Christian symbol of Christ the Redeemer. The emblem was popular, the pelican in her piety features (along with sea monsters which were to become William Gouge's favoured symbol of the ideal nursing mother) on a jacket reputed to be designed for Elizabeth I now at the Victoria and Albert museum in London. See Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books*, Octagon Books, New York, 1966, p. 95.

³⁷ Gouge, p. 517. To be fair to Gouge, he does admit that there are limits to how much a mother should be expected to endure and that God requires 'mercy and not sacrifice'.

difference it shares with the Jacobean *Grissil*) is that suffering makes the mother iconic in a new way. The suffering mother is no longer a figure for the condition of the nation; in these plays her predicament offers no metaphor for political circumstance. Jacobean ideology in fact promoted a model for the understanding of the relations between subject and State which repudiated the maternal metaphor, as James himself outlined:

It is casten up by divers, that employ their pens upon Apologies for rebellions and treasons, that everie man is borne to carrie such a naturall zeale and dutie to his common wealthe, as to his Mother.³⁸

As Claire McEachern points out, for James ‘it is not feeling for the mother which should determine civic identity, but duty to the father – not love, but law’. This then offers a model for “‘the reciproke and mutuall dutie between a free king and his naturall people.’”³⁹ The promotion of a new model that valorised the benign authority of a paternal King had an effect upon dramatic representations of motherhood. The mother tended to become, increasingly, idealised as a figure whose meanings are associated with domesticity, with the safety and success of the home, crucial to the successful functioning of the State, but intensely private in her contribution to it. The links between maternity, the family and household, mediating the public and the private, that were described in Chapter 5, and a new attention to the experience of the child discussed in Chapter 6, combine with traditional ideas to offer a version of the mother figure whose suffering ensures the continuity and safety of the domestic family, whose sacrifice is understood in terms of a motherly love which is governed by morality and duty. It is on these terms, rather than because of a discovery of affective family relations, that Hermione offers an idealised image of the Jacobean Protestant mother.

Moreover, Hermione demonstrates a knowing self-awareness of this visual and symbolic meaning, and an understanding of how to manipulate that meaning. She knows, for example, that part of her role is to negotiate between private life, interior thoughts and public meaning:

I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance shall dry your pities: but I have
That honourable grief lodg'd here which burns

³⁸ King James, Edinburgh, 1598, quoted by Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood 1590-1612*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 22.

³⁹ McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 22.

Worse than tears drown: beseech you all, my lords,
 With thoughts so qualified as your charities
 Shall best instruct you, measure me. (2.1.118-14)

Hermione is able to make her 'honourable' private grief available to her audience (on and off the stage) at the same time as she dismisses 'vain' public displays of tears. Here, she self-consciously figures her suffering, constructing herself rhetorically as the icon that she will literally become. The private and intimate affections of the mother, so celebrated in Protestant ideology, can only be made available to the world by a shift which recreates the mother as iconic, which separates her from the 'vain' passions which would debase her significance. At a time when women were, according to Betty Travitsky, encouraged to record their most private moments in diaries 'for the sake of religious discipline', and 'monuments to dutiful motherhood' in the form of maternal testimony were being published posthumously, this complex relation between an intensely private inner life and public testament to it offered a kind of double-take on motherhood as simultaneously intimate and instinctive, and iconic and idealised.⁴⁰ Phillippe Aries says that 'it is no accident that in England, the birthplace of privacy, diaries were widely kept from the late 1500s' but it is interesting that this should be so at a time when, as Belsey suggests, the personal and domestic experience of individuals became the focus of public discussion and the subject of dramatic representation.⁴¹ Diaries and testimonials by their very nature interrogate the meanings of individual personal lives at the same time that they give significance to those lives, whether the text is intended for personal reflection or for circulation to a wider audience. They offer an exploration of the value of personal meaning in social, religious and political contexts. Motherhood, as displayed in the advice books and posthumously published testimonials written by early seventeenth-century women displays an uneasy compromise between the realities of private intimacy and the public meanings generated by the *ideal* of private intimacy, mediated by the figure of the mother who is transformed through her death into an icon.

When Paulina and Hermione conspire to represent the Queen as a statue at the end of *The Winter's Tale* they demonstrate a knowing manipulation of the relations between the idealised wife and mother and the real experience of wifeness and motherhood. Belsey, interestingly, imagines this scene as if enacted before Hermione's tomb, and that the figure

⁴⁰ Critics have suggested that Lady Margaret Hoby, for example, wrote her rather prosaic diary as part of a programme of religious discipline, as Betty Travitsky shows in *The Paradise of Women; Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*, New York and Oxford, Columbia University Press, Morningside edition, 1989, p. 85.

⁴¹ Aries, *History of Private Life* p. 5.

which descends represents the literal coming to life of a stone effigy, so that ‘the family is saved by a miracle, an impossibility in nature.’⁴² Certainly the impossible congruence of stone and flesh, between ideal and real, happens; a trick, perhaps, but nevertheless an event of wonder to Leontes and his companions and a stunning spectacle for a theatre audience. It is Hermione’s apparently bloodless effigy which, paradoxically, shifts Leontes into a desire for the return of the fleshly version of his wife:

O, thus she stood
 Even with such life of majesty, warm life,
 As now it coldly stands, when first I woo’d her!
 I am asham’d: does not the stone rebuke me
 For being more stone than it? (5.3.34-38)

And when he is permitted to touch her, the experience is for him entirely at the level of physical desire:

O, she’s warm!
 If this be magic, let it be an art
 Lawful as eating. (5.3.109-111)

Hermione, though, remains at the cusp between revered icon and embraceable flesh, a mediatrix between the ideal and the everyday. Her blessing to Perdita confirms this, stressing a supernatural access to the goodwill of the gods, alongside the intimate and ordinary solicitude of a mother:

You gods, look down,
 And from your sacred vials pour your graces
 Upon my daughter’s head! Tell me, mine own,
 Where hast thou been preserv’d? where liv’d? how found? (5.3.121-4)

The Winter’s Tale certainly offers a celebration of the idea of the family, but falls short of celebrating ‘family values’ in Belsey’s definition. Rather, it is a play which engages with and interrogates (within the relatively lighthearted frameworks of a folk tale and a celebratory court entertainment) ideological complexities also apparent in other contemporary discourses. Motherhood, especially, is celebrated in terms of its capacity to negotiate and to mediate; the

⁴² Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, p. 112.

mother figure becomes a 'speaking picture', signifying the convergence of imagined perfection and the actual, the possibility of the family ideal.⁴³

VII.iv: Motherhood and sacrifice

If *The Winter's Tale* offers a visually enthralling theatrical reading of the possibility of the convergence of mythic and actual motherhood to celebrate a Jacobean Protestant ideal, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* gives an equally spectacular account of that ideal blown apart, at one level, by the demands of a material, Catholic culture which gives importance to the heroine's public significance and function at the expense her domestic, maternal role. Mary Beth Rose cites *The Duchess of Malfi* as a play that offers one of those 'dramatic stories centred on mothers [which is] clearly one of the outstanding female roles', and sees the Duchess as 'exceptional as a figure whose 'motherhood is central to her identity as a hero'.⁴⁴ In creating such a character, whose heroism is morally constructed by reference to her goodness as a wife and mother, Webster's dramatic narrative has to work around the complication that though the Duchess is an exemplary mother to Antonio's children, she appears to have no thought of the son who is her first husband's heir. To include this first child in the narrative would not only complicate the Duchess's political circumstances, but, more importantly, muddy the gap between her moral stance and that of her evil brothers; a gap that Webster must maintain to ensure her heroic status. Webster in fact deflects responsibility for the young Duke of Malfi away from the Duchess and towards her brothers, and indeed manages to make use of the existence of the young man to alienate the audience further from Ferdinand.⁴⁵ His command to Bosola to 'Write to ... my young nephew / She had by her first husband, and acquaint him / With's mother's honesty' (3.3.68-70) is understood as malice rather than as a legitimate desire to protect his nephew's right. The dynamic of the narrative works to establish the Duchess's goodness through her rejection of her brothers' values and through her resistance to their attempts to reform her so that, as

⁴³ See footnote 22. Stephen Orgel points out that the play responds to the fact that 'there was a royal family at the centre of English society for the first time since the death of Henry VII.' The focus upon the wife and mother as the significant heart of the successful family surely enhanced the suitability of the play for performance at the wedding of James's daughter Elizabeth in 1613. Orgel also discusses James's arrangements for a new tomb for his mother, asserting that James clearly understood 'the power of art to memorialise, reconcile and restore'. See Orgel's Introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of *The Winter's Tale*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 15 and 55.

⁴⁴ Orgel, *The Winter's Tale*, pp. 296 and 313.

⁴⁵ The implications of this complication are also addressed by Robert Ornstein in *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, Madison and Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, p. 141.

Eileen Allman affirms, 'Ferdinand and the Cardinal determine the play's action, but the Duchess determines its meaning.'⁴⁶

The play celebrates a Protestant understanding of motherhood in terms of personal and private activity, set against the corrupt Catholic world in which the play is set. Belsey has shown how Webster's play 'celebrates the family, identifying it as a private realm of warmth and fruitfulness separate from the turbulent world of politics, though vulnerable to it', and it is that sense of privacy and separation that are important here, placing the mother at the centre of a domestic world where all looks inward and craves to be secure.⁴⁷ The impossibility of such an ideal is emphasised when the Duchess is reunited with her husband Antonio and her children at the shrine of Loretto. Her hopes to protect her family through the device of a pilgrimage to the fabulously relocated childhood home of Jesus and his parents are dashed by the arrival of her brother the Cardinal. Loretto functions to signify the gap between the corrupt world in which the play is situated and the possibility of an ideal family life (symbolised by that of the Holy Family) of which the Duchess's domestic situation offers a glimpse. In its meaning Loretto celebrates the family ideal emblematised by the Duchess and her new family; in actuality it becomes a place where the impossibility of such an ideal in the face of political and patriarchal interests, is exposed. As Allman says:

Whatever the Duchess's motive for pilgrimage, she stands on that sacred ground as a mother whom tyranny has deprived of shelter, her family a replica of the holy family at Christianity's heart.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*, London, Associated University Presses, 1999, p. 148. Dorinda Robbins has pointed out in an unpublished essay how, in the first account that an audience hears of the Duchess (I.ii.123-5) Antonio cuts off all 'lascivious' associations to redefine the Duchess in spiritual terms as a model of heavenly virtue: 'Her Days are practic'd in such noble virtue, / That, sure her nights, nay more, her very sleeps, / Are more in Heaven, than other ladies shrifts.' As Robbins says, '[Antonio] tries to re-contain her as a silent object rather than a sexually enticing subject.' All references to *The Duchess of Malfi* are taken from the New Mermaid edition, edited by Elizabeth M. Brennan, London and Tonbridge, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1973, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁷ Belsey, Catherine, *The Subject of Tragedy*, London and New York, 1985, p. 198. Belsey refers in particular to Act 3 Scene 1, in the Duchess's bedchamber, where the dramatist takes time to establish a sense of intimacy between Antonio, Cariola and the Duchess and thus renders the effect of Ferdinand's unexpected entrance (line 69) even more shocking.

⁴⁸ Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy*, p. 153.

The irony that Webster builds into his narrative, of course, is that the Duchess's domestic world is, as Allman points out, illicit — what might be celebrated as privacy is in fact necessary secrecy and in order to create this world the Duchess has to compromise her public and political role. Eileen Allman sees this as a choice made willingly:

Her secrecy reveals how well she understands the coercive force behind her brothers' construction of her roles as Duchess and sister, but she chooses to live as if the discourses that empower her as ruler and wife and mother supercede this.⁴⁹

This play, then, celebrates the mother's determination to pull away from her economic, social, function as an emblem of the dynasties (her brothers', her dead husband's) with which she is associated. She chooses to become a wife and mother, according to the Jacobean understanding of the significance of that role as intimate, domestic and private. The problem for the Duchess, however, is that she is operating within a culture which sees the mother, and especially the mother's body, as highly political, and which does not allow for true privacy or for a real disassociation from the wider world. When she woos Antonio, she tries to distinguish between her public meaning and her private self by reference to the difference between icon and flesh:

This is flesh and blood, sir,
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
Kneels at my husband's tomb. (1.2.369-71)

But it is impossible for her to effect this separation of meanings in the politicised world of the play. There is no demarcation, even, between public and private spaces, for the Duchess's most private space, her bed-chamber, is infiltrated by her brother.

Even the Duchess's body is similarly infiltrated, for, like Hermione's body in *The Winter's Tale*, it is constantly scrutinised and interpreted, its material reality minutely recorded and given meaning:

I observe our Duchess
Is sick a-days, she pukes, her stomach seethes,
The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue,
She wanes i'th' cheek, and waxes fat i'th' flank;
And, contrary to our Italian fashion

⁴⁹ Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy*, p. 176

Wears a loose-bodied gown: there's somewhat in't (1.2.66-72).

Bosola the spy is detailed to discover and to elucidate those meanings, to discover 'the young springal cutting a caper in her belly' (1.2.155) which is evidence, to her brothers, of her 'infected' and 'attainted' blood.⁵⁰ As in *The Winter's Tale*, too, the mother's body is read for opposing meanings — while Antonio celebrates his wife's fecundity as a blessing, 'She's an excellent / Feeder of pedigrees (3.1.4-5), Ferdinand reads corruption and a curse in the same body:

Damn her! That body of hers,
While that my blood ran pure in't was more worth
Than that which thou wouldst comfort, call'd a soul. (1.6.119-21)

Like Hermione, the Duchess retains a dignity and rectitude which transcends the machinations of patriarchy and politics. As Hermione retains her status, for the audience, despite what Leontes does to her, so the Duchess can insist that 'I am the Duchess of Malfi still' (4.2.139) at the moment of her greatest humiliation. This dignity is linked in both plays to the success with which the women fulfil their maternal and familial roles: two lines later the Duchess is giving instructions for the care of her children:

I pray thee look thou givst my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers, ere she sleep. (4.2.141-3)

Both characters are heroines because they owe a clear allegiance to an authority which is higher than the patriarchy which governs the worlds of the plays here. It is an authority which endows the good wife and mother with moral superiority and thus makes them heroes for an audience which understands the function and meaning of motherhood more profoundly than the patriarchs of the plays. For Eileen Allman, this is a process of 'degendering authority':

Degendering authority in order to overthrow a tyrant means deauthorising maleness, severing the automatic connection between dominance and maleness not only in the

⁵⁰ See 1.4, lines 23 and 26. Lisa Hopkins has written of Bosola's fascination with 'specifically female mysteries' and quotes Celia Daileader's account of him as governed by a "violent fantasy of visual penetration." See Lisa Hopkins, 'With the skin side inside: the Interiors of *The Duchess of Malfi*, in Abate, *Privacy, Domesticity and Women*, p. 23.

tyrant but also in the subject. It allows men and women both, by asserting obedience to a higher authority, to assume, recognise and obey that authority in themselves and in one-another.⁵¹

To argue the point from a different perspective, these plays celebrate a version of motherhood which is at the centre of the family, which is necessary to the family, and which resists the demands of the political and the public. When the mediating and loving mother is banished or killed, not only the families but the societies of both plays fall apart. Mamillius dies and the court of Leontes falls into disarray, and the society of Webster's play implodes:

The Duchess's active commitment to life and to love is repeated, becoming more extreme as the society of the play, deprived of the Duchess's healing presence, falls apart into melancholy, apathy, madness and murder.⁵²

Like Hermione, the Duchess mediates between this world and the next, though in Webster's play that mediation is far more melancholy and the heroine passes away into death rather than returns to new life. Cariola, her servant, notes that the Duchess resembles 'some revered monument / Whose ruins are ever to be pitied' even before she dies, thus, as if, Michael Neill suggests:

Her sufferings had already begun her metamorphosis into the effigy of pious womanhood whose cold embrace she had sought to escape in the wooing scene — a metamorphosis which will be symbolically completed at the point of death where she self-consciously mimics the alabaster figure's kneeling posture.⁵³

Both mothers transcend the demands of patriarchy as they simultaneously reaffirm its values, values which are inscribed in a Jacobean version of Protestantism which celebrates motherhood in terms of intimacy, suffering and sacrifice. This idealised motherhood was celebrated in Jacobean drama just as it was consumed by those who bought and read the mothers' legacies and advice books that, by dint of the living words of their dead authors, eerily offered their husbands, children and readers a glimpse of perfection beyond the grave.

⁵¹ Allman, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵² Jacqueline Pearson, *Tragedy and Tragicomedy in the plays of John Webster*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1980, p. 61.

⁵³ Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 340.

The Jacobean theatre, as Dympna Callaghan points out, offered a similarly otherworldly experience of ideal womanhood in its repeated celebration of dead good mothers who, ‘once dead, become an example of absolute, unquestionable perfection.’⁵⁴ As Michael Neill shows in his discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi* and other Jacobean plays, the visual representation of tombs and of tomb sculpture acts only as ‘a theatrical cipher’ for the ‘true monument’ which is motherly and wifely perfection:

The Duchess’s tomb, surrounded as it is by ruins that express the frailty of mere worldly greatness, stands for the individual renown earned by a woman whose unbreakable “integrity of life” is celebrated in the play’s final couplet.⁵⁵

Catherine Belsey is right, therefore, to associate the statue that Hermione becomes with contemporary funerary effigies, although this thesis offers a rather different reading of the implications of such effigies. As the Duchess of Malfi comes closer to her death, her iconicity is made visibly real in the way in which her flesh appears to become stone. As she dies, she becomes integral to the tomb which is the material monument to her fame, though the immortality of what she stands for is realised by the poignant call of her voice from beyond the grave. The comic ending of *The Winter’s Tale*, however, allows for a dramatisation of what is impossible, and brings to life a monument in which ideal, faultless motherhood is realised. The transformations represented by Hermione’s statue and the Duchess of Malfi’s tomb celebrate an idealisation of motherhood as ‘perfect and undeformed’ which is eternalised in the statuary of the tomb and which resonates as a voice beyond the grave.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Dympna Callaghan, *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 153.

⁵⁵ Michael Neill, pp. 352 and 332.

⁵⁶ See footnote 1 to this chapter.

Afterword

*A late Murther of the Son Upon the Mother (a lost play)*¹

This thesis has argued for the importance of motherhood in the drama of early modern England and has attested to her value both as a signifier of unchanging values and as a figure whose representation readily responds to the demands of ideological and political change. The aim has been both thematic — to discover how far genre influences representation — and teleological: to test the potential of the mother figure for change over time, in response to shifts in cultural and social values. While it would be simplistic to describe a steady change over the hundred years from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, this thesis has argued that the religious conflict of the English Reformation and its attendant issues of national identity created a complex series of dramatic possibilities for the mother figure which allowed her to function as a religious and political emblem. Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatisations of motherhood demonstrate significant shifts in emphasis as English culture responds to increasing pressure from Protestant and later, Puritan ideas, and as they gradually become mainstream. From a crusading, emblematic function in the fifteenth century, the dramatised mother figure eventually (and literally) fossilises into an iconic representation of perfect motherhood, created according to the prescriptions of Jacobean Protestantism and in keeping with contemporary discourses on the family which tend to celebrate maternity in terms of an ideal. The period covered by this thesis ends at a time when, for a number of possible reasons, the mother figure is no longer the subject of intense dramatic interest.

Patrick Collinson has argued that there was a significant change of emphasis in Protestant discourse from early radicalism to later conservatism, which is simultaneous with the shift from the mother figure as an inclusive emblem of communal identity to an iconic signifier of individual moral rectitude that has been traced in this thesis:

In some senses, English Protestantism regressed, becoming less, not more, popular in character as we proceed from the mid sixteenth century to the early seventeenth, and from a time when the Reformation was associated with novelty, youth, insubordination and iconoclasm (when indeed it was still a protest) to the period of its middle age, when it was more obviously associated with the maintenance of the status

¹ A lost play by Ford and Webster, cited in Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623/24*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 144.

quo than with subversion, with middle aged if not middle class preoccupations and when its attack on traditional culture met with widespread and popular resistance.²

Collinson links this with an increasing emphasis upon the literal abhorrence of the emblematic, quoting a popular Puritan text from the Homilies, ‘the seeking out of images is the beginning of whoredom.’³ He suggests that Protestantism ‘became inwardly and outwardly more repressive, less like a religion of liberation.’⁴ This move towards repression tended to prompt a turning away from explorations of motherhood in terms of its potential as an allegory for public and political change, towards a focus upon the personal meanings and experience of the mother and her family. This, Elaine Beilin argues, is manifest in later early modern discourses including conduct literature and advice books. She sees in the Countess of Lincoln’s book — and that of M.R., author of *The Mothers Counsell* (entered 1623) — a return of focus to the domestic sphere which she argues the earlier mother writers had transcended with an emphasis upon a connection between learning and female virtue. For Beilin such a return signals a regressive trend in women’s writing:

In those hundred years [between 1524 and 1623] appeared more translations, varied feminine personae and experiments with genre, style and voice as women steadily strove to establish a legitimate place for their own literary experience. If this constitutes a literary Renaissance for women, it does not conform to that of masculine culture, nor does it extend much beyond the death of James I. At the quarter-century mark, whether the interest in women’s education had faltered, or whether women had exhausted this particular vein of writing, they briefly turned away from building their city to other pursuits.⁵

Ann Rosalind Jones discusses this change from another perspective, suggesting that a backlash against women’s religious testifying forces a further retreat away from a public

² Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia* (Stenton Lecture 1985), University of Reading, 1986.

³ Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia*, p. 35.

⁴ Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia*, p. 6.

⁵ E.V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve, Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. xxiii. In Chapter 9, ‘Women’s Defenses and Advice Books’, Beilin discusses the work of Grymeston, Joceline, Leigh, Elizabeth Clinton and M.R. in some detail in this context.

role.⁶ And Valerie Wayne notices that later women writers are increasingly tentative and conservative and discusses as an example the writing of Elizabeth Joceline:

While her admonitions show little change from Vives 100 years earlier, their articulation, like their contradictory figurative language, represents both an advance and a retreat: through the publication of her advice Joceline is entering the sphere of public discourse generally off limits to women; yet the conservative content of her counsel contradicts the very mode of its utterance.⁷

In the theatre, a similar conservatism in the representation of motherhood in later Jacobean plays, is evident. Juliet Dusinberre wrote, in 1975, a more optimistic account of the representation of women in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama than most critics have since allowed, and linked the liberal ideas about women that she discerned in the drama to Puritan emphasis upon the family and the wife/mother's status as 'helpmeet' within it.⁸ For Dusinberre, the celebration of the woman's domestic role in Protestant discourse confirmed an enhanced status for Puritan women which was represented in the drama. Yet she, too, charts a depressing change in attitude to the representation of women on the stage. For Dusinberre, this change happened as Puritans gradually deserted the theatre as a consequence of political and religious differences with the Stuarts. While this thesis takes a very different view from Dusinberre, it is significant that one of the earliest and most persuasive advocates of the argument that the representation of women became increasingly liberal in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre acknowledges that the liberality was not sustained.

Dusinberre's argument that change was affected by politics is substantiated in a different context by Margot Heinemann, who refers to Glynn Wickham's suggestion that decadence in the drama is attributable to 'the operation of censorship which prevented the serious treatment of political, moral and religious issues' in this context, offering a direct connection between political concerns and theatrical representation.⁹ For Heinemann, the Jacobean theatre found itself operating in the face of developing tensions and conflicts within Court and City, 'the aristocratic and intellectual side of the revolt against the corruption and

⁶Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Nets and bridles: early modern conduct books and sixteenth-century women's lyrics', *The Ideology of Conduct*, eds. Nancy Armstrong, Leonard Tennenhouse, New York: Methuen & Co., 1987, p. 60.

⁷Valerie Wayne, 'Advice for women from mothers and patriarchs' in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 65.

⁸Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Macmillan, London, 1975, p. 15.

⁹Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 38.

oppression of Stuart absolutism ...', and expressing those tensions through changes in the drama itself.¹⁰ Jerzy Limon presses this further by suggesting that 'it was not until the last years of James I's reign that, for the first time, dramatic texts were disseminated on a wide scale for basically political purposes'.¹¹ The mother figure found little function in this increasingly politicised drama, influenced by a monarch who had explicitly rejected the mother/state analogy for a more congenial model of benign paternalism, offering himself as 'A loving nourish-father' to England on his accession.¹² The dramatised mother thus retreated to the suffering and victimhood that had characterised her representation almost a hundred years earlier in the Reformation polemic of *Kyng Johan* and *Respublica*. Now, however, the significance of her suffering was not associated with politics or religion or even the idea of nationhood. Instead, the late Jacobean dramatised mother suffered for her family, an icon of perfect, ideal maternity.

¹⁰ Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, p. 173.

¹¹ Jerzy Limon, *Limon, Dangerous Matter*, p. 1.

¹² Quoted by Eileen Allman in *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy*, p. 29. See also my discussion of James's rejection of the mother/state analogy in Chapter 7.

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