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“This Cursed Womb”: The Queen as Mother on the Early Modern Stage

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ABSTRACT

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While an early modern queen was expected to act as a stabilizing presence by giving birth to heirs and thus securing the line of succession, an examination of the early modern drama reveals that queens who were mothers were, on the contrary, perceived as threats to both domestic and political stability. Dramatic representations of queen mothers illuminate the historical and political contexts in which Queen Elizabeth, in particular, had to negotiate her roles as both a queen and mother.

Gorboduc and Jocasta were produced in the midst of the succession debate as part of the widespread attempt to persuade Elizabeth to become a wife and mother. Yet paradoxically, these plays, with their monstrously (self-)destructive mothers, could only have reinforced Elizabeth’s notion that biological maternity and queenship were incompatible. Despite Elizabeth’s ultimate cultivation of a metaphoric maternity, prevailing fears of a queen mother’s power remained, as evinced by two plays produced during the third decade of Elizabeth’s reign. Shakespeare’s King John demonstrates the ability of savvy political women such as Constance and Eleanor, who mirror the battling cousins Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth, to exploit prevailing fears about maternity in their quests for political power. But they are killed off, just as Zenocrate, in Marlowe’s
*Tamburlaine*, falls prey to Tamburlaine’s anxieties about her vast influence as both a queen and mother.

Queen Anna, the wife of James I, provides an historical example of a young queen mother who capitalized on the power that maternity afforded her before she was marginalized in the Jacobean court. In the last years of her life, she attempted through masque productions, specifically *Tethys’ Festival*, to recover her position as the Jacobean matriarch. Anna, like the other figures of this study, met a premature death.

These portraits of maternity suggest that Elizabeth’s decision to forego biological motherhood, rather than ending her legacy, instead may well have preserved it. In a culture in which a queen’s maternal power was both feared and resisted, Elizabeth, understandably, elected to cultivate a maternity that threatened neither the patriarchy nor her own physical well-being.
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This work is dedicated to Mom, Dad, and Umma, my beloved grandmother, who nurtured within me a love of learning.
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INTRODUCTION

THE QUEEN AS MOTHER ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

For those that will not permit a woman to have power over her owne
sones, will not permit her (I am assured) to have rule over a realme.
John Knox, 1558

John Knox’s loaded comment appears in his notorious manifesto *First Blast of the
Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in 1558, the year Queen
Elizabeth assumed the throne. In this brief remark, Knox simultaneously dismisses the
presence of maternal power and female political power in early modern England. Despite
his attempts at self-“assurance,” Knox, along with many others, increasingly feared that
both mothers and queens were becoming palpable threats to patriarchal rule in the
domestic and political realms.

Knox’s comments suggest a relationship between the roles of the mother and
queen in early modern England that has been all but overlooked by contemporary critics.
Despite multiple recent inquiries into the nature of both early modern maternity and early
modern queenship, scholars have neglected to explore the category of the “queen
mother.” My project intervenes in these ongoing critical discussions by focusing
specifically on the neglected figure of the queen mother in the early modern drama.¹

In a period in which the identity of a clear successor to the throne was often in
doubt, a queen’s duty to give birth to a legitimate male heir assumed tremendous
importance.² The many wives of Henry VIII and Henry’s own daughters, Mary and
Elizabeth, faced an inordinate amount of pressure to provide male heirs and thereby stabilize the uncertain line of succession. Nonetheless, while queens were expected to act as stabilizing presences through their reproductive capacities, depictions of queen mothers in the early modern drama reveal that these women were, in fact, perceived as threats to both domestic and political stability. If mothers were believed capable of "suffocating" their sons, as contemporary scholarship suggests, and women possessing political power were commonly seen as "monstrous" or "unnatural," as Knox himself suggested, a woman filling both roles might be doubly stigmatized.

Motherhood, much to the chagrin of those who espoused misogynistic sentiment, gave a queen inherent political power. Despite the desire of many, such as Knox, to deprive women of agency within the political realm, a queen, be it consort or regnant, held a unique position. Through the birth of a male heir, she could secure the future of the realm. As one ambassador remarked during Mary Tudor’s reign: "the queen’s lying-in is the foundation of everything." Early modern ideas regarding gestation only added to a queen’s ostensible powers. Medical treatises suggested that a mother’s temperament could literally shape a child within the womb; a mother’s unpleasant thoughts or dreams could deform a child. Barrenness was often perceived as punishment for a mother’s sin; fecundity, a reward for a mother’s virtuous life. The queen was, therefore, believed to hold inimitable power over England’s future—she could literally shape the future king or queen, and therefore the monarchy—before ever giving birth.

Because a queen mother was credited with such powers, failure to successfully provide a male heir could bring about her downfall. Anne Boleyn, expected to provide Henry with a male heir, gave birth to Elizabeth and then suffered a series of miscarriages.
Many, including Henry, saw these miscarriages as evidence of Anne’s witchcraft. Her final miscarriage was in January of 1536. By May of 1536, she was dead. While her miscarriages may have not directly led to Anne’s conviction and execution, few scholars doubt that if she had given birth to a male heir, Anne would never have faced charges of any kind.\(^4\)

In the midst of an environment in which queens could live or die depending on their perceived success as mothers, Elizabeth assumed the throne. While the implications of her decision to forego biological motherhood have been examined by early modern scholars, no one has studied the theatrical representations of queen mother figures that can illuminate the historical and political contexts in which she had to negotiate her two possible roles as queen and mother. While courtly poets frequently venerated Elizabeth as the “Virgin Queen,” and Elizabeth constructed herself as a loving metaphoric mother in speeches to her people, the early modern drama reveals apprehensions about maternal queenship that simmered beneath the surface. As Steven Mullaney has argued, “Elizabethan popular drama arises out of the growing contradictions between English society as it was in actuality and as it was portrayed by the official organs of government.”\(^5\) The drama, then, unlike any other genre of its time, provided playwrights with a public venue for reflecting anxieties pervasive in early modern culture. As Arthur Kinney notes, the early modern theatre was “the only widespread public medium for commentary on religious, political and social life.”\(^6\) The dramas of this study suggest that though a well chosen marital partner and biological heir would seemingly have only secured Elizabeth’s position on the throne during a very tenuous time, her choice to
preserve her physical body and forego biological motherhood, rather than ending her legacy, as might be expected, instead preserved it.

My dissertation spans a nearly fifty year period, 1561-1610, covering the years from the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign through the decade following her death. Within this period, a number of dramatic texts feature representations of maternal queenship which, surprisingly, have been overlooked by critics. *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* were produced during the succession debate as part of the widespread attempt to persuade Elizabeth to become a wife and mother. *King John* and *Tamburlaine*, plays produced in the late 1580s and early 1590s, reveal that despite Elizabeth’s success as both a queen and metaphoric mother, concerns about the destabilizing effects of queen mother figures had not been fully allayed. Anna of Denmark, Elizabeth’s successor as England’s queen, found herself struggling to reclaim her maternal role during James’s reign. Dramatic masques such as *Tethys’ Festival* reveal Anna’s efforts through such display to restore the royal family and her role within it.

**Critical Contexts**

The two crucial terms of my project “queen” and “mother,” have a variety of connotations. Queen regnants, such as Elizabeth and Mary Tudor, were a rare occurrence in English history. In fact, prior to Mary Tudor’s reign, only one queen regnant, Matilda in the 12th century, had briefly ruled.7 Tudor and Stuart drama reflects this historical phenomenon: scarcely any sovereign queens are featured in early modern plays. Other queen figures, including queen consorts and queen mothers, are abundant. In my project, the word “queens,” therefore, will refer not only to queen regnants, but also to figures
such as the queen consort, or wife of the king, and the queen mother, or biological mother to the heir to the throne. My decision to do so is in keeping with current scholarship, including recent works such as “High and Mighty Queens” of Early Modern England (2003), which considers a variety of representations of queenship—“queenregnants...queen consorts....and queen mothers,” in order to better understand “cultural anxieties about strong women.” Though consorts and queen mothers were obviously not endowed with the same power as Elizabeth or Mary Tudor, their proximity to the king, and most importantly to the heir, made them politically relevant.

Though the meaning of “mother” might appear self-evident, it is worth noting the dual meanings the term will have in my project. Following critics such as Leah Marcus, Carole Levin, and Louis Montrose, “mother,” will refer not only to biological mothers but also to those women, such as Elizabeth, who developed a metaphoric maternal relationship with their subjects. Elizabeth’s appropriation of the language of maternity was apparent from the early years of her reign. In her 1563 address to the House of Commons, she declared: “Though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more natural mother than I mean to be unto you all.” Though the dramatic queen mothers I will consider are biological mothers, at times they function metaphorically as well; Jocasta, for example, is such a figure to the people of Thebes. Queen Anna was a biological mother and, as I will argue, a metaphoric mother to a group of courtiers and artists.

My work will draw on three areas of discourse: early modern motherhood, Elizabeth’s cultivation of a maternal persona, and early modern dramatic representations of queenship. Though each of these areas has been the subject of extensive critical
inquiry, scholars have not considered how these areas intersect in the figure of the queen mother. Much of the current scholarship focusing on aspects of maternity in early modern culture owes a debt to Janet Adelman’s work, *Suffocating Mothers* (1992). While Adelman, however, makes no distinction between royal mother and other dramatic mothers, my work will focus on the unique challenge confronting a queen mother: to provide a healthy, preferably male, heir, and thereby assure the stability of the monarch, without threatening the patriarchy’s own power. Adelman’s work does offer insight into the mounting anxieties confronting mothers in the early modern period. She provides a psychoanalytic account of the “terror of maternal origin” that she argues existed in early modern culture. As she demonstrates, the “maternal malevolence” of Shakespeare’s plays reflects an “infantile terror” of the mother, who was believed to have the “power to make or unmake the world and the self for her child.”

Critics such as Mary Beth Rose build upon Adelman’s claims and contextualize dramatic maternal figures further by examining historical and cultural documents of the day. In “Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare?” (1991) Rose argues that motherhood was “beginning to be construed as a problematic status.” Early modern mothers were perceived as having an inordinate amount of power over the hearts and minds of their children. Rose concludes that, for these reasons, in early modern plays “the best mother is an absent or dead mother.”

monstrous and self-sacrificial, was an issue not simply of physical reproduction, but of
domestic power as well.” Frances Dolan’s essay considers how early modern medical
treatises on reproduction, along with other writings on maternal conduct reveal “a fear of,
fascination with, and hostility toward maternal power in early modern English culture.”

While Maternal Measures, in particular, provides me with further cultural
evidence of a pervasive fear of maternal power in the domestic sphere, it still fails to
examine how anxieties about childcare uniquely affected queens. As I will show,
queen mothers found themselves with seemingly conflicting responsibilities: give birth to
the heir, do not hinder his development or “suffocate” him, but also make sure that he
does not “grow out of kind,” as the children of Jocasta and Zenocrate, for example, do,
and as Elizabeth feared her own children would.

Much of the current critical discussion of Elizabeth’s maternity owes a debt to E.
C. Wilson, Frances Yates, and Roy Strong, who first examined the “cult of Elizabeth.” Strong, for instance, argues that the cult of Elizabeth was “deliberately” created “to
replace the pre-Reformation externals of religion, the cult of the Virgin.” Adding to and
revising the ideas suggested by Strong and Yeats is Louis Montrose’s seminal work that
considers, among other issues, Elizabeth’s cultivation of a maternal persona. Employing
a new historicist perspective, Montrose examines how Elizabeth provided her subjects
with “a resource for dealing with the internal residues of their relationships to the
primary maternal figures of infancy.” Montrose discusses Elizabeth’s successful
“maternal policy,” in which she fashioned herself into a singular combination of
“Maiden, Matron, and Mother.”
More recently, historian Carole Levin, in "The Heart and Stomach of a King": *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (1994) and *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (2002), has examined how Elizabeth's approach to motherhood proved effective. Levin notes, "By not marrying, by being both mother of no one and of everyone...Elizabeth exerted a strong psychological hold on her subjects."\(^{20}\) Lena Cowen Orlin in "The Fictional Families of Elizabeth I" (1995) considers the ways in which Elizabeth "insinuated and manipulated fictional familial relationships" and used the "maternal metaphor" in particular "to make demands of her people."\(^{21}\)

As these critics have demonstrated, specifically through examinations of Elizabeth's speeches and letters, Elizabeth established herself as a benevolent, venerated mother to her people. The dramatic portraits of my study, however, reveal that despite Elizabeth's ability to develop a generally beloved maternal persona, biological maternity, coupled with any form of political power, still proved threatening. Elizabeth, perhaps aware of such apprehensions, cleverly elected to be a "mother" without enduring the vagaries of pregnancy and childbirth.\(^{22}\) As my study shows, other queen figures, both fictional and historical, inevitably fall short in comparison with Elizabeth's successful model of maternity.

Surprisingly, a relatively small amount of work has been produced focusing on queens within the early modern drama.\(^{23}\) Theodora Jankowski's text *Women in Power the Early Modern Drama* (1992) works to address this omission; her interest is "in exploring...the potential disruption of gender identity that occurs when a woman is placed in a masculine position."\(^{24}\) Jankowski's work draws attention to scholarly neglect of dramatic queen figures. While she focuses on queens such as Shakespeare's Cleopatra,
whose maternity is largely irrelevant, I will concentrate on female characters who are politically powerful because of their roles as mothers.

Lisa Hopkins' recent work, *Writing Renaissance Queens* (2002), considers texts written by and about Elizabeth and Mary Stuart along with dramatic representations of queen figures. She concludes that “from John Knox to John Ford...[dramatic] representations of female rule seem to be characterized primarily by dislike, distrust and an obsession with sexuality.” As Hopkins notes, “every queen is seen as potentially a quean [whore].” Hopkins' attention to the paranoia surrounding a queen’s potential lasciviousness figures prominently in my work. I focus, however, especially in my examination of *King John*, on how such paranoia gave queen mothers inherent power—for they were the only ones certain of the heir's paternity.

*Chapter Summary*

My first chapter, “Elizabethan Constructions of Maternity,” examines the previously undiscussed representations of maternal figures in plays performed early in Elizabeth’s reign during the succession debate. As many scholars have suggested, Queen Elizabeth’s decision to eschew biological maternity in favor of “metaphoric” maternity may have resulted in no small part from witnessing the precarious nature of royal maternity. Physical mutilation, death, and disease plagued her mother, sister, and stepmothers, as they strove to fulfill their queenly duties of providing heirs. The early modern drama, however, also presented Elizabeth with similarly dismal models of maternal queenship. Of particular importance are those dramatic constructions of
maternity specifically staged in the midst of the succession debate that, ironically, only reinforced Elizabeth’s notion of the incompatibility of royalty and biological maternity.

As Marie Axton has noted, the Inns of Court performed a series of plays, including Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc* (1561) and George Gascoigne’s *Jocasta* (1566), with the intention of urging Elizabeth to marry and procreate. Rather than persuading Elizabeth to embrace domesticity, however, these early didactic dramas confirmed the very fears Elizabeth voiced regarding parenting. She articulated one such fear to Parliament: “For although I be never so careful of your well doings, and mind ever so to be, yet may my issue grow out of kind, and become perhaps ungracious.” Both *Jocasta* and *Gorboduc* confront Elizabeth with versions of her maternal nightmare. The plays depict queen mothers who produce sons who “grow out of kind,” and the destruction redounds not only upon the mothers, as Elizabeth feared, but also upon the sons themselves—a fate which did not bode well for a nation obsessed with royal succession.

In contrast to these examples of disastrous biological maternity, Elizabeth cultivated a maternal persona unlike any of the models presented to her, either by historical predecessors or dramatic constructions. Such adaptability allowed Elizabeth to both marry and mother her people “metaphorically,” and therefore avoid the fatal consequences that so many historical and literary royal mothers confronted. In so doing, Elizabeth, long acknowledged as one who redefined queenship for the early modern period, redefined maternity as well.

In Chapter Two, “Warring Mothers in *King John,*” I consider two of Shakespeare’s most neglected female characters, Constance and Eleanor. Produced three
decades following the Inns of Court plays, Shakespeare’s early history play chronicles the fight for power between two warring queen mothers, who, as I argue, represent Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots. Both Constance and Eleanor demonstrate for the male characters within the play and for the Elizabethan audience the destabilizing potential of queen mother figures—mothers who have the exclusive knowledge of the legitimacy of the heirs who claim the English throne. Like their historical counterparts, Mary and Elizabeth, Constance and Eleanor are warring kinswomen who employ maternity for their own political purposes.

In their standoff, these mothers engage in a battle in which they dare to dictate the language of male discourse, engage in a public debate over their own purity, and question the very legitimacy of each other’s children. The freedom in which they engage in political discourse, typically reserved for men, reflects their unbridled status as widows. Unsupervised by husbands, these women engage in a loquaciousness often associated with widowhood and sexual experience in the early modern period. In so doing, they constantly remind the male characters who surround them of their sexually available, and experienced, status.

Despite Eleanor and Constance’s efforts to remake the conflict as a war between two women, both characters are abruptly killed offstage in act four of the play, so that Shakespeare can restore the play’s exclusively male political world. Constance’s dreams of political power are dashed, and she, like Mary Queen of Scots, ultimately fails to capitalize successively on her role as biological mother to a claimant of the English throne.
Chapter Three, “Tamburlaine’s Domestic Threat,” reveals that even in a world in which a powerful, despotic male ruler is present (unlike in *King John* or in Elizabeth’s England), queen mother figures—even a queen consort like Zenocrate—pose a destabilizing threat. While Constance and Eleanor in *King John* exploit the fears surrounding maternity for their own purposes, I believe Zenocrate ultimately falls prey to Tamburlaine’s own anxieties about her vast influence as both a queen and mother. Despite Tamburlaine’s deification of Zenocrate, and his sons’ devotion to their mother, Tamburlaine’s apprehensions about her power prompt him to eradicate the maternal presence in his world and strive to replace it altogether.

Tamburlaine’s saga appears in two parts, and Zenocrate undergoes a transformation between the two plays. While in the first play she is consistently associated with a virginal, chaste body, what Mikhail Bakhtin would categorize as the classic body, when she appears in part two, she has borne three sons. Marlowe’s decision to conceal Zenocrate when she is at her largest and at her most “grotesque” is in keeping with early modern anxieties surrounding the pregnant body. When she appears for the first time in part two, she is positioned on the throne surrounded by her adoring sons—and Tamburlaine soon senses, and resents, the strong connection that exists between his sons and his wife. Conveniently for Tamburlaine, Zenocrate suddenly, inexplicably, falls ill early in part two and dies. Immediately following Zenocrate’s death, Tamburlaine takes steps to supplant her role in the familial unit, and I argue, begins a process of metaphorically “rebirthing” his sons.

With my fourth chapter, “Recovering Maternity: Queen Anna’s Masques,” I turn to a historical figure, Queen Anna, who faced the unenviable task of succeeding
Elizabeth as England’s queen. My interest in Anna, a subject of recent critical inquiry, centers on her displacement from her maternal role—and her efforts to recuperate it. Though devoid of Elizabeth’s political power, Anna, as a biological mother to not one but two viable male heirs, provided England with its first secure line of succession in generations. As a young mother, Anna capitalized on the power that her position as queen mother afforded her. Despite royal tradition, and James’s own insistence that Anna not raise the royal heir, she staged a siege on the castle in which her young son was being raised, and demanded custody. She was ultimately successful.

Despite this ostensible victory, however, Anna’s role as the royal matriarch was jeopardized. James assumed the role of both mother and father to the English people, and thus denied her the opportunity to establish herself as a political mother figure. More importantly, however, James cultivated a familial unit that excluded Anna by displacing her with his favorite male courtiers. Adding to Anna’s difficulties was Queen Elizabeth’s continued relevance in the Jacobean court, which threatened not only Anna’s own success as the new queen, but also her relationship with her own children. As I argue, through her production of masques, in particular Tethys’ Festival, Anna took steps to recover her position as the royal mother.

Anna discovered that artistic endeavors allowed her the opportunity to cultivate a court of her own to rival the homosocial court that James fostered. Though the patronage of a variety of artists, especially poet/playwright Samuel Daniel, Anna fostered a surrogate family that allowed her to mother both artists and courtiers. Anna still yearned, however, to reclaim her role in James’s life and his court, as her efforts in Tethys’
*Festival* demonstrate. Anna's attempts ultimately failed; James's marginalization of Anna continued until her death.

The dramatic queen mothers of my project are a varied group of women—some, such as Videnia, Constance, and Eleanor, seek royal power; others, such as Jocasta and Zenocrate, prioritize their roles as mothers above any political ambition. All of these women, however, are depicted as both threats to the domestic realms in which they mother and destabilizing forces within the political realms in which they reside—and all of these women are dead before the conclusion of the plays in which they appear.²⁶ Mirroring the fate of the historical queen mothers Elizabeth herself had witnessed, these doomed figures remind us of the precarious roles Elizabeth successfully negotiated. Presented with such compelling evidence of the prevailing antipathy directed toward queen mothers, Elizabeth, understandably, elected to cultivate a maternity that threatened neither the patriarchy nor her own physical well-being.
NOTES

1 We see queen mothers “killed off” not only in the works that I discuss, but also in plays featuring the best known female characters of the period, including Hamlet, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra. For my study, I have deliberately chosen plays that are often overlooked but that provide us with rich examples of queen mothers.

2 Many factors contributed to the often uncertain line of succession in Tudor England. Much of the confusion during the period stemmed from Henry VIII’s indecision and his frequent revisions of the Act of Succession: sometimes excluding his daughters, deeming them illegitimate, sometimes restoring them to the line of succession.

3 Quoted in H. F. M. Prescott, Mary Tudor (London: 1952), 307.


7 Prior to Mary’s accession, Lady Jane Grey was also proclaimed queen regnant. Her rule, of course, lasted only nine days.


11Mary Beth Rose’s “Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance,” (Shakespeare Quarterly 42, no. 3 [1991]: 291-314) appeared a year before Adelman’s complete work, but Rose cites two earlier essays by Adelman which are the foundation of Adelman’s book.


15Within the first year of her reign, Elizabeth expressed her reservations about biological children: “For although I be never so careful of your well doings, and mind
ever so to be, yet may my issue grow out of kind, and become perhaps ungracious” (Qtd. in Anne Somerset, *Elizabeth I* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991], 97).


17Strong, 16.


19Montrose, 63, 80.


California Press, 1988), Leah Marcus also examines Elizabeth’s ability to assume a variety of familial roles, including both mother and son, to suit her political purposes.


23 While not dealing specifically with dramatic queen mothers, in *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), Katherine Eggert considers the positive effects antipatriarchal power had on various genres, including the drama.


26 Queen Anna, like the fictional characters of my study, died prematurely.
CHAPTER ONE

CONFIGURATIONS OF MATERNITY: THE ELIZABETHAN SUCCESSION

DEBATE

Bestow the bonds of your modesty on a husband... For then a little Henry will play in the palace for us.

Sir Thomas Challoner, in the dedication of a book presented to Queen Elizabeth, 1560

In the early days of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, many English subjects, though pleased with the relatively smooth transition following Mary Tudor’s rule, immediately became nervous about the naming of the next successor. After the rapid succession of four monarchs in eleven years, many of Elizabeth’s subjects were understandably anxious that she was without an heir, and so they urged her to rectify the situation—ideally through marriage and childbirth.¹ As the above epigraph illustrates, the nobility proposed an idealized version of motherhood to Elizabeth: one in which a “little Henry will play in the palace,” succession will be secured, and all will be well. Elizabeth would have been hard pressed, however, to find contemporary examples of such a positive royal maternal experience.² Elizabeth knew only too well that her own mother died in her efforts to provide a “little Henry,” and that Jane Seymour, who finally provided Henry with a male heir, died from complications in childbirth. Elizabeth’s sister, Mary, humiliated herself by mistakenly professing to be pregnant, and died—most likely from a gynecological
form of cancer.\textsuperscript{3} Catherine Parr, Elizabeth’s father’s last wife and perhaps her closest maternal figure, faced infertility most of her life, finally gave birth, and subsequently died.\textsuperscript{4}

Despite this history of tragic royal maternity, Elizabeth’s subjects were endlessly fascinated with the possibility of Elizabeth becoming a mother. Rumors regarding Elizabeth’s maternity preoccupied subjects of every social strata, as numerous speculations circulated around England. A number of commoners were punished for gossiping that Elizabeth had given birth to several illegitimate children, perhaps fathered by Robert Dudley; at the same time the Spanish Ambassador repeated rumors that Elizabeth was physically incapable of copulation and procreation.\textsuperscript{5}

Yet Elizabeth ultimately aspired to achieve, through her connection with her subjects, a relationship which would dwarf any biological maternity she might experience. Scholars have long debated whether her decision to eschew biological maternity in favor of metaphoric maternity might have resulted from witnessing the precarious nature of maternity.\textsuperscript{6} Physical mutilation, death, and disease plagued her mother, sister, and stepmothers, as they strove to fulfill their queenly duties by providing heirs. However, this debate has overlooked early modern dramas that presented Elizabeth with similarly dire models of maternal queenship. Of particular importance are those dramatic constructions of maternity staged in the midst of the succession debate that, ironically, reinforced Elizabeth’s notion of the incompatibility of royalty and biological maternity rather than convincing her to reproduce. A series of plays by the Inns of Court\textsuperscript{7} were performed with the intention of urging Elizabeth to marry and procreate, including Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s \textit{Gorboduc} (1561) and George Gascoigne’s
Jocasta (1566), yet these productions presented Elizabeth with images of dysfunctional maternity. An examination of these early didactic dramas reveals that these plays, rather than persuading Elizabeth to embrace domesticity, instead confirmed the very fears Elizabeth voiced regarding parenting, most specifically that the presence of a viable heir during her reign would be equivalent to "burying alive" the monarch. Elizabeth, instead, cultivated a maternal persona unlike any of the biological models presented to her, either by historical predecessors or dramatic constructions, and thus negotiated a place for herself alongside that other Tudor icon, her father, Henry VIII. In so doing, Elizabeth, long acknowledged as one who redefined queenship for the early modern period, redefined maternity as well.

I. Gorboduc: "The Wretched Name of Mother"

As early as 1559, only a year into Elizabeth's rule, Parliament began calling on their queen to marry. Elizabeth resolutely resisted Parliament's discussion of such matters. Members of the aristocracy, however, as Marie Axton notes, discovered another forum for the succession debate through "the Christmas entertainments of the Inns of Court." By setting their dramas in either ancient England (Gorboduc) or mythical Thebes (Jocasta), lawyers of these establishments discreetly produced plays that were in keeping with the 1559 Proclamation which forbade plays dealing with the "governance of the estate of the common weale," and developed, as Axton describes it, "their own distinctive kind of politic criticism."
Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*, according to Axton and many subsequent critics, cautions Elizabeth about the dangers of uncertain succession through the failures of King Gorboduc. After dividing the kingdom between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex, and ignoring his counselors' sage advice, Gorboduc's family, and then his country, fall apart. Porrex kills Ferrex, the queen mother, Videna, kills Porrex, and the people revolt and kill both Gorboduc and Videna. This precursor of *King Lear* serves as a cautionary tale to rulers—accept the counsel of advisers, and never leave a kingdom vulnerable by a lack of a successor.

Since Axton's groundbreaking work, other scholars have discovered an eyewitness account of the first performance of *Gorboduc* confirming that it not only deals directly with succession, but more specifically with royal marriage. Norman Jones and Paul Whitfield White note that "one extraordinary revelation is that the Inner Temple performance of *Gorboduc* directly addressed the controversial issue of royal marriage." In particular, they contend that Robert Dudley, who sponsored the production, hoped *Gorboduc* would awaken the queen to the dangers of a foreign marriage such as that presented by Eric of Sweden, a leading royal suitor at the time, and instead favor himself.

While Norton and Sackville ostensibly hoped to nudge Elizabeth closer to embracing matrimony and subsequently motherhood, they curiously depict the queen mother, Videna, as the catalyst behind the familial conflict—a deviation from their source material. Though the story of *Gorboduc* had been told multiple times prior to Norton and Sackville's rendition in many forms and genres, as Irby Cauthen notes in the introduction to his edition of the play, "The play is ultimately based on the story of Gorbodugo in
Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Histories of the Kings of Britain*.13 A lengthy excerpt from Monmouth’s account highlights a crucial decision made by Sackville and Norton:

Unto [Gorboduc] [sic] were two sons born, whereof the one was called Ferrex and the other Porrex. But when their father began to verge upon eld, a contention arose betwixt the twain as to which should succeed him in the kingdom. Howbeit, Porrex, spurred on thereunto by a more grasping covetise, layeth snares for his brother with a design of slaying him, whereupon Ferrex, when the matter was discovered unto him, betook himself across the Channel into Gaul, and...returned and fought against his brother. In this battle betwixt them, Ferrex was slain together with the entire host that accompanied him. Thereupon the mother, whose name was Widen, which she learnt the certainty of her son’s death, was beyond measure troubled, and conceived a bitter hatred of the other, for she loved the one that was slain better of the twain, and so hotly did her wrath blaze up by reason of his death, that she was minded to revenge it upon his brother.14

A protracted delay of any mention of the queen mother is clear; the first sentence omits her involvement at all in the births of Porrex and Ferrex, “unto [Gorboduc] were two sons born,” and Viden, or “Widen” is not mentioned until the ninth line of the text. More importantly, however, is her absence from the pivotal action of the play. The father’s “verge upon eld” causes “contention” between the sons, and only after Porrex kills Ferrex does Viden “conceive[...] a bitter hatred of the other [Porrex].” Though Viden, even in Monmouth’s account, always loved her elder son better than her younger son, there is no indication that she took any part in the political strategies that led to the dissolution of the royal family.

In Norton and Sackville’s play, however, though Gorboduc errs by dividing his kingdom and dallying with primogeniture by giving equal parts of the country to both of his sons, Viden is the actual instigator of familial discord. Scholars have ignored
Videna’s initial actions in the play, and in fact seem to overlook the first scene of the play altogether. Jacqueline Vanhoutte, for instance, remarks, “The play beings with King Gorboduc’s decision to abdicate in favor of his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex.” 15 The play actually begins, however, with a scene in which Videna instigates discord between her older son and his father and younger brother. In doing so, Videna exemplifies maternal monstrosity, manifesting so many of the anxieties that early modern culture associated with motherhood.

As Janet Adelman and others have argued, motherhood, independent of any royal influence, was itself viewed with trepidation throughout the early modern period. 16 As Adelman notes in her examination of Shakespeare’s canon, “The womb takes on a malevolent power quite divorced from the largely powerless women who might be supposed to embody it.” Infancy was “both dangerous and long” and these “conditions of infancy would have intersected with cultural representations of the female body to mark that body as the site of deformation and vulnerability.” 17 Nor did the mother escape negative connotations as the child matured. Misogynistic writings enforced the notions of the dangerous mother. Juan Luis Vives in his Instruction of a Christen Woman insists that mothers resist any urge to pamper their children, “For cherysshyng marreth the sonnes.” 18 Thus, mothers were seen as potentially debilitating figures, especially for male children. As Christine Coch notes, “considerable social pressure pushed male children out of the mother’s private sphere and into the public realm of men. The mother who sought to keep her son close effeminized him and thwarted social order.” 19 Mothers accused of hindering the development of otherwise strong, healthy males, were effectively “suffocating,” to use Adelman’s term, their sons. Anxiety about such “suffocation” prompted, especially in
upper classes, separation between the mother and child during formative years\textsuperscript{20}—and this often contributed to a sense of maternal abandonment on the part of children.

In the first scene of \textit{Gorboduc}, Videnia simultaneously “suffocates” one son, while abandoning the other, and in the process, initiates the conflict that will ultimately decimate the royal family. Videnia’s loyalty to Ferrex is certainly connected to her political agenda; since he is the elder son, she expects him to inherit the kingdom. Thus, she has neglected her younger son in favor of her elder—and her lack of affection does not go unnoticed. In Porrex’s words, she “loves my brother and...hateth me” (1.2.51).

Now that Porrex threatens Ferrex’s succession, she views her younger son as her political enemy. She informs Ferrex of Gorboduc’s division to divide the kingdom:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Videnia:} Half of his kingdom he will give away.
\textbf{Ferrex:} To whom?
\textbf{Videnia:} Even to Porrex, his younger son.
\hspace{1cm} Whose growing pride I do sore suspect
\hspace{1cm} That, being raised to equal rule with thee,
\hspace{1cm} Methinks I see his envious heart to swell,
\hspace{1cm} Filled with disdain and with ambitious hope.
\end{quote}

\begin{center}(1.1.28-34)\end{center}

Videnia’s language reveals her alienation from her younger son. While she frequently refers to Ferrex as “my son,” Porrex is “his [Gorboduc’s] younger son.” In her mind, he has “be[en] raised” by Gorboduc, not by his mother.

According to Videnia, Porrex’s “envious heart” is now swelling, beyond the control of his mother. Porrex embodies, in fact, Elizabeth’s worst maternal nightmare. As early as 1559, Elizabeth expressed to Parliament her anxieties about attempting motherhood as a queen regnant: “For although I be never so careful of your well doings,
and mind ever so to be, yet may my issue grow out of kind, and become perhaps ungracious.” 21 Elizabeth’s remarks resonate with a fear that she would be unable to control her child: her “issue” could “grow out of kind,” and thereby become a political liability rather than the ideal successor, the “little Henry,” that Parliament seeks. At the same time, as mother of this uncontrollable, unkind, 22 or “unnatural” issue, Elizabeth would be held responsible for his or her actions. Similarly, if Porrex is indeed un“kinde,” an early modern audience would likely look to his mother as the reason for his inadequacies. As Philip Dust has noted, “Videna sins against “kinde” by favoring her eldest son to the total exclusion of affection for her youngest son [sic].” 23

All the while that she is neglecting Porrex, Videna manifests an interest in her favorite son that early modern audiences would likewise characterize as unhealthy. She denies Ferrex the right to establish his own identity apart from her. She suggests that she and her son are practically interchangeable:

Videna: 
.....such is the [Gorboduc’s] froward will,
.....such my mishap and thine.

Ferrex: 
Mine know I none, but grief for your distress.

Videna: 
Yes, mine for thine, my son.

(2.1.14-7)

Though Ferrex makes efforts to distinguish himself from his mother, Videna will have none of it. “Mine for thine,” embodies Videna’s refusal to allow differentiation between them. She goes on to confirm that Gorboduc has observed her attachment to Ferrex:

Videna: 
For, knowing well, my son, the tender love
That I have ever borne and bear to thee,
He, grieved thereat, is not content alone
To spoil me of thy sight, my chiefest joy,
But thee of thy birthright and heritage.

(2.1.22-6)

Emphasizing the maternal/child bond, Videna refers to the love she “bears” for Ferrex, just as she literally “bore” him in childbirth. Videna resents any effort to effect geographical distance between herself and Ferrex—further proof of her “suffocating” effect on him.

Though Videna errs in smothering one son and neglecting the other, an early modern audience would fault her even more for another transgression that she commits in the first scene—one that critics have altogether ignored: she foments a revolt against Gorboduc, and in so doing incites her child’s rebellion against his father and monarch. Though Ferrex ultimately becomes enraged about what he views as his father’s betrayal, it is only after Videna repeatedly suggests the injustice of Gorboduc’s decision:

Ferrex: Madam, leave care and careful plaint for me.
Just hath my father been to every wight.
His first injustice he will not extend
To me, I trust, that give no cause thereof.
My brother’s pride shall hurt himself, not me.

(1.1.40-4)

Ferrex resists retaliation, and demonstrates loyalty to his “just” father. He resolutely commands his mother to abandon grieving for his sake, “leave care and careful plaint for me,” yet Videna insists:

So grant the gods! But yet thy father so
Hath firmly fixed his unmoved mind
That plaints and prayers can no whit avail.

(1.1.45-7)
Viden’s careful phrasing, “thy father,” suggests her estrangement from her husband; her interests are her own, and she makes no effort to feign loyalty to her husband and king. Ferrex continues, however, to maintain that the hegemonic power, in which his father rules surrounded by counselors, will not fail him:

Ferrex: Their ancestors [the counselors] from race to race have borne True faith to my forefathers and their seed; I trust they eke will bear the like to me.

(1.1.51-3)

Ferrex here “trusts” in the patriarchal establishment, behaving as an early modern son would be expected to behave. Not only is he loyal to his father the king, but also to the legacy of men who have surrounded the king. Viden is, however, relentless in her pressure, and when Ferrex finally agrees to pursue revenge, it is clear he is acting in order to appease his mother: “Mother, content you, you shall see the end” (1.1.67). This ambiguous promise leaves Viden perplexed, “The end? Thy end, I fear: Jove end me first” (1.1.70). Perhaps Ferrex can foresee the ultimate consequence of the familial dissension that Viden has instigated, which is, of course, the “end” of the royal family itself.

While Viden’s actions might enforce early modern anxieties about the contaminating effects of maternity on male children, her manipulation of a royal heir for her own political agenda had other contemporary relevance as well. Exploitation of a child in an effort to seize the monarchy is something Elizabeth herself had witnessed. Elizabeth’s own cousin, Lady Jane Grey, suffered fatal consequences as a pawn in just such a plot. A cabal, including Jane Grey’s parents, advanced her claim to the throne,
ultimately leading to her execution after a nine-day reign. Elizabeth, perhaps in response to a variety of such political corruptions of the parent/child relationship, insisted “Princes cannot like their children, those that should succeed unto them.”

Even if a child did not independently pursue his or her parent’s throne, a child with a legitimate claim to the throne often became the focal point of political campaigns. If Elizabeth became a biological mother as a queen regnant, she would face dual burdens unlike those confronted by any of her predecessors. She would feel pressure to avoid the missteps of both Videna and Gorboduc: conform to “appropriate” maternal childrearing practices, yet be wary of her own child’s potential as a political enemy.

If in her first appearance Videna enacts all the socially condemned behaviors of maternity, in her final appearance, she verbalizes a fear faced by early modern mothers—producing monstrous progeny. This fear pervaded even the royal household. As David Starkey notes, the birthing chamber prepared for Anne Boleyn prior to her delivery of Elizabeth was designed with this fear in mind: “Precautions were taken…about the design of the hangings. Figurative tapestry, with human or animal images, were ruled out. The fear was that it could trigger fantasies in the Queen’s mind which might lead to the child being deformed. Instead, simple, repetitive patterns were preferred.”

Starkey’s comments highlight one aspect of an early modern mother’s plight. If a child manifested monstrous characteristics, the mother would most likely be deemed responsible, even if she engaged in the most innocuous of behaviors while pregnant. Monstrosity was, in fact, broadly defined in early modern culture; the term could describe mild to severe biological deformity, but could also refer to any emotional behavior deemed “unnatural.”
Videna, after learning that her younger son has killed her favorite son, rails aloud as though Porrex is before her, labeling him as monstrous:

...if needs, needs thy hand must slaughter make,
Moughtest thou not have reached a mortal wound,
And with thy sword have pierced this cursed womb
That the accursed Porrex brought to light,
And given me a just reward thereof?

*  *  *

Shall I still think that from this womb thou sprung?
That I thee bare? Or take thee for my son?
No, traitor, no; I thee refuse for mine!...
Never, O wretch, this womb conceived thee,
Nor ever bode I painful throes for thee...
Ruthless, unkind, monster of nature’s work,
Thou never sucked the milk of woman’s breast...

(4.1.53-72, my emphasis)

Videna does her best to divorce herself altogether from Porrex by denying any involvement in the stages of his conception, gestation, and birth. He was not “conceived” in her, she never bore him through “painful throes,” and neither she, nor a wetnurse, ever nurtured him through the “milk of woman’s breast.” Videna thus rewrites his conception and development: he is a product of nature, not herself, and thus, he is not her responsibility. Videna, however, is unable to convince herself that she is wholly blameless for Porrex’s “monstrosity.” She claims that she wishes Porrex had slain her, instead of his brother, by “piercing” her “cursed womb” with a “mortal wound.” Videna describes such a death effected through the literal mutilation of her womb as a “just reward.” In so doing, she echoes early modern sentiment by holding herself, and her womb, responsible for her son’s “monstrosity.”
Videnz elects to destroy evidence of this monstrosity by murdering Porrex. Her action, in Senecan tradition, does not transpire onstage, but is reported by Marcella, Videnz’s lady-in-waiting, and the only other woman in the play:

Marcella: The noble prince, pierced with the sudden wound,  
 Out of his wretched slumber hasty start...  
 Beheld the queen and cried to her for help.  
 We then, alas, the ladies which that time  
 Did there attend, seeing that heinous deed,  
 And hearing him oft call the wretched name  
 Of mother and to cry to her for aid  
 Whose direful hand gave him the mortal wound,  
 Pitying, alas, for nought else could we do,  
 His ruthful end, ran to the woeful bed,  
 Despoiled straight his breast, and all we might,  
 Wiped in vain with napkins next at hand  
 The sudden streams of blood that flushed fast  
 Out of the gaping wound...

(4.2.204-19)

With this account of Porrex’s murder, the playwrights present Videnz’s destruction of her own issue as the ultimate perversion of “kinde.” Porrex, awakened by the pain of a piercing wound, cries out to his mother for help, only to discover that she, in fact, inflicted the blow. Marcella curses the name of “mother,” yet tends to Porrex in a maternal manner—along with the other ladies-in-waiting—in an effort to compensate for the damage that Porrex’s biological mother has done.

Marcella’s depiction of Porrex as the “noble prince” problematizes Videnz’s depiction of her son as “monstrous.” Marcella goes on, in fact, to eulogize him at length, fetishizing his ideal body: his “comely face,” “his princely cheer and countenance /
valiant active arms, his manly breast,” “his fair and seemly personage,” “his noble limbs in such proportion cast” (4.2.234-8). Marcella, by constructing an ideal image of the “noble Prince,” vilifies Videnia further, who labels this same prince, her own “issue,” a “monster.” Marcella’s ire at Videnia’s actions spreads through Gorboduc’s subjects—who subsequently kill both Gorboduc and Videnia.

Though critics have remarked that Videnia’s villainy safely distances her from Elizabeth, by killing her own child, Videnia enacts a crime associated with Elizabeth. Allegations of infanticide were the culmination of other salacious rumors that dogged Elizabeth all her life. Rumors of Elizabeth bearing illegitimate children began early in her reign—in fact, during the year that Gorboduc was produced, there were a number of subjects punished for perpetuating rumors that Elizabeth bore illegitimate children. As Carole Levin reveals, “In 1560 there were several reports that Elizabeth was pregnant. For instance, Mother Anne Dowe was committed to jail for ‘openly asserting that the Queene was with child by Robt. Duddeley.’” Such rumors became even more elaborate as her reign progressed. In 1570 “a man named Marshame was condemned to lose both his ears or else pay a fine of a hundred pounds for saying that Elizabeth had two children by Robert Dudley.” The following year, Robert Blosse was charged with spreading rumors that Elizabeth had given birth to, perhaps predictably, four children by Robert Dudley.

The ongoing speculation that Elizabeth secretly bore children led to more ominous accusations. If she was indeed bearing children, and these children never appeared in public, some speculated that Elizabeth committed that most unnatural of acts: infanticide. Late in Elizabeth’s reign, a man named Hugh Broughton reported a heinous
tale involving Elizabeth. After delivering a baby girl of Elizabeth, the midwife, "was brought to another chamber where there was a very great fire of coals, into which she was commanded to cast the child, and so it was burnt."\(^{30}\)

Though it is unlikely that such scandalous accusations were widely believed, the persistence of such rumors about Elizabeth throughout her reign reveals the public’s fascination with her potential as a biological mother, and their fears regarding the hybridity of the queen and mother roles. While some believed Elizabeth was capable of infanticide, others contended that Elizabeth was biologically tainted by her mother, who allegedly engaged in a number of unseemly acts, including incest. Because of such a "taint," some speculated that she was incapable of procreation whatsoever, because she herself was "monstrous." Elizabeth’s convoluted familial history, rife with a variety of such allegations, leads us to a discussion of Jocasta, another play produced in the midst of the succession debate.

II. Jocasta’s "Paynfull Womb"

Just as Queen Mary’s marriage was a terrible plague to all England, so now the want of Queen Elizabeth’s marriage and issue is like to prove as great a plague. If your parents had been of like mind, where had you been then? Alack, What shall become of us?

Dean of St. Paul’s, Alexander Nowell, at the opening of the 1563 session of Parliament

In the years following the production of Gorboduc, the succession debate intensified exponentially. Elizabeth’s near-death bout of smallpox in the fall of 1562 fueled the anxiety surrounding her lack of a successor. She herself later admitted how
close to death she came, remarking, “Death possessed every joint of me.”

Adding to English unrest was the fact that Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth’s greatest rival, had married in 1565 and given birth to a viable male heir, James, in 1566. It is little wonder that Parliament, despite Elizabeth’s aversion to the topic, insisted on revisiting the succession issue. It convened twice in early 1563 to address succession, but Elizabeth dodged its inquiries. When members of Parliament issued a petition to her later that same year, again broaching the subject, she responded ambiguously, “if I can bend my liking to your need I will not resist such a mind.”

By 1566, Elizabeth openly bristled at their queries: “I have sent word that I will marry, and I will never break the word of a prince said in a public place, for my honour’s sake. And therefore I say again, I will marry as soon as I can conveniently, and I hope to have children, otherwise I would never marry.”

Despite such assurances, a series of broken courtships belied her protestations and exacerbated many of her subjects’ anxieties.

As Elizabeth loathed private matters being bandied about in a public forum, the dramatic productions of the Inns of Court continued to provide rising members of the aristocracy with an alternative means of attempting to sway the monarch. George Gascoigne’s *Jocasta* was produced in 1566, and in the tradition of *Gorbovduc*, “was another appeal to settle the issue of succession by demonstrating the lesson of history.”

Unlike *Gorbovduc*, there is no evidence that Elizabeth ever attended a performance of *Jocasta*, and yet the Inns of Court were confident that news of their productions would reach their monarch. As Axton notes, there is evidence of an “elegant manuscript version of this tragedy prepared for Elizabeth’s maids of honour,” and two editions of Gascoigne’s works circulated in the 1570s.
Yet, with the production of *Jocasta*, the Inns of Court provided Elizabeth with an even more frightening portrait of maternity than that in *Gorboduc*. Jocasta, unlike Viden, is an unwitting victim: by marrying the wrong man—her first-born son—she sends her family and country into a downward spiral. Viewing this tale of incest as irrelevant to Elizabeth’s situation, critics have consistently overlooked or marginalized the play’s significance. Even Axton downplays the relevance of *Jocasta* to Elizabeth’s own life: “Oblique allusion and analogy were the lawyers’ strongest cards; the Inns of Court risked no tragedies of virgin queens plagued by clamourous female rivals; they [instead] conjured up two unnatural sons of Oedipus.”37 Perhaps *Jocasta*’s allusions were neither as oblique as Axton has asserted nor as Elizabeth might have preferred. Though Axton refers to the play as that of the “two unnatural sons of Oedipus,” the play positions Jocasta, as the title suggests, at the center of its story. While the Inns of Court might have performed another version of the Oedipus tale, such as *Oedipus Rex*, they instead, for whatever reason, presented a play that concentrates on the effects of incest on maternity.

This production of *Jocasta* was in keeping with an early modern preoccupation with incest, a preoccupation that might have resulted in part from the repeated accusations of incest that so often dogged the English royal family. As Bruce Boehrer notes, the multitude of literary formulations of incest combined with the recurring rumors of incest within the royal family resulted in incest becoming “something close to an obsession within courtly circles in 16th and 17th century England.”38 Though it is well documented that during the trial that led to her execution Anne Boleyn was accused of committing incest with her brother, other accusations against Elizabeth’s mother carried even greater repercussions for Elizabeth’s legitimacy. Perhaps most notably Nicholas
Sander, a Jesuit historian, in his *De Origine et Progressu Schismatis Anglicani* (1585), perpetuated a rumor involving Elizabeth’s mother, father and grandmother. As Retha Warnicke explains, “Sander claimed Lady Elizabeth (Anne’s mother) had conceived her daughter during an affair with Henry. Thus when Anne became the king’s wife, she actually married her father. This assertion was undoubtedly an enlargement of rumors current during Anne’s lifetime that her mother had been the king’s mistress.”39 Sander’s salacious narrative was not alone. Another Catholic writer, Adam Blackwood, published the virulent *Martyre de la Royne d’Escosse* (1589),40 which, as Boehrer notes, produced “a different tale of incestuous horrors. In this version of her genealogy, Elizabeth is not even Henry’s illegitimate, incestuous daughter; she is instead the incestuous daughter of Anne Boleyn by her brother George, and thus Blackwood concludes that she is ‘non seulement bastarde, mais aussi nee de triple incest,’”41 or “not only a bastard, but also born out of triple incest.”

Though Elizabeth never even acknowledged such allegations, the possible taint of incest followed her throughout her life. Critics such as Sheila Cavanagh have noted that since Elizabeth was “the offspring of an officially incestuous adulterer,” some expected Elizabeth to follow in her mother’s footsteps: “Roughly contemporaneous physiological beliefs made it unequivocally clear that Elizabeth could easily have inherited her mother’s lascivious temperament.”42 Warnicke posits that the accusations leveled against Elizabeth’s mother, specifically that witchlike behavior led her to engage in repeated acts of incest, contributed to Elizabeth’s decision to forego marriage and childbirth: “On a rational level surely she did not believe that her mother had been a witch. But the psychological impact of knowing that her father had approved Anne’s execution for
activities associated with witchcraft could have created an uncertainty and even an apprehension in Elizabeth.”

The production of Jocasta presented Elizabeth head-on with the horrors of incest, and specifically revealed how the descendants of incestuous unions are irreparably contaminated by their ancestors’ sins. As the play opens, Jocasta, the unfortunate mother and wife of Oedipus, the king of Thebes, laments the miserable state of her convoluted family. Oedipus is in seclusion, having blinded himself upon discovery of his incest, and Jocasta is grieving that their two sons, Pollynices and Eteocles, are preparing to fight one another for control of Thebes. During the course of the play, Jocasta brings her sons face to face in a failed attempt at reconciliation. They eventually kill one another in hand-to-hand combat. Jocasta, devastated by their deaths, kills herself with the very knife Pollynices uses in killing Eteocles.

The play portrays Jocasta as a queen mother who has abandoned all interest in royal power, and is instead completely absorbed in her role as mother. Unlike Videnia, political gain is not her concern; she is wholly invested in mothering. As she herself describes, “I have...cleane cast asyde / My princely robes, and thus in wofull weede, / Bewrapped have these lustless limmes of myne” (2.1.64-6). Instead of standing regally apart from the Theban women who surround her, she appears as one of them, dressed in mourning. Jocasta is a mother, amidst a chorus of lamenting mothers, desperate to save her children from further pain.

Despite her admirable maternal motives, the play repeatedly characterizes biological motherhood in bleak terms. Jocasta is a “miserable mother” (5.2.25) and her children are “wretched sons”; her body possesses a “paynfull womb” (1.1.47) that
produces “unnatural fruits” (1.1.109; 1.1.145). Regardless of her best efforts to reconcile her sons, the play depicts Jocasta’s actions as inevitably futile; the pall of incest has made her sons “unnatural”—and one consequence of this “unnatural” state is their willingness to commit fratricide in their quests for political power.

Jocasta senses that because of their incestuous parentage, her children are irreparably cursed:

Alas, alas, howe wrekefull wrath of Gods
Doth still afflicte Oedipus progenie:
The fyrste cause was thy fathers wicked bedde,
And then (oh why doe I my plagues recompte?)
My burden borne, and your unhappie birth?

(2.1.131-5)

Jocasta, like Videna, tries to distance herself from the tragedy that has befallen her sons by referring to her children as “Oedipus progenie,” and by describing the site of their conception as their “fathers wicked bedde.” She cannot, however, despite her best efforts, forget her own involvement in their “unhappie birth.”

Jocasta is driven, from the first scene of the play, to restore a semblance of normalcy to her sons’ familial relationships. Perhaps because of the guilt she feels for her role in producing these “unnatural fruits,” Jocasta repeatedly suggests her willingness, even eagerness, to suffer physical mutilation alongside her sons as they battle one another. In her first meeting with her son Polynices, she remarks:

And knowe deare chylde, the harme of all missehap
That happes twixt you, must happe likewise to mee:
Ne can the cruell sworde so slightly touche
Your tender fleshe, but that the selfe same wounde
Shall deeply bruse this aged brest of myne.
Her choice of this “aged brest,” a locus of maternal nurturing, as a site of sacrifice seems appropriate. After committing unnatural acts with her first son, Oedipus, she now determines to become the apotheosis of maternal devotion to her younger sons.

Jocasta’s maternal devotion prompts the Theban female chorus to reflect on the joys of maternity: “There is no love may be comparde to that, / The tender mother beares unto hir chyld” (2.1.92-3)—a sentiment they later echo when they remark on the “fervent love / A mother beares unto hir tender sonnes” (4.2.1-2). With these passages, the chorus members describe an idealized mother/child relationship in which an incomparable love exists between a “tender mother” and her “tender sonnes.” In some ways, their sentiments mirror the chorus of those surrounding Elizabeth who similarly presented an idealized version of maternity. In 1563, in the period between the productions of Gorboduc and Jocasta, Sir Nicholas Bacon told Elizabeth, “If your Highness could conceive or imagine the comfort, surety and delight that should happen to yourself by beholding an imp of your own...it would (I am assured) sufficiently satisfy to amove all manner of lets, impediments and scruples.” Yet while Jocasta’s chorus recognizes that the “fervent love” of maternity can result in a “dolefull griefe [and] secret pain” (4.2.6-7) for their queen, Elizabeth’s “chorus” of counselors ignore the potential tragedies she could face as a royal mother. They instead focus on the “blessings” they assure her will result from the birth of “the most honorable issue of your body.”

Despite Jocasta’s best efforts to “normalize” her children’s familial relationships, her attempt to reconcile her sons only intensifies their anger toward one another, and Jocasta’s desperation increases as well: “O sonnes, dear sonnes, away with glittring
arnes: / And first, before you touch eache others flesh, / With doubled blowes come
pierce this brest of mine’’ (2.1.526-8). Again Jocasta subjects her breast to a severe
physical punishment—now, however, she offers to suffer not alongside her sons, but in
lieu of them. As the time of their confrontation grows near, she announces her specific
plan: “I atwixt them both will throw my selfe, / And this my brest shal beare the deadly
blowes, / That otherwise should light upon my sonnes: / So shall they shead my bloud
and not their owne” (4.1.223-6). The specific image Jocasta conjures is one that resonates
with details of an early modern symbol of great significance for Elizabeth, the pelican.
The pelican, as Susan Doran explains, represented maternal self-sacrifice because “the
mother pelican was said to pierce her breast with her beak and feed her young with the
blood.”49 The pelican was incorporated into a number of Elizabeth’s portraits,
emblematizing her self-sacrifice for her people. Jocasta, however, is literally subjecting
herself to physical mutilation whereas Elizabeth will spare her physical body, and only
metaphorically “bleed” for her subjects—just as by eschewing biological maternity,
Elizabeth avoids the physical vicissitudes that accompany pregnancy and birth, and
leaves her body intact.

Jocasta, however, arrives too late to protect either son—when she discovers them
they have already mortally wounded one another. An observer recalls,

    The mother thus beholding both hir sonnes
    Ydone to death, and overcome with dole,
    Drewe out the dagger of hir Pollinice,
    From brothers brest, and gorde therewyth her throte.
    Falling betweene hir sonnes:
    Then with her feebled armes, she doth enfolde
    Their bodies both, as if for company
Hir uncontented corps were yet content
To passe with them in Charons ferrie boate.

(5.1.173-81)

Her final action is to stage a maternal embrace—desperate to enact a “natural” maternal stance in this most unnatural of circumstances, she preserves the breast she so often invoked, perhaps so that her final action may be one of “enfold[ing]” and embracing her sons’ bodies. As Jocasta and her sons form this morbid tableau, the early modern audience, and Elizabeth, are met yet again with an example of sons who have grown “out of kinde,” just as the monarch feared her own royal children might.

Ironically, despite the Inns of Court’s agenda, Jocasta presents metaphoric motherhood as a more fulfilling and less destructive alternative to royal biological motherhood. With the first exchange of the play, the pain of biological motherhood is juxtaposed with the rewarding role of metaphoric maternity. The play begins with an exchange between Jocasta and her servant that highlights this distinction:

Jocasta: Once again, I must to thee recompte
The wailefull thing that is already spred,
Bicause I know, that pitie will compell
Thy tender hart, more than my naturall childe,
With ruthfull teares to mone my mourning case.

Servant: My gracious Queene….
No Sonne you have, doth owe you more than I…

(1.1.11-9)

Jocasta craves filial devotion in her time of grief, and knows that her servant, whom she has lovingly nurtured, will provide her with greater succor than her “naturall childe.” The metaphoric maternity that Jocasta enjoys extends beyond this single relationship.

Following her death, the chorus laments,
Behold, your Queene twixt both her sonnes lyes slayne,  
The Queene whom you did love and honour both,  
The Queene that did so tenderly bring up  
And nourish you, eche one like to hir owne.  

(5.3.7-10)

Jocasta cultivates relationships with her people, acting as a mother to them all. So in her death, as her biological family disintegrates, her subjects remain to mourn her passing. Through such a portrait, the Inns of Court unwittingly valorize the very form of maternity that Elizabeth herself embraced: that as mother to her people.

IV. “Semper Eadem” Elizabeth’s Maternity

Your love for me is of such a kind as has never been known or heard of in the memory of man. Love of this nature is not possessed by parents, it happens not among friends, no, not even among lovers. It is such a love as neither persuasion, nor threats, nor curses can destroy. Time has no power over it. Time, which eats away iron and wears away the rocks, cannot sever this love of yours.

Queen Elizabeth I to Oxford Students (1592)

Whether the dramatic constructions of maternity presented in *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* influenced Elizabeth is unknown; what is clear is that these plays failed to persuade Elizabeth that marriage and childbirth would have a stabilizing effect on her reign. She instead cultivated a maternity that no mere biological mother could hope to emulate. While Elizabeth did not literally produce any children of her own, she did successfully preserve her own body—fulfilling her own motto “Semper Eadem,” “always the same,” and avoiding the fatal consequences that so many historical, and literary, royal mothers confronted. Through her redefinition of maternity, Elizabeth ensured the
propagation of her legacy, and by situating herself at various times as both a mother and a spouse to her people, she prevailed precisely where Jocasta failed.

Turning to a play produced some twenty years after Gorboduc and Jocasta, Shakespeare’s King John, reveals that even after Elizabeth’s successful adoption of a maternal persona, anxieties about maternal and royal power were still prevalent.
NOTES

Though Elizabeth might have named a successor, and diverted some of the pressure to marry and have children, at least seven different persons had claims to the throne—so whomever she had selected would invariably have produced controversy. Also, Elizabeth believed that naming a successor would inevitably leave her vulnerable to supporters of her successor—just as Elizabeth’s followers had continually threatened Mary Tudor’s rule. Elizabeth, wary of just such a situation, felt that naming a successor was tantamount to suicide. In response to calls for settling the succession question in 1561, Elizabeth responded, “Think you that I could love my own winding sheet?”...I know the inconstancy of the people of England...how they ever dislike the present government and have their eyes fixed upon the person that is next to succeed, and naturally men be so disposed” (Qtd. in Alison Plowden, Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stewart: Two Queens in One Isle [Towota, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984], 70).

The most recent “successful” royal maternal example might have been Elizabeth's grandmother, Elizabeth of York, who gave birth to several children, including two sons, “an heir and a spare,” Arthur and Henry. But even she suffered in her maternal experiences, for a year after her elder son Arthur died she died in childbirth, “desperately trying to have a son” (Alison Weir, The Six Wives of Henry VIII [New York: Grove Press, 1991], 6).

In Elizabeth: Apprenticeship (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), David Starkey explains that despite Mary’s vehement protestations that she was indeed pregnant, as time passed and no birth occurred, people concluded that Mary was suffering from a gynecological malady. The Venetian ambassador reported that “from her youth” she had suffered from a retention of her menstrual fluids and a strangulation of her womb. Her body swelled and her breasts enlarged and sent out milk. It was these symptoms, he concludes, “which led to the empty rumour of her pregnancy” (181). Weir concludes that
“What was at first thought to be a pregnancy later turned out to be a malignant growth within the womb” (568). E. W. Ives notes: “There is among the relics of Mary Tudor a book of prayers where the page devoted to intercessions for women with child is said to be stained with tears.” Ives then insightfully adds, “no pressure on the would-be mother today can match the peculiar strain on a sixteenth-century queen” (Anne Boleyn [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 236).

4 It is believed that both Jane Seymour and Catherine Parr suffered from puerperal fever, a condition that frequently plagued women in childbirth.

5 Spanish Ambassador de Quadra reported: “It is the common opinion confirmed by certain physicians, that this woman is unhealthy and it is believed that she will not bear a child” (Qtd. in Carole Levin “The Heart and Stomach of a King”: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994], 86). Rumors like this were not uncommon, even after Elizabeth’s death. Ben Jonson, for one, suggested that Elizabeth had a “membrane that made her incapable of intercourse, though despite that ‘for her delight she tried many’” (Levin, 86).

to *Gorboduc* as it relates to Elizabeth’s maternity, she ignores its ironic context in the succession debate.

7The Inns became, as A. Wigfall Green notes in *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), a “favorite rendezvous for poets and dramatists,” and therefore evolved into “the center of literary activity in the nation” (3). The courts often entertained the nobility and royalty with their productions, and Green hypothesizes, “the opinion of the gentlemen of the Inns seems to have been of some weight with the crown” (33).

8Elizabeth’s remark was reported by the French Ambassador in 1566, who claimed, “as for handling the succession, not one of them [her subjects] should do it; she would reserve that for herself. She had no desire to be buried alive, like her sister” (Qtd. in Axton, 11).

9Marie Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 1. Axton identifies a series of Inns of Court productions as relevant to the succession debate including *Desire and Beauty* (1561/2), *Gis mond of Salerne* (1567/8), and the *Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587/8). I am concentrating on *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* because of their specific focus on maternal queenship, and their relevance to Elizabeth’s own anxieties about motherhood. While critics have often examined various aspects of *Gorboduc*, in part because of its status as the first English tragedy, *Jocasta* has been virtually ignored, except for Richard McCabe’s *Incest, Drama and Nature’s Law, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120-4, which treats it only briefly.

10Axton, 12.

similarly suggests that *Gorboduc* served as a “plea to Queen Elizabeth to heed the advice of her sage councillors—in particular Cecil—and during her lifetime order the succession” (95).


13 Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Irby B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), xiv. All subsequent citations of *Gorboduc* come from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text by act, scene, and line number.

14 Qtd. in Cauthen, xiv.

15 Jacqueline Vanhoutte, “Community, Authority, and the Motherland in Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc*,” *Studies in English Literature* 40, no. 2 (2000): 227-39, 230. Vanhoutte focuses on the role of England as the “motherland” in Gorboduc. Though for the most part Vanhoutte is not interested in Videna, she concludes her essay by insightfully remarking, “In its depiction of the monstrous Queen Videna, the play…pioneers a pattern that recurs in later Elizabethan plays…Again and again, on the Elizabethan stage, the threat to England is embodied in a monstrous mother” (237).


17 Adelman, 5.

19Coch, 439.

20As Lawrence Stone has noted, aristocratic infants were typically “put out” to wetnurses at birth, and separated from their birth mothers for 12-18 months (*The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], 106). In *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984), Ralph Houlbrooke notes that between the ages of 7 and 13 upper-class children “were commonly sent away from home to another household or to board in or near a school of good repute” (150). As might be expected, boys were sent away more commonly than girls.


22“Kinde” is a multivalent word in early modern literature, and one that is repeatedly invoked in *Gorboduc.* It is most commonly used to describe the “natural disposition or character” of a person or thing, or to refer to “nature in general or in the abstract, established order of things” (C. T. Onions, *Shakespeare Glossary* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], 148). Philip Dust examines the various implications of the word in “The Theme of ‘Kinde’ in *Gorboduc,*” in *Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan Studies,* ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1973), 43-81, 50.

23Dust, 50.

24Qtd. in Somerset, 97.

25Starkey, 2.

26Patricia Crawford notes that “The woman nourished the child in her womb with her blood, and gave to it her character. Her imagination was believed to shape the child’s features, although deformities could be a punishment for parental sin. Printed bills advertising the exhibition of monstrous children frequently blamed the mother: for example, a child was born (in 1566) with ‘ruffs’ because its mother had followed the fashions in dress” (“The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England,* ed. Valerie Fildes [London: Routledge, 1990], 3-38, 7).
27 Jones and White, for instance, note that "it is as if the authors deliberately de-emphasized parallels between Viden and Queen Elizabeth" (12).


29 Levin, Heart and Stomach of a King, 78.


32 See Wallace MacCaffrey's Elizabeth I (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), 70-113, for a thorough account of Parliament's attempts to sway their queen to settle the succession question. As MacCaffrey notes, in 1564 Parliament reminded Elizabeth that England "from the Conquest to this present day was never left, as now it is, without a certain heir, living and known" (90).

33 Qtd. in Clark Hulse, Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 67.

34 Weir, Life of Elizabeth, 180.

35 Ronald C. Johnson, George Gascoigne (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 145. Axton agrees that the play was produced to show 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" (54). I would argue that, regardless of the playwrights' intention, the play in fact valorizes metaphoric maternity.

36 Axton, 55

37 Axton, 38.


40 Though perhaps predictably, the most vicious writings about Anne Boleyn were by Catholic writers, her reputation suffered from the moment she appeared on the royal scene—and she continued (and continues) to be vilified by many long after her death.

41 Boehrer, 47.


43 Warrincke, 241. In *Elizabeth’s Glass* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1993), Marc Shell similarly speculates, “But what about the adage ‘Like mother, like daughter?’ Did Elizabeth see, or fear to see, her mother in herself, as in a glass?” (17). Shell’s work, examines, “The Glass of the Sinful Soul,” Elizabeth’s translation of a poem by Marguerite of Navarre focusing on “incest, spiritual and physical.” Shell’s study offers proof of Elizabeth’s own preoccupation with the subject of incest.

44 Readers familiar with the Oedipus myth will recall that the tale begins with a forced separation between a mother, Jocasta, and her child, Oedipus. An oracle prophesies that Laius, king of Thebes, will be killed by his first-born son. As soon as Jocasta delivers the child, Oedipus is abandoned in the woods on Laius’ orders. Oedipus is saved by a passing shepherd, and adopted by the King of Corinth. Laius’ prophecy, however, is proven true, when as a grown man Oedipus unwittingly kills his biological father. Following this
action, he conquers the Theban monster, the Sphinx, and is rewarded with the hand of Jocasta, his biological mother. Freud's Oedipal Complex has, of course, had an incalculable influence on literary studies. My interest in this essay, however, is the historical context in which Jocasta was produced, rather than the psychoanalytic theory the Oedipal tale inspired.

45 George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh, Jocasta, in Early English Classical Tragedies, ed. John Cunliffe, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912). Gascoigne's work was a translation of Euripides; he was assisted by Kinwelmersh. All subsequent citations of Jocasta come from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text by act, scene, and line number.

46 The play opens in the midst of civil war caused by the strife between Jocasta's two sons. The women of the chorus mourn the loss of men who have died in battle, both fathers and sons. My thanks to Thomas Herron, who responded to an abbreviated version of this chapter at the 2004 Elizabeth I Society meeting. In particular, he emphasized the pervasive fear of civil war during the Elizabethan era, one that perhaps contributed to the Inns of Court's decision to produce Jocasta.

47 Qtd. in Somerset, 96-7.


50 For a thorough account of Elizabeth's cultivation of metaphoric maternity, see Orlin and Coch.
CHAPTER TWO

WARRING MOTHERS IN *KING JOHN*

With him along is come the Mother-Queen,
An Ate, stirring him to blood and strife

Shakespeare, *King John*, 2.1.32

In Shakespeare’s *King John*, the title character is frequently accompanied and coached by England’s “Mother-Queen,” Eleanor. Eleanor’s imposing presence is felt throughout the play: whether as military aggressor (“Ate”) or as devoted mother. Constance, Eleanor’s daughter-in-law and similarly ambitious arch-rival, is equally imposing. Yet, the women of *King John* have been largely ignored. While the maternal figures of *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* have been overlooked despite scholarly interest in the plays that feature them, Constance and Eleanor have suffered scholarly neglect, in part, because of the general unpopularity of *King John*. This is unfortunate because *King John* allows us a rare opportunity to see women whose independence and ambition give them unusually important power in the play’s political world. This chapter argues that both Constance and Eleanor, and the significance of maternal queens in general, have been underestimated by critics and audiences. Although much has been written about the weakness of the play’s male king, scholars have overlooked how the women around him,
in assuming positions of power based on motherhood, threaten to appropriate the battle for the throne as a war between two women.

Even Janet Adelman in *Suffocating Mothers*, her exhaustive study of the “fantasies of maternal power,” only provides a cursory sketch of *King John*. This omission by critics is especially surprising because Eleanor and Constance provide an intersection in which queenship, motherhood, and widowhood, subjects of special interest to feminist critics, collide. Shakespeare does abruptly, even “ludicrously” “kill them off” in act four as Adelman notes, but only after their presence threatens to transform the play of *King John* into something else altogether: a war, not between two nations or two aspirants of the throne, but between two women. In a political climate in which England’s “mother,” Elizabeth, had recently “killed off” the future king’s mother, Mary Stuart, this play provided early modern audiences with a rare glimpse at a female political confrontation. In their standoff, these mothers engage in a battle in which they dare to dictate the language of male discourse, engage in a public debate over their own purity, and question the very legitimacy of the English throne. Together, Eleanor and Constance present a destabilizing threat to the political hegemony of the world they inhabit.

Early in act one, Queen Eleanor’s words alert the audience and readers that this is not a typical history play. She recasts the quest for the throne as one that is first and foremost a battle between mothers:

What now, my son? Have I not ever said
How that ambitious Constance would not cease
Till she had kindled France and all the world
Upon the right and party of her son?
This might have been prevented and made whole
With very easy arguments of love
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.

(1.1.31-8)

The language of Eleanor's warning to John reveals that she clearly sees Arthur, the actual claimant to the throne, as incidental. This passage, so early in the play, sets the tone for the maternal conflict that pervades the work. "My son" and "her son" are at conflict, and now "fearful bloody issue" will arbitrate. While some critics, such as Virginia Vaughan, assert that in King John, as in so many of Shakespeare's other history plays, "the women have identity only in their relationships to men, as wives or mothers," here and elsewhere Eleanor seems to suggest that the men have identities only as they relate to women. Constance, not Arthur, is mentioned by name; he appears in the passage only as he relates to Constance, as "her son."

Though Constance is traditionally viewed by critics as being much weaker than Eleanor, in the passage above, Eleanor credits Constance with the ability to foment a worldwide rebellion. As she later reveals in her confrontation with Constance, Eleanor fears that Constance "mayst be a queen and check the world!" (2.1.122-3). Though others within the world of the play might underestimate the power of these women, Constance and Eleanor do not make the mistake of underestimating each other.

This passage also reveals a trend in King John: Eleanor and Constance frequently use maternal terminology to unsettle their male listeners. As this passage shows, the king and his rival for the throne are both recast as "sons" in this confrontation, and while Eleanor refers to the "easy arguments of love" that might have brought about reconciliation between the warring sons, she concludes with an image of violent procreation: "bloody issue." Though "issue" is typically glossed by editors as
"consequence," or "outcome," it also denotes "progeny" and perhaps, in this case, "bloody" progeny. This use of the term would resonate with an early modern audience, accustomed to witnessing the violence of childbirth. Eleanor's blending of the language of maternity and martiality in this passage is indicative of a pattern within the play, as she acts as both soldier and mother throughout—but Constance also appropriates the language of birth and motherhood for her battle.

Constance, traditionally praised for her "excess of maternal tenderness," emplys the language of procreation and maternity in a way that seems inconsistent with that of traditional maternal figures. In Eleanor and Constance's heated exchange of act two, both women find their roles as mothers lend them an inordinate amount of power—only they truly know who fathered the children they bore. Preying upon the anxiety so prevalent throughout early modern drama—that any man could be cuckolded and never be the wiser—both women trade accusations of whorish behavior, in an effort to impugn the legitimacy of both John and Arthur. This remarkable confrontation, often referred to as the "Billingsgate" scene, has proven so unsettling to audiences that it has historically been removed from theatrical productions. The women imply that neither aspirant to the throne can ever be sure of his parentage—only his mother holds that sacred knowledge.

In her effort to excoriate Eleanor, Constance taps into early modern anxieties surrounding motherhood by introducing the language of maternal contamination, remarking that Arthur may bear Eleanor's sins "Being but the second generation / Removed from thy sin-conceiving womb" (2.1.181-2). In Constance's speech that follows, the word "plague" appears five times within eight lines:

I have but this to say,
That he [Arthur] is not only plagued for her sin,
But God hath made her sin and her the plague
On this removed issue, plagued for her
And with her plague; her sin his injury
Her injury the beadle to her sin,
All punished in the person of this child,
And all for her. A plague upon her!

(2.1.183-90, my emphasis)

What is perhaps most surprising in this vitriol is Constance’s willingness to impugn the legitimacy of her own son, the very son she claims is entitled to the throne, in order to publicly decimate Eleanor. Constance’s remarks question both her deceased husband’s and son’s legitimacy, and Eleanor’s remarks taint her own grandson’s legitimacy. As Kristian Smidt notes, Constance’s “counter-accusation relating to Geoffrey’s parentage . . . must be just as damaging to her son . . . as it is to Eleanor.”

By engaging in such an exchange, Constance and Eleanor question the very legitimacy of the English throne in a public forum. The repetition of “plague” emphasizes Arthur’s vulnerability to the pollution in what Constance calls Eleanor’s “sin-conceiving womb.” Again capitalizing on fears commonly associated with motherhood, in this case that a son can be forever marred by the infidelities of his mother, Shakespeare’s women tap into anxieties that would resonate with an Elizabethan audience. In this passage, Constance is using Arthur not as a tool to achieve the throne, but as a symbol of Eleanor’s contamination—and while Constance is traditionally considered slavishly devoted to Arthur, phrases such as “this removed issue” and “the person of this child” reveal a distancing on Constance’s part from her son. Here Constance is preoccupied with victory over Eleanor—in the course of eight lines, Constance refers to “her” ten times.
Both women are obsessed with personal grudges, and they see motherhood as their greatest weapon.

This public confrontation between the two maternal queens, Constance and Eleanor, is unlike most female verbal exchanges in Shakespeare, in that it is public. As Douglas Bruster has noted, scenes of "female conversation in Renaissance drama often occur in what seems to be depicted as confined, interior spaces...these scenes often depend upon a feeling of intimacy."\textsuperscript{12} Here, before the walls of a French town, before the leaders of both England and France, these women make the most intimate of discussions public. Female speech, seen by Lynda Boose as a "symbolic relocation of the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which the symbolics of male castration are ominously complicit,"\textsuperscript{13} is a powerful weapon. Boose argues that "if the chastity belt was an earlier design to prevent entrance into one aperture of the deceitfully open female body, the scold's bridle, preventing exit from another, might be imagined as derivative inversion of that same obsession."\textsuperscript{14} Eleanor and Constance certainly grasp the value of unbridled speech, and their brazen verbal exchange is not isolated to a single confrontation.

Throughout the play, both women intrude on male discourse to appropriate the battle as one that is between them. Their willingness to engage in audacious speech is most evident in act three when Constance berates the Duke of Austria for his "recreant limbs," and he responds "O, that a man should speak those words to me!" (3.1.129-30). Austria's comment illuminates an advantage that both Eleanor and Constance frequently exploit: they are allowed greater latitude in speaking because of their ostensible weakness as women. Juliet Dusinberre has noted that in Shakespeare's history plays, "men are
conscious of being effeminised if their only weapons are words, historically the weapons of powerless women."

In King John, men are constantly urging both women to be quiet, but are powerless to actually silence them. Constance and Eleanor capitalize on the "weapons" of words, and proceed to dictate the direction of discourse from the start of the play.

An examination of the beginning of the play reveals that the women's intrusion on male discourse actually begins during the first conversation of scene one. King John, in discussion with Chatillon, the French Ambassador, exchange only two brief lines before Eleanor interrupts them by upbraiding the ambassador for his choice of words:

King John: Now, say, Chatillon, what would France with us?
Chatillon: Thus, after greetings, speaks the King of France, In my behavior, to the majesty— The borrowed majesty—of England here.
Eleanor: A strange beginning: "borrowed majesty"!

(1.1.1-5)

Dusinberre refers to this interruption of Eleanor as "startling." She notes "the conventional hostile interchange between the representatives of two centres of power is displaced by a new contender for power." The content of Eleanor's interruption is also significant, however: she mimics the French ambassador and critiques the language of his political discourse while at the same time aptly describing the uniqueness of the play's start as a "strange beginning." This line is a "beginning" in another sense as well: it is the first of many instances in the play in which women assert their control of the language of the men surrounding them. Though male characters repeatedly attempt to demonstrate their dominance, (following the above exchange, for instance, John claims, "Silence,
good Mother. Hear the embassy” [1.1.6]), Constance and Eleanor are never silenced for long.

Scholars agree that in early modern England, women of all strata faced chastisement for “excessive” speech. As Catherine Belsey puts it: “To speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become a subject. But for women to speak is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy.”17 Women who were prattlers, in the eyes of their husbands, could be punished by a variety of humiliations—including through the use of a “scold’s bridle, an instrument with an iron framework to enclose the head and a metal gag or bit which restrained the tongue.”18 Within the play, Eleanor even labels Constance an “unadvised scold” (2.1.191).

Part of the reason, however, that Constance and Eleanor’s voices go unchecked is their status as widows.19 Widows, ostensibly vulnerable as single women, paradoxically enjoyed freedom from direct masculine supervision. As Barbara Todd notes, there was unusual power afforded to widows: “A married woman was legally and personally subject to her husband. A widow was free from such control. Even if she was poor, she was her own woman and could run her life as she saw fit.”20 It is important to note that Constance’s “widowhood” is a specific choice made by Shakespeare. While historically she was remarried by the time of the events in the play, Shakespeare modifies her marital status.21 Shakespeare’s choice to widow Constance grants her greater liberty and the play less stability. Though men throughout the play attempt to silence both Constance and Eleanor, “I do beseech you, madam, be content” (3.1.42); “Peace, lady! Pause or be more
temperate” (2.1.195); “Bedlam, have done” (2.1.182), no single man is responsible for “controlling” these women.

The loquaciousness of Constance and Eleanor also mirrors the sexual promiscuity commonly associated with widows of the time. Their uncontrolled speech suggests their uncontrolled libidos. As Boose notes, “as illogical as it may seem, the two crimes, being a scold and being a so-called whore—were frequently conflated.” In early modern England, Constance and Eleanor’s status as widows suggests that they were “possessors of intimate knowledge of male/female sexuality.”

Constance and Eleanor capitalize on the fears associated with talkative women, and repeatedly usurp the male role in dictating the direction of discourse—just as they vie to usurp the power of the throne. Constance, like Eleanor, senses the importance of asserting herself through speech, for her first words, like Eleanor’s, are actually an interruption of an exclusively male love-fest. A sole women in the midst of soldiers and kings, Constance observes King Philip and the Duke of Austria heap attention on Arthur, the “noble boy,” (2.1.18) whom they are determined to make England’s king. After thirty lines of their exchange, Constance interjects in response to Austria’s remark, “Till then, fair boy, / Will I not think of home, but follow arms” (2.1.30-1). Constance responds on Arthur’s behalf:

O, take his mother’s thanks, a widow’s thanks,
Till your strong hand shall help to give him strength
To make a more requital to your love!

(2.1.32-4)

Where Eleanor interrupts a diplomatic discussion, Constance intrudes on a moment of male bonding and military strategizing. Though she ostensibly minimizes her presence by
identifying herself as merely a “mother” and “widow,” and emphasizes male power, the “strong hand” that Austria represents, Constance inserts herself into the dialogue and speaks in lieu of Arthur, as though Arthur is, in fact, still in the womb.\textsuperscript{24}

Both women independently assert themselves in discourse reserved for men, and when they finally confront each other in the second act, they appropriate the confrontation that is ostensibly occurring between two nations and two pursuants of the English throne for themselves. After John, Eleanor, and their forces arrive in Angiers, John and Philip exchange a volley of insults until Eleanor and Constance again interject themselves into the debate.

\begin{quote}
King John: Alack, thou dost usurp authority.
King Philip: Excuse it is to beat usurping down.
Eleanor: Who is it thou does call usurper, France?
Constance: Let me make answer: thy usurping son.
\end{quote}

(2.1.118-21)

It is interesting that Eleanor and Constance’s comments echo their earlier disruptions. Eleanor, again, takes umbrage at the language used by the French: just as she had objected earlier to the ambassador’s earlier use of the term “borrowed majesty,” she now objects to the word “usurper.” Eleanor exploits the language of the opposition to supply her with entries into the debate. Constance too follows her own earlier pattern. Using the phrase “Let me make answer” suggests that she is subservient to male leaders, in this case King Philip, just as she earlier enforced the notion of her powerlessness by identifying herself solely as a widow and mother. Of course, the rest of Constance’s line reveals that she is, in fact, waiting for no one’s permission to speak. Instead, by presuming to speak for the French king, she is ironically “usurping” France’s role in the conversation. More
importantly, however, is how Constance instantly makes this pursuit for the throne not about national agendas or even rival cousins, but as the phrase "thy usurping son" reveals, about dueling mothers.

In their duel, these mothers do not hesitate to emphasize their sexual experience. This is, again, unusual in Shakespeare. As Jeanne Roberts has noted, Shakespeare tends to "desexualize motherhood." When he depicts women "whose sexuality is emphasized...[they] are shadowed by the implication of 'whorishness.' And yet, strikingly, the 'whorish' women are the fertile ones...it is the 'whores' who shape the future." With Constance and Eleanor, Shakespeare presents a sexualized maternity, and Constance, especially, capitalizes on her identity as a sexually experienced, currently unmarried woman. Her first words in the play reveal this tactic: "O, take his mother's thanks, a widow's thanks" (2.1.32). Later, in a bid for sympathy, she remarks, "I am sick and capable of fears, / Oppressed with wrongs....A widow, husbandless, subject to fears, / A woman, naturally born to fears" (3.1.12-5); later she cries out in desperation, "A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!" (3.1.108). In her final line she refers to Arthur as "my widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure" (3.4.105). While these protestations might seem declarations of her vulnerability, each time she identifies herself as a widow, she reminds her listeners again of her uncontrolled, and sexually available, status.

Some critics have ignored the overt sexuality demonstrated by these mothers, including Constance's eroticized engagement with death. The most sexually charged dialogue of the play occurs when Constance faces defeat; and her behavior is deemed both by those onstage and by many readers as mad. Engaging in an apostrophe to Death reminiscent of Donne, she mingles eroticism with death.
Death. Death, O amiable, lovely Death!
Thou odiferous stench! Sound rottenness!
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,
And I will kiss thy detestable bones,
And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,
And ring these fingers with thy household worms,
And stop the gap of breath with fulsome dust,
And be a carrion monster like thyself.
Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smil’st,
And buss thee as thy wife. Misery’s love,
O, come to me!

(3.4.25-33)

In E. A. J. Honigmann’s reading, “Constance’s frenzy resembles Ophelia's insanity in its sexual prepossessions, but whereas Ophelia, whose mind has snapped, gives voice to something essential to her nature in her bawdy songs, Constance in III.iii is not true to herself, and her ravings show only how far from itself her mind has been bent.”

However, presuming that Constance is not true to herself seems a dangerous assumption, and a convenient way of critically containing her overt erotic behavior in the scene.

Constance craves a merging with death in which she and death are sensuously joined as a wedded couple: they will share her “eyeballs” which she will “put... in thy vaulty brows,” and she will don the “household worms” of death for wedding rings. Gone are her aspirations of becoming a queen mother, and with it the accoutrements of royalty; she now anticipates her marriage with death. Royal marriage, which brought her to the brink of power, has ultimately failed her. She now calls on death to “grin on me and I will think thou smil’st / And buss thee as thy wife.” Honigmann and others have ignored the power
of Constance’s ecstatic cries “O, come to me” that seem more similar to Cleopatra’s erotic engagement with death than Ophelia’s mad ravings.

Shakespeare positions Blanche, the niece of King John, in direct opposition to such sexual experience: she becomes, in fact, another object of contention between the women. Both Eleanor and Constance see the political possibilities of Blanche’s virginity. Blanche, as her name implies, is a blank page, and as Phyllis Rackin notes, “Shakespeare depicts Blanche as… awaiting the inscription of a masculine text.” However, I think the play depicts both women likewise wrestling to inscribe her with the language of their own agendas. Blanche’s virginity becomes a source of mockery for Constance, who urges the Dauphin: “O Lewis, stand fast! The devil tempts thee here / In likeness of a new, untrimmed bride” (3.1.209-10). Constance, speaking from her vantage point of the sexually experienced woman, encourages the Dauphin to read Blanche’s virginity as a seductive guise, masking political disaster. By labeling Constance “the devil,” she also alludes to the fact that Blanche’s first allegiance is to Eleanor, whom she had deemed a devil only a few lines earlier (“Look to it, devil” [3.1.196-7]), and to the English interests that she represents.

Eleanor, however, endorses the match between the Dauphin and Blanche as a means of political stability. Instructing John as she does throughout the play, she insists:

Son, list to this conjunction; make this match.
Give with our niece a dowry large enough,
For by this knot thou shalt so surely tie
Thy now usurped assurance to the crown.

(2.1.469-73)
Instructing John to both “list” and “make,” she again orchestrates his actions. Here Eleanor assumes control of a patriarchal tradition by arranging for an appropriate “dowry” so that the “match” will take place. Just as their widowed state gives them leverage, Eleanor and Constance see how Blanche’s virginity can be used to further their political agendas.

While Constance and Eleanor’s “widowed” status contributes to their subversive presences, their positions as mothers lend them their greatest potency: just as they appropriate discourse usually reserved for men for their own purposes, Eleanor and Constance do not hesitate to exploit their maternal roles for political gain. Eleanor finds a political advantage in gaining the “Bastard,” (the son of Eleanor’s deceased son Richard the Lionheart), as a grandson. Sizing up the Bastard, she sees a potential ally who can aid her cause; yet she also sees that John will have to be assisted to “read” the possibilities in him. She prods John into recognizing characteristics of Richard the Lionheart in the Bastard: “Do you not read some tokens of my son / In the large composition of this man?” (1.1.85-6). After forcing this recognition of the Bastard’s parentage, Eleanor directs her grandson, “I am thy grandam, Richard. Call me so” (1.1.168). Eleanor emphatically establishes, even with an illegitimate grandson, a maternal relationship, one that the Bastard privileges above all else in the play. Eleanor’s eagerness to embrace the very embodiment of illegitimacy for her cause is indicative of her unsentimental approach to motherhood. Eleanor uses familial terminology and sentiment to recruit a loyal soldier for her side. At the same time, Eleanor maximizes her maternal presence by acquiring another “son” for her side.
As Eleanor happily exploits her relationship as “grandam” of the Bastard in order to strengthen her political agenda, she attempts a similar maneuver in a confrontation with Constance over Arthur, Constance’s son, and Eleanor’s grandson. This is in part the result of a crucial modification that Shakespeare made from Raphael Holinshed. Arthur was not a child in Holinshed’s account. As Beaurline notes, “Historically Arthur was about 15 years old at the time of the conflict...but Shakespeare makes his seem just a child, ruled by his mother.” 29 With Shakespeare’s infantilizing of Arthur, a powerless child becomes the center of Constance and Eleanor’s standoff. In the midst of their confrontation in act two, in which both Eleanor and Constance exchange accusations of bearing illegitimate heirs, the mothers engage in a vicious taunting of one another:

Eleanor: There’s a good mother, boy, that blots thy father.
Constance: There’s a good grandam, boy, that would blot thee.

(2.1.132-3)

Employing a cadence that suggests maternal cooing “there’s a good...boy,” Constance and Eleanor’s remarks drip with irony as they simultaneously disparage each other’s mothering. The language of contamination, which abounds throughout the play, also pervades this exchange, as the mothers credit each other with the ability to “blot” their male progeny.

As Eleanor attempts to forge a relationship with Arthur, “Come to thy grandam, child,” Constance retorts:

Do, child, go to it grandam, child;
Give grandam kingdom, and it grandam will
Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig.
There’s a good grandam.

(2.1.160-3)
Constance, hailed by critics for her maternal love for Arthur, repeatedly refers to Arthur as “it”—suggesting that, during this exchange at least, she views her son as little more than an object of contention. She also engages in a bitter parody of maternal language, and this mockery has the opposite effect of traditional baby talk; instead of calming the “child,” it sends him into tears:

Good my Mother, peace!
I would that I were low laid in my grave.
I am not worth this coil that’s made for me.

[He weeps.]
(2.1.163-5)

Arthur here senses that he is not “worth this coil” between Constance and Eleanor, and of course, he is right. Shakespeare’s Arthur is an ethereal child, not imbued with the qualities necessary for kingship, or even manhood.

The conflict in the play becomes increasingly about the women, and less and less about the men pursuing the throne. Perhaps, for that very reason, Shakespeare moves to “kill them off.” As act three begins, readers can sense the play’s movement away from these women. Before Constance departs, however, she engages in ruminations about birth deformities—another unexpected move from the character known for her “excess of maternal tenderness.” Arthur, trying to calm his mother, comments, “I do beseech you, madam, be content” (3.1.42). Constance responds:

If thou that bidd’st me be content were grim,
Ugly, and slanderous to thy mother’s womb,
Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains,
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,
Patched with foul moles and eye-offending marks,
I would not care, I then would be content,
For then I should not love thee, no, nor thou
Become thy great birth nor deserve a crown.

(3.1.43-50)

Constance’s bizarre focus on this variety of monstrosities may be considered one sign of her descent into madness. In this same scene, however, Constance lucidly argues in favor of the French going to war against the English, so her sanity seems intact. Instead, Shakespeare shows Constance’s awareness of the cultural apprehensions regarding birth. Rather than focusing on Arthur’s “great birth,” Constance engages in a morbid fantasy in which she visualizes the various monstrosities, both external and internal, that could have plagued Arthur. Unlike early modern physicians, who often blamed a child’s deformities on the mother, Constance, instead of blaming herself for the imaginary deformities, recoils from them, saying she “should not love thee.” Here Constance’s devotion to her son is self-admittedly capricious: she loves Arthur not because he is her child, but because he is beautiful and regal.

Critics have tended to ignore this admission by Constance—or gloss over it. John Candido, for instance, contends that “in her imagination at least...[Constance] would somehow remove him from her love.” Candido’s language, in which he refers to this idea of abandonment as a product of Constance’s “imagination” and skeptically considers that “somehow” she would abandon him, reveals the resistance critics have to viewing Constance as anything less than the paragon of motherhood. Yet Constance, as though to once again remind those surrounding her of the power inherent in motherhood, warns of the danger every person faces just in being born: rejection by the mother. ³¹

Shakespeare depicts Constance, in her final appearance, with all the topos of the theatrically insane: loose hair, raving about death, she is filled with “vexed spirits.” Yet
Shakespeare seems to construct Constance’s madness only to deconstruct it: in her final appearance on stage, she attests to her sanity:

I am not mad. This hair I tear is mine;
My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey’s wife;
Young Arthur is my son; and he is lost.
I am not mad; I would to heaven I were,
For then ’tis like I should forget myself!

(4.1.45-9)

Just as Constance and Eleanor have directed the readings of those around them, now Constance issues instructions in reading herself. Her pronouncement has the ring of authenticity; fully aware that a woman such as herself, one who is distraught at her failure to pursue political power through motherhood will be deemed “hysteric,” she is determined to not be contained by such a label.

Constance’s “hair” is emblematic of this refusal to be contained. Throughout the scene her “loose” hair seems to reiterate her presence throughout the play, or as Vaughan says, “her unbound tresses visually emphasize her passionate struggle against the restraints of patriarchy.”32 Constance prizes her hair, as it is the one possession that is uniquely hers: “this hair I tear is mine” (3.4.45). All else is gone: she “was” Geoffrey’s wife, and while Arthur “is” her son, he too is now “lost.” Her hair, however, remains.

King Philip calls repeatedly for Constance to contain her loose hair, saying “bind up those tresses” and “bind up your hairs” (3.4.61, 68). Some critics disregard Philip’s repetition as a textual error; Smidt notes his lines “may well have been meant for excision, since it begins with the king’s exhortation to Constance ‘Bind up those tresses’ and is followed by a repetition, ‘Bind up your hairs.’”33 Perhaps, however, this repetition instead reflects the anxiety that Philip feels towards Constance, and the urgency he feels
to contain her physical presence. His urging from the beginning of the scene, “I prithee, lady, go away with me” (3.4.20) is re-enforced by his remarks, “Patience, good lady. Comfort, gentle Constance” (3.4.22), “O fair affliction, peace” (3.4.36). In any case, Constance resolutely refuses to keep her hair, or herself, contained.

Following the second unleashing of her hair, the scene concludes with Philip’s firm intention to contain her: “I fear some outrage, and I’ll follow her” (3.4.106). He instinctively acts to sequester Constance, and Shakespeare uses this opportunity to excise her from the play. This attempt to confine female corporeality is actually similar to the need to silence women throughout *King John*. As Bruster has noted, the “plentitude of speech” stands in “close relationship to freedom of movement; talking freely thus equals going freely.” Until her final appearance, Constance wields her body and her speech freely and dangerously—leading to her final removal from the play when Shakespeare, as Adelman and others have noted, abruptly removes her from the play.

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These characters’ interestingly anomalous positions—widowed mothers fighting one another for the power of the monarchy—alone justify a closer reading of *King John*. But the play’s historical parallels also warrant greater scrutiny. Many readers have discussed the play’s connection to contemporary events. Traditionally, critics have argued that Arthur’s pursuit of the throne mirrors Mary Stuart’s ill-fated bid, and that John’s role as reigning king naturally parallels Elizabeth, who successfully staved off Mary’s pursuit of the monarchy, in part by ordering the execution of her rival. What has
not been noted, however, is the quite different and remarkable parallel between Eleanor and Constance and Elizabeth and Mary.

Mary Stuart, Elizabeth’s cousin and rival for the English throne, pervaded English politics for decades. She was viewed by many as a threat to Elizabeth’s reign, and during her long imprisonment in England she was at the center of numerous conspiracies to overthrow Elizabeth. Even in the years following her execution, Mary has held the public’s imagination. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis’s recent work discusses the Queen of Scots’s “eerie persistence through generations of collective psychological life.”36 Following her execution in 1587, Catholics, as expected, claimed Mary as a martyr of their religion; but unexpectedly, as Lewis notes, her presence also continued to pervade “Protestant fantasy” because of a need to remain in “intimate, even slavish contact with Mary.”37 As Lewis and others have noted, Mary’s influence remains palpable even today. It is not unlikely, therefore, that a play written perhaps only two to three years following the execution of Mary,38 filled with altercations between potent queen figures, would refer to the contemporary political scene. Mary Stuart’s doomed bid parallels not Arthur, the ethereal child, but the fierce Constance, who is willing to align herself with any number of foreign powers in order to claim the English throne. Mary Stuart and Elizabeth never had a face-to-face meeting, but the play allows viewers a symbolic representation of such an encounter in which, appropriately, Eleanor (Elizabeth) is triumphant.

Though mining plays for political allegory can be a dangerous business for contemporary critics,39 Leah Marcus compelling argues that early modern audiences did just that. They sought out “local meaning” in the plays they attended: with a “feckless, highly ingenious, almost ungovernable gusto”; there was a “contemporary rage for
finding homologies with events and people about London.⁴⁰ Such audience members, it seems reasonable to assume, would recognize the Billingsgate scene, the biggest “slanging match Shakespeare ever wrote for women”⁴¹ as an imaginative meeting between the rival kinswomen queens.

While there are obvious differences between the relationships of Constance/Eleanor and Mary/Elizabeth, contemporary audiences might have noticed that all four women employed similar political strategies. Mary and Elizabeth, like Constance and Eleanor, recognized the need to “cultivate a specialized poetics of queenship… and used speeches and writing to define themselves in empowering ways.”⁴² Perhaps Constance and Eleanor’s savvy in specifically exploiting the terminology of maternity is relevant. Mary Stuart seems to have suffered political defeat in part because of her failure to use her role as James’s mother to her advantage, and her own writings reveal her failure to capitalize on this most powerful of roles. In a sonnet written during her marriage to the Earl of Bothwell, she surrendered everything to him: “Into his hands and wholly in his power / I place my son, my honour and my all, / My country, my subjects, my surrendered soul.”⁴³ Mary Stuart lost both her son and country to male control in Scotland; her surrender of her crucial role as mother, and her inability to use James as a tool for her own advancement, also contributed to her failure to acquire power in England.

Despite her best efforts, Constance fails, like Mary, to effectively capitalize on her status as mother to a claimant to the throne. Despite this failure, however, both Mary and Constance are consistently remembered for their roles as mothers. As discussed above, when Constance is considered at all, she it typically hailed for her “excess of
maternal tenderness,” and Mary too is consistently identified as a matriarch. As James Mackay notes, “she who never reigned in England [has] been the ancestor of all 18 British monarchs through 13 generations since 1603.”

Though Mary failed to effectively exploit her role as James’s mother in her lifetime, Mary’s most influential role, ultimately, was that of mother.

Elizabeth, by contrast, ironically succeeded in exploiting the language of maternity during her reign—despite the fact that she never gave birth. By the time of King John’s first performance, it was commonly known that Elizabeth would not bear an heir, despite the vehement criticism she confronted. As the previous chapter noted, Elizabeth’s “refusal to marry and bear children [became] a national obsession—they saw her as, by her own choice, the end of the House of Tudor.” The legendary story about Elizabeth’s response to James’s birth suggests that in the nation’s eyes at least, Elizabeth ought to have been worried about her cousin’s fertility: “Alack, the Queen of Scots is lighter of a bonny son, and I am but of barren stock.” Yet despite her resistance and ultimate refusal to marry and procreate, Elizabeth cleverly appropriated the language of motherhood, as in her 1563 address to the House of Commons: “Though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any, a more natural mother, than I mean to be unto you all.” Her subjects also exploited this connection; Parliament became convinced by 1572 that Mary must be eliminated for Elizabeth’s own protection. One member of Parliament, Robert Newdigate, pled, “I have heard she delighteth to be called our mother…Let us desire her to be pitiful over us her children, who have not deserved death.” So Elizabeth’s children demanded that their “mother” eliminate the other, threatening maternal presence, Mary.
One parallel between Eleanor and Elizabeth that critics have noted is their similar use of military garb. Elizabeth’s famous appearance at Tilbury in 1588, in which she wore military armor, is the only record of such behavior. Eleanor similarly toys with gender ambiguity and appears in military clothing—and acts as a soldier throughout the play. More striking, however, than this superficial similarity is the way both women provoke discomfort in observers by their mingling of male and female characteristics. The French forces in *King John* repeatedly call the troops accompanying Eleanor effeminate. Chatillon announces that John is approaching England:

> With him along is come the Mother-Queen,
>
> An Ate, stirring him to blood and strife…
>
> And all th’ unsettled humors of the land—
>
> With ladies’ faces and fierce dragons’ spleen.

(2.1.62-3, 66-7)

The passage identifies Eleanor’s presence as threatening in a myriad of ways; she is both mother, soldier, queen, and “Ate”—the goddess of discord—simultaneously. Her ability to summon “unsettled humors” who don “ladies’ faces,” speaks to the gender confusion her presence, as an armored woman, produces. At the time of the play’s original production, Elizabeth was producing similar feelings of discomfort. Some in early modern England found Elizabeth’s cross-gendered appearance disturbing. As Marcus notes, “the queen’s martial self-presentation at Tilbury was a glorious moment of patriotic triumph, but also a spectacle that aroused distinct uneasiness among Englishmen.”

The “uneasiness” that Eleanor and Elizabeth produced accentuated both their presences as powerful, anomalous creatures.
Though Eleanor and Elizabeth might be more militant than their aspiring rivals, Constance and Mary also employed martial tactics when necessary. Plowden notes that on one occasion, “Mary showed to her best advantage, riding out of Edinburgh at the head of her troops in high spirits, with a pistol at her saddle bow and swearing revenge on her enemies.”52 A week following the massacre of her secretary, David Riccio, “Mary was back in Edinburgh at the head of a businesslike little army....By any standards it had been a remarkable exploit, but especially for a young woman of 23 in an advanced stage of her first pregnancy.”53 Constance, like Mary, may not wear armor, but she too rallies her allies to battle, insisting that Austria was “sworn [her] soldier” and pledging the “spilling of her enemies blood” (3.1.51, 28).

Yet Constance and Mary both seem to exploit their vulnerabilities as single women more than their presences as fierce soldiers. Women, such as Constance and Mary, were members of a faction on the rise in Elizabethan England, that of “masterless women.” As Marcus has noted, “there was a surge in the number of ‘masterless women’ in the late 16th century England, with a crisis around 1600. ‘Masterless women’ could be milkmaids or spinners or wealthy widow or vagrants—any woman who lived on her own outside the structure of a male-dominated household.”54 The play appeared, then, in the midst of this “crisis,” a time in which more women seemed, for a variety of reasons, under less and less male supervision. Mary, like Constance, capitalized on her role as a widow55 both to accentuate her sexual availability and to imply her political vulnerability.

Mary’s sexual appeal was legendary, and she was also known, much to Elizabeth’s chagrin, for arousing sympathy in whomever she encountered.56 Mary used this to gain support for her own cause and demonize Elizabeth. For instance, when
Elizabeth refused to grant Mary safe passage through England on her journey from France to Scotland, the Venetian ambassador in Paris railed against Elizabeth’s “inhumanity...in refusing to give passage through her dominions to a woman, a widow, unarmed and almost banished from her own home.” Constance’s ploy, to use her position as a defenseless widow to summon up support for her cause, mimics the tactics Mary used throughout her imprisonment in England.

Constance’s speeches, often criticized for their melodramatic flair, resonate with both the passion and strategy often evident in Mary Stuart’s own writings. From prison Mary wrote:

The gods, the heavens, death, envy and hate rail on;
They are deaf, angry, cruel, marshalled against me.
To pray, weep, suffer, be a friend to everyone
Are the only cures for the many woes I see.

Constance, like Mary Stuart, bargained her future on her ability to “be a friend to everyone,” specifically foreign powers. In the course of the play, Constance seeks alliances with the French, Austrians, and church of Rome, all in the name of her son’s claim. Mary also was all too willing to ally with foreign powers against Elizabeth; as Plowden notes, “throughout the whole period of her captivity the Queen of Scots was ready at all times to open her heart to everyone, English or Scots, French, Italian or Spaniard, who showed the slightest sign of being willing to help her.” Ultimately, however, the sympathy that Constance and Mary arouse for their individual causes is inadequate—foreign powers put their own needs first, and in both cases she who is “mother” to England (for Eleanor too is referred to as mother-queen of England [2.1.54-62]) triumphs.
Rounding out the political allegory at work in *King John* is Arthur. His position in *King John*—caught between two kinswomen who hate one another and who both insist on his loyalty—is not unlike that of James, who was born into a similarly awkward position.\(^{61}\) James’s relationship to two mothers, Elizabeth, his godmother and the “mother” of England, and Mary Stuart, his birth mother, placed him in a precarious spot. James recognized, however, that his political future ultimately rested in Elizabeth’s hands, so he “styled himself as her [Elizabeth’s] mirror image and her son.”\(^{62}\) He became, in one sense, the child Elizabeth never had. James lived to reap the advantages of his birth, unlike Arthur, his counterpart in *King John*, who, like Constance and Eleanor, is ultimately “killed off.”

Speculation about the Elizabeth/Mary relationship is only intensified because the two kinswomen never met: despite years of pleading by Mary, Elizabeth refused such an encounter,\(^{63}\) and certainly *realpolitik* would have prevented the ignominious name-calling that Constance and Eleanor engage in, even if they had met. In the course of their lifetimes, however, Elizabeth and Mary accused one another of a variety of sins: Mary repeated rumors that Elizabeth was a “raging nymphomaniac” and a “monster of vanity,”\(^{64}\) and she scoffed at the idea of Elizabeth’s purported marriage to Robert Dudley, saying “So the Queen of England is to marry her horsekeeper, who has killed his wife to make room for her!”\(^{65}\) For Elizabeth’s part, in 1578, when an ambassador dared to speak on Mary’s behalf, Elizabeth remarked that Mary was “the worst woman in the world, whose head should have been cut off years ago.”\(^{66}\) In addition, their followers and enemies circulated other accusations as well: at various times, both women were labeled whores, accused of bearing illegitimate heirs, and were even considered devils. All these
accusations find place in Constance and Eleanor's confrontation. Shakespeare takes license in creating an imaginative altercation between the two titans who had dominated English thought for so long. Gone is the need for diplomacy: these women instead attack each other with uncontained venom, and the early modern audience looks on as privileged spectators of their confrontation.

Interestingly, the play finally expels Constance and Eleanor at the same time—in a single sentence, their offstage deaths are announced. Though, as I have argued, Shakespeare indulges his imagination by staging the altercation between these figures, he also ultimately feels the need to silence them, succeeding exactly where the male characters in King John fail. His own decision to silence them may reflect an anxiety aroused by the conflicts between women such as Mary and Elizabeth. If "excessive speech" of the everyday English woman prompted the use of cucking stools and bridles, we can only imagine the anxiety that women who dared to engage in political discourse would provoke. Shakespeare ultimately clears the play of such voices, leaving his political world exclusively male.

Even Shakespeare, however, could have never imagined that Mary and Elizabeth, like Constance and Eleanor, would eventually be brought together in death. The two cousins who never met now lay buried within a few feet of one another in Westminster Abbey—providing a visual reminder of how the fates of those two queens, like the fates of Eleanor and Constance, were so inextricably tied together.

We now turn to Tamburlaine, a play, unlike King John, that features an undeniably powerful male ruler. The queen mother figure, Zenocrate, however, even
without the political ambition so evident in Constance and Eleanor, unwittingly threatens the seemingly invulnerable Tamburlaine.
NOTES


2 Constance's husband was Geoffrey, Eleanor's son.

3 Critics vary in their opinions of why *King John* has failed to garner interest from critics and audiences, though many would concur with Geraldine Cousin's remark that "The fundamental criticism which has been levelled against *King John* in the twentieth century is that it is poorly constructed," (*Shakespeare in Performance: King John* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994], 22). L. A. Beaurline, in his introduction to the Cambridge 1990 edition remarks, "It is commonly said that *King John* is poorly constructed, that the Bastard is or should really be the hero, and that Shakespeare lacked interest in the script" (Introduction to *King John*, ed. L.A. Beaurline [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 1-57).

4 Janet Adelman has demonstrated how a "maternal malevolence" pervades much of the literature of Shakespeare's time in her *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4. Regarding *King John*, Adelman remarks: "Except for Romeo—who leaves his family behind as he comes on stage for the first time—and for the multiple sons of *King John*, Shakespearean sons have no mothers. The case of *King John* is in fact diagnostic of Shakespeare's retreat in the face of maternal power: though he begins the play with two warring mothers, each in her own way powerful both politically and dramatically, he kills both of them off in act 4—with an abruptness that borders on the ludicrous (4.2.120-23)—in order to recuperate masculinity at the end of the play" (10). Adelman leaves *King John* there—like many critics, she chooses to focus her attention on other Shakespearean
plays. Though Juliet Dusinberre remarks that *King John* is “a play of intense interest to feminists,” (“King John and Embarrassing Women,” *Shakespeare Survey* 42 [1989]: 37-52, 40) a relatively scant number of articles focus on females within the play. Recent collections, including *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) and *Shakespeare, Feminism, and Gender*, ed. Kate Chedgzoy (New York: Palgrave, 2001), for example, include insightful examinations of the usual suspects—but *King John* is left undisussed.

Those critics who have chosen to deal with *King John* and some aspect of the female characters within it include Dusinberre, who argues that “the play goes to pieces once the women leave the stage” (51); Phyllis Rackin, “Patriarchal History and Female Subversion in *King John*,” in *King John: New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 76-90, in which Rackin argues that Eleanor and Constance “claim a place in the historical narrative and challenge the myths of patriarchal authority that the men invoke to justify their actions” (82); Naoko Komachiya’s essay “The Legitimation of Power and the Power of Legitimation in *King John*,” *Shakespeare Studies* [Japan] 33 (1998), 31-70, discusses how Eleanor and Constance are “subversive and threatening to patriarchal ideology” as they “manipulate and exploit the patriarchal system without being marginalized by it,” and focuses on how they, like many of the male characters, seek their own “self-interest...and use politics and religion to legitimize their positions” (65, 32, 46); Carole Levin, in “‘I Trust I May Not Trust Thee’: Women’s Visions of the World in Shakespeare’s *King John*,” in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 219-233, notes that though “the women characters are more clear-sighted about the world in which they live than their male counterparts...in Shakespeare’s history plays, even the strongest women can expert power only indirectly” (220). In “Fashioning Obedience: *King John’s* ‘True Inheritors,’” in *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare’s History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Barbara Hodgdon argues that the women’s subversive voices are “check[ed] and contain[ed]” in *King John* by “localizing the voices of its women so that
all...speak to the issue of legitimacy” (27). Most recently, in “Refiguring the Nation: Mothers and Sons in King John,” in Women’s Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare’s Early History Plays (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), Nina Levine insightfully examines the play in light of radical succession tracts that were circulating during 1590s. As she explains, her focus on King John is “less on individual female characters and more on the roles of women in general in matters of succession and dynastic conflict” (24). These works are integral to my essay, but I hope to build upon their investigations to focus specifically on these women as “individual...characters,” and to examine how Constance and Eleanor specifically use their traditionally assigned roles as a source of political power—while also considering previously unexamined contemporary historical parallels as well.


7Levin remarks that Constance “lacks Eleanor’s power throughout the play” (221).

8William Hazlitt observes in Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays (1817) that the “excess of maternal tenderness, rendered desperate by the fickleness of friends and the injustice of fortune, and made stronger in will, in proportion to the want of all other power, was never more finely expressed than in Constance.” Samuel Johnson went so far as to say she is “the epitome of powerlessness” (qtd. Dusinberre, 40).

9Productions dating from the nineteenth century have removed this altercation between Constance and Eleanor (Dusinberre, 40).

10In “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,” Representations 2 (1983): 61-94, Louis Montrose notes, “Although biological maternity was readily apparent (in Shakespeare’s age), biological paternity was a cultural construct for which ocular proof was unattainable. More specifically, the evidence for unique biological paternity, for the physical link between a particular man and child, has always
been exiguous. And, in Shakespearean drama, this link is frequently a focus of anxious concern” (73). This “anxious concern” is exactly what Eleanor and Constance exploit in the Billingsgate scene.


12Douglas Bruster, “‘In a Woman’s Key’: Women’s Speech and Women’s Language in Renaissance Drama,” *Exemplaria* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 255. Carole McKewin, in a study of fifty scenes of this type, primarily found in Elizabethan comedies, notes that women tend to engage in a discourse that is more private than men’s: “Intimate talk between men is less enclosed, because its themes move easily between public and private concerns. In that way the privilege of intimate discourse has its drawbacks as well: that which can confer an aura of privateness upon speech may also limit its mode and substance” (Qtd. in Bruster, 255).

13Lynda E. Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 179-213, 204.

14Ibid.


16Dusinberre, “King John and Embarrassing Women,” 41.


18Belsey, 181.

19Critics who have observed the destabilizing effect of widows on early modern culture include Theodora Jankowski in her *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama*

20Todd, 54.

21Historically, both Eleanor and Constance had colorful marital histories. Eleanor of Aquitaine served successively as Queen of France and England: she married King Louis VII of France in 1137, divorced him in 1152, and in the same year married Henry, Count of Anjou, who became Henry II of England. Constance left her second husband, the Earl of Chester, in 1199 to marry Lord Guy de Thouras (See Beaurline, 60-1). These women, like Shakespeare’s creations, were clearly not bound by the conventions of matrimony.

22Boose, 195.

23Jankowski, 168.

24My thanks to Elizabeth Dietz for this insight.


27Constance and Eleanor’s willingness to exploit Blanche’s virginity for political power mirrors Queen Elizabeth’s similar strategy.

28Rackin, 83.

29Beaurline, 61. For a fascinating discussion of the importance of children in *King John*, see Mark Heberle, “‘Innocent Prate’: *King John* and Shakespeare’s Children,” in


31 See Adelman, 4-7.

32 Vaughan, 69.

33 Smidt, 85.

34 Bruster, 255.

35 A number of critics have debated the merits of this analogy. Many consider John, a figure commonly employed by Tudor rhetoric because his claim to the throne was similar to Elizabeth's, to be a clear representation of Elizabeth—who is similarly excommunicated from the Catholic church, and is similarly ambivalent about ordering the execution of her rival. See Braunmuller, 58-60, and Komachiya, 33. Other critics disagree; Hodgdon, for one, contends that such "topical parallels...were...out of date by the mid-1590's" (24). Levine takes Hodgdon's argument a step further, arguing that the "about-face in Catholic and Protestant positions during this period turned upside down the familiar parallels between John and Arthur and Elizabeth and Mary" (128). My reading opens up the possibility that the powerful women of this play might also parallel figures in the political landscape of Tudor England.


37 Lewis, 53.

38 Though a majority of critics see Shakespeare's play as a reworking of the anonymous play The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England, and conclude that Shakespeare's play was written between 1591-98, several critics, including Beaurline,
contend that Shakespeare’s play was written first, following the publication of the 2nd edition of Holinshed in 1587. If Beaurline’s date is correct, Shakespeare would have been composing the play on the heels of Mary’s execution, also in 1587.

39 For instance, Levin notes that though there are similarities between Elizabeth and Eleanor, there are “some marked differences...and any comparison should not be taken too far” (Levin, 221.) Leah Marcus herself admits that a traditional pitfall with topical readings is that “each critic has felt obliged to discredit previous topical readings to make space for his or her more probable reading, only to be discredited in turn by the next...the effort collapses from within, since it defeats its own goal of finding stable meaning” (Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents [Berkley: University of California Press, 1988], 33). With my own “topical reading” of King John, I will attempt to avoid such a pitfall. While I certainly see how Arthur and John can be read as Mary/Elizabeth figures, respectively, with my reading, I hope to open up another set of possibilities.

40 Marcus, 26-7.

41 Dusinberre, 49. Beaurline says that in the “Billingsgate” scene, Constance and Eleanor “sound like a pair of brawling women” (Beaurline, 29). My reading suggests there is more at work in this altercation than simply such a “brawl.”


43 Quoted in Findlay, 184.

44 James Mackay, In My End is My Beginning: A Life of Mary Queen of Scots (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 1999), 304.

Elizabeth “transformed natural hazards into a source of political strength” and how acting as a mother to the English people was one way in which she developed fictional familial relationships to strengthen her authority (85).


47 Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969). Fraser comments that this remark is “the primitive complaint of the childless woman for a more favoured sister” (268). Yet Elizabeth in her lifetime was certainly the more successful of the two mothers.


49 Quoted in Orlin, 90.

50 Alison Plowden, *Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stewart: Two Queens in One Isle* (Towota, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 179.

51 Marcus, 54.

52 Plowden, 99. Jane Dunn, in her new work *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* (New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), relates a story that reveals Mary’s practical approach to motherhood. Mary received an elaborate gift from Elizabeth for James’s christening, a baptismal font that was “dazzling gold...encrusted with jewels” and cost the modern day equivalent of £230,000. Mary eventually “sent it off to the mint to have its ornamental 330 ounces of gold reduced to useful bullion and coin....Mary used 5000 crowns of this to [partially] finance 500 foot soldiers and 200 horsemen to defend herself and Bothwell against the confederate lords” (280). Mary’s willingness to appropriate a symbol of her child’s christening to fund her martial endeavors again parallels the women of *King John*, who are similarly unsentimental about maternity.
53 Ibid.

54 Marcus, 97. Marcus offers further proof that this surge in “masterless women” was viewed as a crisis: “During the 1590s there was a decided increase in institutionalized devices specifically for the curbing of women. For example, more and more villages invested in “cucking stools” for the punishment of domineering wives and scolds” (97).

55 Mary lived as a widow for much of her life, starting at the age of 18 when her husband, the young French king, suddenly died. In 1567 she was linked to the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley, and shortly thereafter married the Earl of Bothwell, one of the conspirators in Darnley’s murder. Bothwell eventually fled to Denmark, and after a bout with insanity, died in 1578. (See Plowden, Fraser, Mackay, and Michael Lynch, *Mary Stewart Queen in Three Kingdoms* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988]). Though Mary was, therefore, technically married for many years during her confinement in England, the marriage was viewed by most as a mere technicality. As Plowden remarks, “the trifling matter of her marriage to Bothwell could easily be put aside” (152). Several potential marriages were suggested by both Elizabeth and other parties.

56 As Anne Somerset has noted, “those who came into contact with her invariably found her immensely sympathetic” (*Elizabeth I*. [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991], 146).

57 Plowden, 66.

58 Qtd. in *Reading Monarch’s Writing: The Poetry of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I*, ed. Peter Herman (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002).

59 Levine argues that in *Richard III* and *King John*, the “English queens …now fight for rather than against the nation’s welfare” (24). Yet I would argue that Constance’s continual pursuit of foreign allies belies this assessment.
60 Plowden, 163.

61 While Levine also notes that all the male heirs in King John are placed precariously amidst various strong mothers like James was positioned between Elizabeth and Mary, I would contend that the role of Arthur, positioned squarely between the two rival queens, is specifically a figure for James. James’s advantage over Arthur, however, was his geographical distance from his natural mother—he was not “contaminated” by her failure, and was able to succeed where she did not.


63 Many feel Mary was confident that she could charm her cousin, as she so frequently charmed others, if only she could come face-to-face with her. Dunn convincingly argues that their failure to meet played a significant role in their rivalry: “The fact they were never to meet is the black hole at the heart of their relationship...in the absence of reality, a rival grows in stature in the imagination, becoming something superhuman” (xxi). Elizabeth and Mary did agree to meet early on during Mary’s tenure in Britain—but plans fell through after the political situation became murkier, following a massacre of Protestants in France. Later, Elizabeth claimed she could not meet Mary with a cloud of suspicion hovering over her regarding the Darnley murder.

64 Plowden, 201.

65 Robert Dudley, Elizabeth’s closest companion for many years, was under a cloud of suspicion following the mysterious death of his wife, Amy Robsart Dudley. See Somerset.

66 Somerset, 214.

67 Their abrupt excision from the play has drawn a variety of responses. Levin notes that “Just as Eleanor and Constance balanced each other as opposing forces in life, so,
too, do they in death” (231). Rackin remarks, “their deaths three days apart reported in a single speech of six lines as if to suggest the containment of these bitter enemies within a single, genderically determined category” (84). See Levine for an unconventional reading of the closing of King John; she sees the play’s ending, in which the child monarch weeps, as lamenting the absence of mothers, rather than celebrating the exclusion of them. I would argue, however, that Constance and Eleanor, as mothers, were not depicted as soothing comforters; they instead provoked tears from Arthur.
CHAPTER THREE

TAMBURLAINE’S DOMESTIC THREAT

Produced within a few years of Shakespeare’s relatively obscure *King John* were two of Marlowe’s best known works, *Tamburlaine Part I* and *II*. Critical interest in *Tamburlaine* centers, understandably, on the title character. Early critics debated Tamburlaine’s status as an overreacher, scourge of God, or hero.¹ Recently, issues of homoeroticism, alienation, and colonization have been at the forefront of scholarly debate, and underlying most of this critical inquiry is an interest in Tamburlaine’s fearless pursuit of empire. Scholars have overlooked, however, Tamburlaine’s similar pursuit of familial control. Though Zenocrate, Tamburlaine’s wife, is traditionally read as a representation of his “feminine” side, or as a voice of conscience in the midst of his bloodthirsty pursuits,² I will argue that Marlowe creates with Zenocrate, and indeed with all of the representations of maternity in the text, something far more threatening. Motherhood in *Tamburlaine* is mysterious, powerful, even lethal—and a reading of both parts of *Tamburlaine* with a specific interest in aspects of maternity reveals that women can have a destabilizing effect, even on the seemingly invulnerable Tamburlaine.³ Such an effect ultimately prompts Tamburlaine to eradicate the maternal presence in his world and strive to replace it altogether.
Though critics commonly note that Tamburlaine transforms himself from a shepherd to a powerful despot, few observe that Zenocrate makes a radical transformation as well. She is born into prestige as the daughter of an Egyptian Sultan, but when she first appears in the play she is a kidnapped foreigner with no power whatsoever, miles away from either her father or fiancé.⁴ By Part 2, however, Zenocrate is the queen of Persia, wife to Tamburlaine, and perhaps most importantly, mother to Tamburlaine’s three sons. Yet Zenocrate’s transformation from a self-described “silly maid” (2.1.2.10) to maternal figure happens offstage.⁵ In the years between Tamburlaine I and II, she experiences three pregnancies and three births. Marlowe’s decision to conceal Zenocrate from public view as she undergoes such major transformations is telling. It accords with the fact that many people in early modern culture viewed pregnancy and childbirth as mysterious experiences, belonging exclusively to the female domain. As Naomi Miller comments, “the processes of conception and birth, as well as the caregiving associated with labor, delivery, and lactation, were very much the province of women in the early modern period.”⁶ Such a “province” is absent from the onstage world of Tamburlaine. But although this erasure is understandable in cultural terms, by omitting the processes of an ordinary birth, including conception, Zenocrate’s appearance on stage in Part 2 with three grown sons seems abrupt, even startling. She is transformed from virgin to mother without any of the pain or vulgarity so often associated with childbirth in the early modern period.⁷

Peter Stallybrass has argued that early modern discourse perceived the “woman’s body” as “naturally grotesque.” Such a body “must be subjected to constant surveillance precisely because, as [Mikhail] Bakhtin says of the grotesque body, it is ‘unfinished,
outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits." Mary Russo similarly argues that the feminine body is frequently linked with the "grotesque." If this is so, then the maternal body, a growing body, transgressing limits and expanding beyond boundaries, was viewed as especially grotesque. As Valerie Traub notes, "that the maternal was linked to the 'grotesque body' in early modern societies is evidenced in part by the performance of certain pollution behaviors. The practice of 'churching' women after menstruation and childbirth suggests that the products of women's sexual and reproductive bodies posed enough of a psychic threat to the social order to call for ritual purification." Marlowe chooses not to feature Zenocrate when she is in the "grotesque" stage of pregnancy, a stage in which she reaches her maximum physical size and presence, nor when her body is still capable of producing the pollutants that were believed to accompany pregnancy and birth.

Zenocrate is instead frequently associated with chastity and virginity (which Bakhtin aligns with a closed, contained body), and Tamburlaine's preoccupation with her chastity, which Simon Shepherd refers to as the "fetishising of her chastity," is apparent from their earliest exchange. Tamburlaine describes Zenocrate in language that, as C. L. Barber notes, is "literally frigid": "Zenocrate...Fairer than whitest snow on Scythian hills, /...With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled / Thou shalt be drawn amidst the frozen pools / And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops" (1.1.2.87-100). Mark Burnett notes that "this aestheticizing of Zenocrate is...robbing her of any sexual threat," and Tamburlaine insists on declaring himself no sexual threat as well. After capturing her as a prisoner, he declares, "The jewels and the treasure we have ta'en / Shall be reserved" (1.1.1.2-3). As Cunningham notes, "reserved" means "kept intact." "Jewels" are a
common metonym for female chastity, so Tamburlaine’s insistence on “reserving” such a treasure suggests his determination to see that Zenocrate too is “kept intact,” not violated—her chaste body not penetrated.

Tamburlaine apparently fulfills his promise to keep Zenocrate “intact”; moments prior to their marriage at the close of Part I he pledges to her father, “For all blot of foul inchastity, / I record heaven, her heavenly self is clear” (1.5.1.487-88). His remark indicates his tendency to deify Zenocrate, yet also implies that for Tamburlaine, Zenocrate is not a sexualized woman, but is instead an ethereal presence, to be revered. Tamburlaine never sees Zenocrate as an erotic figure, and engages only in limited physical contact with her. As Barber notes, “nowhere is there any cue for an embrace of pleasure of Tamburlaine with Zenocrate.”15 She, on the other hand, expresses sexual frustration resulting from her desire for him: “Ah, life and soul, still hover in his breast / And leave my body senseless as the earth, / Or else unite you to his life and soul, / That I may live and die with Tamburlaine!” (1.3.2. 21-4). Her ability to crave physical union with Tamburlaine differs dramatically from his own need to etherealize her.

In the midst of deifying Zenocrate, Tamburlaine repeatedly promises to grant her earthly power. In their first meeting he promises to make her “empress of the East” (1.1.2.46), yet he continually postpones the actual conferment of this title. Even after he has crowned numerous tributary kings, he insists to Zenocrate, “I will not crown thee yet, / Until with greater honours I be graced” (1.4.4.146-7). One reason for his delay in crowning Zenocrate may be his desire to crown and marry her in a single lavish ceremony that concludes the first play. Tamburlaine relishes the opportunity to stage theatrical events; as Barber notes, “he designs his own ceremonies, and they are
all...aimed at aggrandizing his identity.” Yet, in this case, Tamburlaine may resist granting Zenocrate power also because through the coronation and wedding he aggrandizes not only his identity, but Zenocrate’s as well. In the stunning ceremony which concludes Part 1, Zenocrate ascends the throne and transforms from a vulnerable captive into a royal queen. In her first appearance in Part 2, she similarly ascends the throne, but this time she is not alone—she is accompanied by Tamburlaine and her sons.

In her reappearance in Part 2 of Tamburlaine, Zenocrate seems to be associated with the Virgin Mary. “Divine” Zenocrate (an epithet invoked numerous times) has given birth to the sons of Tamburlaine, so often depicted as a god-figure, and she, whose “beams illuminate the lamps of heaven,” (2.1.3.2) now ascends her royal throne. She embodies what Gail Kern Paster describes as an early modern “male fantasy” illustrated by Jacques Guillemeau’s 1612 childbirth manual, in which he longingly ruminates on those women “whose bodies are entire and Virgin-like, even after often child-bearing, and in whom there is perceived no difference from them that are Virgins.” Even in Zenocrate’s death scene, Tamburlaine emphasizes the identification between Mary and Zenocrate, declaring

The cherubins and holy seraphins
That sing and play before the King of Kings
Use all their voices and their instruments
To entertain divine Zenocrate.
And in this sweet and curious harmony
The God that tunes this music to our souls
Holds out his hand in highest majesty
To entertain divine Zenocrate.

(2.2.4.26-33)
“Divine Zenocrate” appears hand-in-hand with God; as C. L. Barber notes, in these lines Tamburlaine makes “Zenocrate equivalent to the Virgin Mary.”\textsuperscript{18} An earlier scene in Part 1 visually suggests the Virgin Mary as well; Marlowe presents Zenocrate in a tableau reminiscent of Michelangelo’s “Pietà,” in which the Virgin Mary embraces Christ’s dead body. Zenocrate cradles her dying fiancé, Alcidamus, the King of Arabia in her arms, as he remarks: “My heart with comfort dies / Since thy desirèd hand shall close mine eyes” (1.5.1.432-3). She tends to him with maternal care as he takes his last breath, and with his final words he remarks, “I die with full contented heart, / Having beheld divine Zenocrate” (1.5.1.418-9).

While this repeated deification of Zenocrate might seem a tribute to her, the figure of the Virgin Mary was coded with controversy in early modern culture. Critics of Marian devotion argued that she “sinned by exceeding her boundes, and by intruding her selfe so far, as that she might chance to have obscured the glory of Christ thereby.”\textsuperscript{19} One such critic, William Crashaw, warned, “wee must take heede we so inlarge not the excellencie of the Mother, that wee diminish the glorie of the sonne.” Frances Dolan concludes that such critics “contested women’s authority as mother as much as they did the Virgin Mary’s claims on devotion.”\textsuperscript{20} If Zenocrate is indeed a figure for the Virgin Mary, she represents a mother who threatens to eclipse both the son and the father.

Of course, for members of Marlowe’s audience, the figure of the Virgin Mary carried other connotations as well. Critics have noted how Elizabeth filled the vacancy left by the Virgin Mary in post-reformation England. Elkin Wilson, among other critics, notes how “from 1558 to 1603 the virgin queen of England was the object of a love not dissimilar in quantity from that which for centuries had warmed English hearts that
looked to the virgin Queen of Heaven for all grace.”21 By the time of Tamburlaine’s production, the English people realized Elizabeth would never bear an heir, but she had successfully depicted herself as a mother to her people, thereby fulfilling the dual roles of Mary: virgin and mother. Like Elizabeth, Zenocrate too fulfills both of these roles, and her power seems to increase exponentially in the second part of Tamburlaine. No longer the remote, cold divinity whom Tamburlaine adores from afar, she is instead surrounded by physical proof of her corporeality and maternity.

Zenocrate’s first appearance as a mother is specifically staged by Tamburlaine—and is immediately rife with tension. After instructing her to “Sit up and rest thee like a lovely queen,” Tamburlaine remarks:

So, now she sits in pomp and majesty
When these my sons, more precious in mine eyes
Than all the wealthy kingdoms I subdued,
Placed by her side, looke on their mother’s face.
But yet methinks their looks are amorous,
Not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine.

(2.1.3.17-22)

His immediate change in address, from instructing and situating Zenocrate, “Sit up,” to observing her, and remarking seemingly to himself, “now she sits,” reflects the beginning of a tonal shift in the passage. As an observer, he views a queen with two young men, complete and intact without a father or king. Though Tamburlaine is the one who “subdued kingdoms” and who, in fact “placed” the boys “by her side,” they look to “their mother’s face” with looks that he perceives as “amorous.” Tamburlaine, in his mind, has created his own (Oedipal) nightmare; by crowning a queen who has given birth to princes, he has made himself obsolete. The repetition of “looke” and “looks” signals his
preoccupation with his sons’ external appearances, and the ways in which their
corporeality mirrors their mother, rather than Tamburlaine himself. Tamburlaine then
performs a blazon, parodying the typical address of female beauty by mocking the
effeminate beauty of his sons.

Their hair as white as milk and soft as down—
Which should be like the quills of porcupines,
As black as jet, and hard as iron or steel—
Bewrays they are too dainty for the wars.
Their fingers made to quaver on a lute,
Their arms to hang about a lady’s neck,
Their legs to dance and caper in the air,
Would make me think them bastards, not my sons,
But that I know they issued from thy womb,
That never looked on man but Tamburlaine.

(2.1.3.25-34)

Characteristics Tamburlaine would admire in Zenocrate, “daintiness,” “fair” skin, and
“softness,” are perceived in his sons as indicators of illegitimacy.22 Yet Tamburlaine
retracts his own suggestion of bastardy by claiming dominion over Zenocrate’s very
womb: since her womb “never looked on” another man, these boys must be his. Like
many in early modern culture, Tamburlaine endowed the womb with its own
consciousness. As Miller notes, the womb “represented life-giving nurturance...as well
as the potential disruption of patriarchal order. Beyond the purview of masculine control
or regulation...[the uterus] could undermine male social authority.”23 Tamburlaine again
invokes the term “mother’s womb” a few lines later, in an effort to praise his son,
Celebinus: “thy seed / Shall issue crownèd from their mother’s womb” (2.1.3.53). His
need to appropriate the womb as a locus of control extends even to the procreation of his grandchildren, and is indicative of his desperation to reassert paternal power.

Zenocrate’s response to Tamburlaine’s complaint about their sons’ feminine appearances suggests her desire to placate him: “My gracious lord, they have their mother’s looks, / But when they list, their conquering father’s heart” (2.1.3.36-7), and yet even her reassurance suggests that the boys mimic their father only “when they list.” Her intercession on her sons’ behalf again links her to early modern associations with the Virgin mother. As Dolan observes, there were clear parallels between domestic and heavenly hierarchy: “Children might appeal to their mothers, and the faithful, by analogy, might appeal to the Virgin Mary, for protection against paternal violence.” Zenocrate succeeds here in staving off Tamburlaine’s violence with accounts of their sons’ bravery; when she is dead, however, there is no intermediary.

Though his two elder sons, Celebinus and Amyras, respond to Tamburlaine’s displeasure by vying for his approval and praise, Calyphas says the very thing Tamburlaine fears most: “But while my brothers follow arms, my lord, / Let me accompany my gracious mother” (2.1.3.65-6). Early modern child-rearing discourse lectured on the destructive tendencies of maternal influence on sons. As Christine Coch argues, “considerable social pressure pushed male children out of the mother’s private sphere and into the public realm of men. The mother who sought to keep her son close effeminized him and thwarted social order.” Calyphas makes a crucial, perhaps fatal mistake by craving greater intimacy with his mother. Zenocrate’s influence appears all the more threatening because in this scene she is not in the “mother’s private sphere,” but is instead sitting on a very public throne. Having acquired political power as
Tamburlaine's queen, and parental power as the mother of a devoted son, Zenocrate becomes one more threat that Tamburlaine must neutralize.\textsuperscript{26}

Zenocrate's powerful presence upon the throne mirrors two scenes in Part 1 that Tamburlaine similarly stages. One such scene is the previously discussed coronation scene; another, perhaps more revealing scene, occurs when Tamburlaine confronts Bajazeth, the emperor of the Turks, with a call to war. Both men leave "their" women as representatives upon their thrones. The significance of Zabina, Bajazeth's wife, to the text is often overlooked. However, from the vantage point of Part 2, we can see that she foreshadows Zenocrate's future. A mother of three boys, an empress, she is at ease with political power and the savagery of war.\textsuperscript{27} She also sparks Zenocrate's "two major spoken acts...the mock-battle scene and the Zabina-death scene."\textsuperscript{28} In the "mock-battle scene," Zenocrate squares off in a confrontation against Zabina, set up by Tamburlaine and Bajazeth like a modern day boxing match. In this corner, Bajazeth cries,

\begin{quote}
Zabina, mother of three braver boys  
Than Hercules...  
Who, when they come unto their father's age,  
Will batter turrets with their manly fists.
\end{quote}

(1.3.3.103-11)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bajazeth's introduction of Zabina becomes an encomium to his "three braver boys." He continues,

\begin{quote}
Sit here upon this royal chair of state  
And on thy head wear my imperial crown,  
Until I bring this sturdy Tamburlaine  
And all his captains bound in captive chains!  
\textit{[She ascends the Turkish throne and is crowned.]}
\end{quote}

(1.3.3.112-6)
Because this scene precedes her marriage to Tamburlaine, Zenocrate lacks both the maternal and royal power attributed to Zabina. She is, therefore, introduced to this standoff by Tamburlaine’s characteristic focus on her chastity. Tamburlaine launches into one of his typical blazons,

    Zenocrate, the loveliest maid alive,
    Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone,
    The only paragon of Tamburlaine,
    Whose eyes are brighter than the lamps of heaven….
    Sit down by her, adorned with my crown,
    As if thou wert the empress of the world.

[She ascends the Persian throne.]

….take thou my crown, vaunt of my worth,
And manage words with her as we will arms.

(1.3.3.117-31)

His direction to Zenocrate is clear; he instructs her to play pretend, “as if thou wert the empress of the world,” positioning her, “Sit down by her,” giving her a costume, “adornèd with my crown,” providing her with lines, “vaunt of my worth,” and actions “Stir not,” and “manage words with her as we will arms.” Pam Whitfield notes that with this setup by Tamburlaine, “the new king gives her a taste of royalty even as he invited her to join the man’s world of sparring and battle.”29 But while Whitfield contends that Zenocrate “acts against herself” in “abusing the character of another noblewoman,” I see Marlowe instead depicting the corrupting effects of power on a previously unimpeachable woman. Once the men make their exits, the resulting visual picture is startling; women are, albeit temporarily, wearing crowns, seated upon thrones, and granted royal authority. One might wonder what would result if Bajazeth and Tamburlaine killed each other, now that their two female representatives have assumed
the "royal chairs." Unlike the later throne scene that appears in Part 2, in which Tamburlaine observes Zenocrine's every movement, this is a rare instance in which she is free of Tamburlaine's surveillance. Interestingly, it is at this moment, when Zenocrine is unobserved by Tamburlaine, that she seems seduced by the possibility of her own potential royal authority.

This juxtaposition of Zenocrine and Zabina is indicative of Marlowe's fascination with Queenship, evident in several of his other plays. Sara Deats notes that though Marlowe's canon is "generally characterized by the absence of puissant female figures, [it] is nevertheless framed by plays depicting powerful and potentially dangerous queens." She goes on to argue that "the three commanding queens appearing in his dramas (Dido, Queen Mother Catherine in The Massacre at Paris, and Isabella in Edward II), although sometimes treated sympathetically, all validate the alleged contemporary queasiness concerning female sovereigns."³⁰

Critics have neglected, however, the representation of Queenship in Tamburlaine, so prominent in this face-off, in which Zenocrine ably asserts herself in a public forum. As readers have noted, Zenocrine does not often speak in Tamburlaine's presence. In the moment that she ascends the throne and wears a crown, however, Zenocrine is transformed from a meek, silent observer to an aggressive participant. Shepherd and others sees Zenocrine as "chaste" in comparison to the "passionate" Zabina, and yet the scene features Zenocrine matching Zabina insult for insult. After being labeled a "concubine" (1.3.3.166), Zenocrine responds by calling Zabina a "Disdainful Turkess and unreverend boss" (1.3.3.168). And though she is often seen as merely Tamburlaine's mouthpiece, this scene suggests that she is immediately drawn to the idea of
empowerment available to her. She warns Zabina, “Thou wilt repent...[and] plead for mercy at his kingly feet / And sue to me to be your advocate” (1.3.3.172-5). Zenocrate imagines Zabina’s political and physical fall from her throne, where she will require Zenocrate as an ally.

This standoff between queens marks a development in Zenocrate’s character. Though she will plead with Tamburlaine to stop bloodshed, she ultimately chooses political power over a role as “advocate” for Tamburlaine’s victims. As Sarah Emsley argues, Zenocrate “is not the long-suffering, virtuous type; she makes pragmatic rather than honourable choices.”31 The punishment Zabina suffers following Bajazeth’s defeat is significant as well: though her husband suffers the most conspicuous humiliation through his imprisonment in a cage, Tamburlaine singles Zabina out, as Shepherd notes, “for particular humiliation, specifically insisting that other women mistreat her.”32 She who was once “queen of fifteen contributory queens” (1.5.1.266) is now subservient to maidservants; both Tamburlaine and Zenocrate insist on this ultimate inversion of female power. Though Zenocrate ultimately seems to lament Zabina’s brutal end, staging possibilities suggest that at the close of Part 1, she has to physically step over Zabina’s dead body on her way to be crowned an empress herself. In the throne scene of Part 2, Zenocrate sits surrounded by her “brave boys”; she is, albeit temporarily, positioned on the throne with neither a king nor fellow queen at her side.

Though she is devoid of any royal power following Bajazeth’s defeat, Zabina’s significance is not entirely eradicated; she is still mother of “three brave boys,” who are potential rivals to Tamburlaine’s power, and she suggests that motherhood imbues her with a life-sustaining force. Tending to her caged husband with tender, even maternal,
care, she promises, “Sweet Bajazeth, I will prolong thy life, / As long as any blood or spark of breath / Can quench or cool the torments of my grief” (1.5.1.283-5). Yet she also calls upon the most visceral images of maternal revenge to curse Tamburlaine, “And may this banquet prove as ominous / As Procne’s to th’ adulterous Thracian king / That fed upon the substance of his child!” (1.4.4.23-5). Zabina’s comment on the potential for maternal devastation proves prescient as the fate of Calyphas later reveals.

The significance of Zabina’s power as both a queen and mother are simultaneously mocked by Tamburlaine’s sadistic treatment of her. Now degraded, the maternal body becomes the object of grotesque plans by Tamburlaine. He urges Bajazeth to eat his own flesh for sustenance, and one of Tamburlaine’s followers, Usumcasane, remarks, “Nay, ’twere better he killed his wife, and then she shall be sure not to be starved, and he be provided for a month’s victual beforehand” (1.4.4.46-8). Tamburlaine agrees, “Here is my dagger. Dispatch her while she is fat, for if she live but a while longer, she will fall into a consumption with fretting, and then she will not be worth the eating” (1.4.4.49-52). Zabina’s body that once nurtured, at least in the womb if not in lactation, three sons, is now parodied as food for her husband. Yet Zabina resists capitulation of her former power, urging Bajazeth, “Eat...Let us live in spite of them, looking some happy power will pity and enlarge us” (1.4.4.103). Zabina, who is labeled fat by both Tamburlaine and Zenocrate (who calls her a “boss” or “fat slut”) insists that instead of allowing the diminution of her body, she and her husband will eat and hope that “some happy power will . . . pity and enlarge us.” While “enlarge” connotes “liberate,” it also suggests “to make bigger.” Her physical body, that has once enjoyed
the expansion of pregnancy and the elevation of royalty, continues to resist her enslaved status.

Yet Zabina’s body is savagely destroyed—once Bajazeth commits suicide by braining himself against the cage, Zabina follows suit. Prior to her suicide, she descends into a rambling soliloquy:

Go to my child, away, away, away. Ah, save that infant, save him, save him!...Hell, death, Tamburlaine, hell! Make ready my coach, my chair, my jewels, I come, I come, I come!

[She runs against the cage and brains herself]

(1.5.1.312-19)

In a speech that anticipates Cleopatra’s death scene, Zabina’s last thoughts are of her roles as mother and queen, and she is filled with desperation to preserve both by “saving” a child and regaining her royal seat. Her reference to “that infant,” might refer to her son Callapine, who appears in Part 2, fully grown.33

Though Zabina’s first and last appearances in the play focus on her relationship with her sons, Part 2 reveals that her significance to Callapine is marginal. In his first words, he introduces himself as “Callapine, the son of Bajazeth,” (2.1.2.2) and concentrates on revenge for his “father’s death” (2.1.2.78); he boasts about his father’s accomplishments, describing Bajazeth as “My royal lord and father” who “filled the throne” (2.3.1.12-3). Since, according to most critics, between fifteen and twenty years have passed between the first and second parts of Tamburlaine, Callapine’s formative years were spent motherless. Unlike Zenocrine’s sons, who have grown too attached to their mother and become the weaker for it, Callapine has thrived without a maternal influence to soften him. He is the son Tamburlaine craves, devoid of feminine influence.
Marlowe's eradication of Zabina's maternal significance is indicative of an overall movement in the play.

This movement reflects a cultural trend. As Coppélia Kahn argues, "Between 1580 and 1640 two forces, one political and one religious, converged to heighten paternal power in the family. As the Tudor-Stuart state consolidated, it tried to undercut ancient baronial loyalty to the family line in order to replace it with loyalty to the crown. As part of the same campaign, the state also encouraged obedience to the paterfamilias in the home, according to the traditional analogy between state and family, king and father." As Tamburlaine asserts his dominion over an increasingly extensive empire, the play reveals his domination in his domestic space as well. It is as if Marlowe decides that Zenocrate has been imbued with too much power. Following the demonstration of Zenocrate's extensive influence over her sons, her next appearance is in her deathbed.

Critics have neglected to note that though Zenocrate does not literally die in childbirth (the nature of her illness is never revealed), her sudden appearance in the beginning of Part 2 with sons, followed by her similarly abrupt death scene, is reminiscent of the often witnessed childbirth/deathbed. Again, Zenocrate seems situated in a tableau not of her own making, in a scene designed with great symmetry. The stage directions reveal:

_The arras is drawn, and Zenocrate lies in her bed of state, Tamburlaine sitting by her; three Physicians about her bed, tempering potions; Theridamas, Techelles, Usumcasane, and the three sons [Calyphas, Amyras, Celebinus]._

(2.2.4.s.d.)

Three groups of three male figures surround her in what would typically be a scene imbued with a feminine presence. Like the childbirth chamber, the deathbed was
traditionally considered a “feminine” domain. Phillippy explains, “the gendering of death and its rituals ascribed to women, prior to the development of the undertaking profession in the late-seventeenth century, not only the task of attending the dying but also the ‘menial and gendered’ work of preparing the body for disposal.”36 There is a resistance then by Tamburlaine, if not by Marlowe, to a woman’s presence in the death chamber—Tamburlaine’s death scene is similarly devoid of women.

Marlowe’s positioning of Zenocrate in her deathbed (in one of her lengthiest appearances in either Part 1 or 2) resembles a popular genre of painting that developed in the early-seventeenth century featuring a female corpse on her deathbed.37 Jonathan Goldberg discusses a 1637 painting by David des Granges, The Family of Sir Richard Saltonstall, in which “the husband draws the curtain to reveal the mother of his eldest son, who stands beside him, holding his hand.”38 Sir Richard’s wife, Elizabeth, (like Zenocrate) appears in the bed in the background, depicted in a way that was “appropriate iconographically for the representation of a woman who died in childbirth.”39 While in Saltonstall and other paintings of the genre the husband’s second wife is also featured in the portrait, in Tamburlaine no other female/maternal presence is evident. Like these portraits, which were “interested in preserving not the living wife’s likeness but the image of her body in death,” Marlowe’s positioning of Zenocrate in her deathbed and Tamburlaine’s subsequent determination to preserve, but not inter, her dead body, insists that the “image of [Zenocrate’s] body in death” pervades the play.

Critics have noted Tamburlaine’s fetishizing of Zenocrate through his elaborate embalming plans, and Burnett comments that Tamburlaine, in effect, mummifies his queen through his actions.40 Also significant, however, is the social and cultural reaction
to embalming during the time in which *Tamburlaine* was produced. Zenocrate never
speaks of her wishes for internment, but the stigma attached to embalming pervades
literature of the time. Queen Elizabeth herself requested that her body not be embalmed,
and this resistance, Phillippy remarks, was “typical of the growing distaste among
noblewomen for the practice in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.”
Because of “the culture’s insistence on feminine chastity and corporeal enclosure,” there
was a “desire to avoid the hands of male embalmers.” In fact, the move to male
embalmers was a relatively new development, as the rites of preparing the body had
traditionally been an exclusively female enterprise. Tamburlaine supports this move to
demystify a traditionally female ritual, a decision that further appropriates a female
endeavor. Zenocrate’s body will be penetrated by male embalmers, and denied
internment in a tomb, often seen by psychoanalytic critics as a return to the womb.

Tamburlaine orders:

> Where’er her soul shall be, *[Turning to address her body]* thou
> shalt stay with me,
> Embalmed with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh,
> Not lapped in lead, but in a sheet of gold,
> And till I die thou shalt not be interred.

(2.2.4.129-32)

While Zenocrate’s fecund living body could not be contained, her dead body will be
permanently sealed.

Interestingly, the only time that women are actively involved in the preparation of
a dead body in *Tamburlaine* is in the case of Calyphas—the “effeminate brat” (2.4.1.162)
whom Tamburlaine kills himself. Tamburlaine insists that the Turkish concubines
prepare his body for burial, “For not a common soldier shall defile / His manly fingers
with so faint a boy” (2.4.1.163-5). Following their work on Calyphas, Tamburlaine rewards his soldiers with these same concubines: “Hold ye, tall soldiers, take ye queens apiece— / I mean such queens as were kings’ concubines. / Take them, divide them and their jewels too, / And let them equally serve all your turns” (2.4.3.70-3). The scene plays as a chilling parody of Tamburlaine’s first wooing scene of Zenocrate; while he swore to preserve her “jewels,” he now sanctions the violent gang rape of these women’s “jewels.” The passage also reveals Tamburlaine’s mockery of “queenship”; he seems more at ease dealing with women whom he considers “queans,” an early modern term for “whores,” than with women in positions of power, as Zenocrate and Zabina briefly are.

In Zenocrate’s death scene the threat of a dominating maternal presence remains, however, and Marlowe’s move to supplant the mother/son bond is evident. Though her sons are present by her deathbed, they never speak a word, and Zenocrate’s interest in addressing them seems half-hearted, at best:

Yet let me kiss my lord before I die,
And let me die with kissing of my lord. [They kiss]
But since my life is lengthened yet a while,
Let me take leave of these my loving sons
And of my lords, whose true nobility
Have merited my latest memory.
Sweet sons, farewell! In death resemble me,
And in your lives your father’s excellency.

(2.2.4. 69-76)

Zenocrate insists that her dying wish is to be enclosed in Tamburlaine’s embrace; she adds her wish to say goodbye to her sons, with an almost apologetic tone, “since my life is lengthened yet a while,” and in addressing them, groups them with Tamburlaine’s
nobles, who are also gathered at her deathbed. Her parting advice suggests her
determination to support Tamburlaine’s indoctrination of the children. Since Tamburlaine
accused their sons of bearing too many physical similarities to Zenocrate, she asks that
they now determine to “resemble” their father. Until the end, Zenocrate senses the
importance of minimizing the significance of her maternal bond with her sons.

It is interesting to note that Tamburlaine’s memorial to Zenocrate is one of
destruction: he devastates the very town that she occupied in death, just as he earlier
destroyed the city of her birth. He erects a pillar that reads: “This town being burnt by
Tamburlaine the Great / Forbids the world to build it up again” (2.3.2.17-8). Yet even in
death, her presence continues to threaten Tamburlaine. Early modern treatises cautioned
against the dangers of mothers “consuming” their males sons and debilitating their
development of character. Amyras’s remark upon witnessing the burning of the site of his
mother’s death, “As is that town, so is my heart consumed / With grief and sorrow for my
mother’s death” (2.3.2.49-50), reveals that even in death, the maternal presence looms
large over Tamburlaine’s world.

Tamburlaine immediately takes steps to appropriate Zenocrate, and her likeness,
for his own purposes: “Here the picture of Zenocrate…sweet picture of divine
Zenocrate…will draw the gods from heaven” (2.3.2.25-9). As Zenocrate’s body is
preserved according to Tamburlaine’s specifications, he also uses her visual image in his
martial endeavors. She, who is earlier credited with the ability to light the heavens, is
now used to rally his troops to engage in further violence. This use of her picture in
martial endeavors again suggests an identification of Zenocrate with the Virgin Mary;
iconic images of both women are used to sanction war. Zenocrate’s portrait, Cunningham
notes, “is enlisted into his belligerent world, as she is metamorphosed from an icon of peace and mercy into Bellona, goddess of war.” Tamburlaine thus appropriates the very “looks” of Zenocrate, which he found so repellent in his own sons, to inspire his men in battle.

Tamburlaine also immediately begins a process of remaking his “boys” into soldiers—first by training his sons in the “rudiments of war” (2.3.2.54). Tamburlaine engages in a fifty line monologue, detailing the necessary steps his sons must follow in order to become the “worthy sons of Tamburlaine the Great” (2.3.2.92). The instructions depict a female-less world, in which men are powerful “makers.” They will “make whole cities caper in the air,” (2.3.2.61) “make the water mount,” (2.3.2.85) and “make a fortress in the raging waves” (2.3.2.88); these men will be creators, forging new empires without the assistance or presence of women. This urge to create seems to complicate Stephen Greenblatt’s assertion that men in Marlowe use violence to destroy and therefore “give life shape.”

Yet Tamburlaine is not content with simply dispensing advice; he requires that the “boys” participate in a bloody ritual. Tamburlaine engages in self-mutilation and then demands, “View me, thy father...And see him lance his flesh to teach you all” [He cuts his arm.] “Come, boys, and with your fingers search my wound / And in my blood wash all your hands at once, / While I sit smiling to behold the sight” [They touch his wound.] (2.3.2.110-28). With this act, he orders his sons to partake in a “baptism” of blood, hearkening back to an earlier discussion prior to Zenocrate’s death. Upon witnessing his boys’ ostensible effeminacy in the throne scene, he declares that his sons must “armèd wade up to the chin in blood,” (2.1.3.84) to which Celeinus responds, “For if his chair
were in a sea of blood / I would prepare a ship and sail to it," and Amyras responds, “And I would strive to swim through pools of blood” (2.1.3.89-92) Yet Zenocrate resists such a discussion: “My lord, such speeches to our princely sons / Dismays their minds” (2.1.3.85-6). Her intrusion hinders, temporarily, Tamburlaine’s determination to see his sons submerged, metaphorically and literally, in blood. With Zenocrate’s absence, however, he sees the opportunity to immerse his sons in blood, and reclaim these sons as his own; Tamburlaine will metaphorically rebirth his sons. They whom he once saw as “bastards” will now re-emerge as bloodied warriors.

Interestingly, though Tamburlaine urges his sons to embrace manhood through such a ritual, he consistently refers to them as “boys.” Since approximately twenty years pass between the first and second parts of Tamburlaine, these “boys” are in their 20s. Tamburlaine seems, while insistent on creating strong soldiers out of his sons, equally determined to remind them of their own youth and inexperience. When at one point Amyras pleads, “Let me have coach, my lord, that I may ride / And thus be drawn with these two idle kings,” Tamburlaine responds, “Thy youth forbids such ease, my kingly boy. / They shall tomorrow draw my chariot” (2.4.3.27-8). This example is all the more revealing when examined in light of Tamburlaine’s use of the Phaethon/Apollo myth, a cautionary tale about the father/son relationship. At two different points in the plays, Tamburlaine invokes the mythical story of the headstrong Phaethon, whom he describes both times as “Clymen’s brain-sick son” (1.4.2.47, 2.5.3.232). He refers to Phaethon, in fact, with his final breath. Despite his staunch determination to cultivate the development of his “boys,” Tamburlaine resists his inevitable replacement by his sons.
In the case of his two elder sons, Tamburlaine succeeds in finally making his boys “like” him. The King of Jerusalem, Tamburlaine’s captive, says as much when he is mercilessly taunted by Celebinus, and comments, “Ah, cruel brat, sprung from a tyrant’s loins, / How like his cursed father he begins / To practise taunts and bitter tyrannies!” (2.4.3.54-6). Doomed Calyphas, however, refuses to be indoctrinated into the life of a warrior. Some readers see Tamburlaine’s killing of Calyphas as destroying the “feminine” impulses within himself. While that is certainly consistent with Tamburlaine’s fears of his own feminine impulses, I believe he also destroys Calyphas because he is the living embodiment of Zenocrine; in killing him, he destroys the last living remnant of her. Worth noting is that in Tamburlaine’s abrupt killing of his son he never refers to Zenocrine at all, and yet he refers not only to Calyphas’s birth, but to his own as well:

O Samarcanda, where I breathèd first,
And joyed the fire of this martial flesh
Blush, blush, fair city, at thine honour’s foil
And shame of nature…
Here, Jove, receive his fainting soul again—
A form not meet to give that subject essence.
Whose matter is the flesh of Tamburlaine…..

[He stabs Calyphas]

By Mahomet thy mighty friend I swear,
In sending to my issue such a soul,
Created of the massy dregs of earth,
The scum and tartar of the elements,
Wherein was neither courage, strength, or wit,
But folly, sloth, and damned idleness,
Thou hast procured a greater enemy.
Though he displaces his anger onto omnipresent Jove for producing such an unworthy
heir, the earlier throne scene with Zenocrate reveals that he blames her for not only
producing “feminine” sons, but for also encouraging them in the most inappropriate of
diversions—diversions promoting “folly, sloth, and damned idleness.” Though the
bloody baptism of his other sons begins the reversal of their feminine characteristics,
Calyphas is apparently too far gone to save.

In murdering Calyphas, Tamburlaine suggests that his son’s birth involved neither
Zenocrate or himself; instead, he is a composite of the lowest components of nature:
“dregs,” “scum,” and “tartar.” Perhaps Tamburlaine deliberately minimizes his own
involvement in Calyphas’ creation in order to mitigate the horror of his actions. But the
depiction of birth as unnatural is not inconsistent with other portrayals of childbirth in
both parts of Tamburlaine. Marlowe chooses, in fact, to begin Tamburlaine Part I with
Cosroe’s claims that his brother Mycetes, the king of Persia, was born under unnatural
circumstances. On his “birth-day Cynthia with Saturn joined, / And Jove, the Sun, and
Mercury denied / To shed their influence in his fickle brain!” (1.1.13-5). Mycetes is a
product, therefore, of the inconstant moon (Cynthia), who is incapable of generative
powers without the help of the sun. Mycetes later responds in turn that Cosroe is a
“Monster of Nature” (1.1.1.103). Though these minor characters figure little in the
overall significance of Tamburlaine’s domestic strife, they are part of a group of male
characters in the play who are consumed with the details of unusual births.

Bajazeth continues this preoccupation—when he discusses the qualities of his
own sons, he appropriates monstrous imagery: “Their shoulders broad, for complete
armour fit, / Their limbs more large and of a bigger size / Than all the brats y-sprung
from Typhon’s loins” (1.3.3.107-9). Marlowe’s choice of the mythological “Typhon” is an interesting one: Typhon, a masculine monster, coupled with a female monster to produce gargantuan beasts. Bajazeth identifies his own children as being even more monstrous than Typhon’s; their limbs are “larger” and “of a bigger size.” His children, who are first called “brave boys” in connection with their mother, Zabina, now seem grotesque in their enormity.

Of greatest significance, of course, is Tamburlaine’s birth, which becomes a topic of speculation among his enemies. Meander, one of his early opponents, declares, “Some powers divine, or else infernal, mixed / Their angry seeds at his conception; / For he was never sprung of human race” (1.2.6.9-11). Ortygius also ponders Tamburlaine’s unnatural creation: “What god or fiend or spirit of the earth, / Or monster turn’d to a manly shape, / Or of what mould or mettle he be made” (1.2.6.15-7). Even his followers are seen as unnatural progeny; Meander compares Tamburlaine’s men “to the cruel brothers of the earth / Sprung of the teeth of dragons venomous” (1.2.2.47-9).

Tamburlaine ultimately, however, credits himself with his own creation. Greenblatt has noted how Marlowe’s heroes, “invent themselves” and Barber notes that in Tamburlaine “the birth of the hero happens by his making himself a god on earth.”48 Tamburlaine reinforces this notion throughout both plays—practically disparaging his actual physical birth. Though he admits he was born of “silly country swain,” he declares “I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, / And yet a shepherd by my parentage” (1.1.2.34-5). Minimizing the significance of his own parents allows him to claim greater credit for his own creation. In his sons, however, he sees boys who have not taken the steps to “make” themselves, and that drives his recreation of them.
Tamburlaine's death scene could be seen as a birth scene as well, as he finally completes the creation of his sons. Weakened by an unnamed ailment, he remarks, "I cannot stand...Why shall I sit and languish in this pain?" (2.5.3.51, 56). He then turns to his sons:

But sons, this subject, not of force enough  
To hold the fiery spirit it contains  
Must part, imparting his impressions  
By equal portions into both your breasts;  
My flesh, divided in your precious shapes,  
Shall still retain my spirit though I die,  
And live in all your seeds immortally.

(2.5.3.170-8)

Burnett notes "Tamburlaine's desire to pass on his powers to his sons" is represented by his urge to "divide himself into smaller entities." Tamburlaine enacts a birthing of sorts, in which he produces children who are free of maternal influence. These remaining sons, who Zenocrate had earlier insisted had "their mothers looks...but when they list their father's conquering heart," now exist as parts of Tamburlaine, displaying both his "impressions" and his "fiery spirit." Amyras credits his father, solely, with his existence: "Your soul gives essence to our wretched subjects, / Whose matter is incorporate in your flesh" (2.5.3.165-6).

Zenocrate is not entirely removed from this birth/death scene, however. Tamburlaine, after descending from his chariot, orders "Now fetch the hearse of fair Zenocrate. / Let it be placed by this my fatal chair / And serve as parcel of my funeral" (2.5.3.211-3). In a scene replete with echoes of the earlier critical throne scene, Tamburlaine directs his son to ascend to the place of honor, in this case a chariot drawn
by captive kings—but now any presence of maternal or queenly power is gone. Zenocrate is no longer seated beside her sons; she is instead wheeled out on display, a lifeless body denied humane burial, so that she can “serve as parcel” of Tamburlaine’s funeral. Tamburlaine has succeeded in giving birth to Amyras, placing him on the throne sans female accompaniment, and forecasting generations of immortality through the “seeds” of his sons. As we move to a historical figure, Queen Anna, we will see another queen mother struggle, unsuccessfully, to avoid similar marginalization.
NOTES


2Prior to Sara Munson Deats’s work, Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), there was little critical focus on women in Marlowe. Joanna Gibbs discusses reasons for this oversight in her essay “Marlowe’s Politic Women,” in Constructing Christopher Marlowe, ed. J. A. Downie and J. T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164-76. Two early essays considering women in Marlowe include Velma Bourgeois Richmond’s “Renaissance Sexuality and Marlowe’s Women,” Ball State University Forum 16, 4 (1975): 36-44, in which the author argues that “Marlowe’s women” generally represent Christian attitudes as opposed to aggressive masculine values; and Barbara J. Baines, “Sexual Polarity in The Plays of Christopher Marlowe,” Ball State University Forum 23, 3 (1982): 3-17, in which Baines contends that the plays externalize the internal conflicts between masculine and feminine characteristics in the psyche. Critics have rarely focused on maternity in Marlowe; the most thorough treatment is Constance Brown Kuriyama’s Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe’s Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1980), which provides an insightful psychoanalytic reading of the mother/son relationships in Massacre at Paris and Dido, but does not focus on maternity in Tamburlaine. A recent treatment of a variety of maternal figures in Marlowe’s works is Audrey Becker’s, “‘The Author of My Death’: Marlowe and the
Poetics of Maternity,” in “So troubled with the mother’: Death and the Performance of Maternity in Early Modern Drama” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 112-52. Becker insightfully argues that “Marlowe’s mothers are positioned profoundly close to death” (113). While Becker, however, contends that “Zenocrine’s death enshrines her as the exemplary mother” (133), I argue that Marlowe’s text instead portrays Zenocrine as a mother who, albeit unwittingly, exceeds the proper bounds of influence over her sons. Death, rather than enshrining her, contains and subverts her influence in the familial unit.

3The focus of my investigation will be Zenocrine, and to some extent, her Turkish counterpart Zabina. Olympia, another maternal figure in Tamburlaine, who has been praised for her maternal devotion, deserves further inquiry. Though time does not allow a full examination here, I would suggest that Olympia, in keeping with the other mothers in Tamburlaine, is a more threatening figure than most scholars have recognized.

4Stephen Greenblatt has noted how Marlowe focuses on “the idea of the stranger in a strange land. Almost all of his heroes are aliens or wanderers” (Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 194. Yet Zenocrine too is an alien, wandering in a strange land, who, like Tamburlaine, nonetheless ultimately acquires power.

5Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great, ed. J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). All subsequent citations of Tamburlaine will be from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text by part, act, scene, and line number.


7Baines notes that in Tamburlaine there is “little allowance or need even for the sexual gratification that women provide. Blood lust replaces sexual desire” (10). Pam
Whitfield comments on the significance of Zenocrate's chastity in "Divine Zenocrate," 'Wretched Zenocrate': Female Speech and Disempowerment in Tamburlaine I," Renaissance Papers (2000): 87-97. She comments that Tamburlaine "gathers psychic power from...Zenocrate's body. Medieval and Renaissance belief endowed virginity with unique powers, including the ability to mediate between the earthly and the divine" (90). Tamburlaine is ultimately more comfortable with Zenocrate when she is deified; her role as a corporeal being who produces devoted sons disconcerts him.


14Marlowe, Tamburlaine, ed. Cunningham and Henson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 49.

Chicago Press, 1988), 45-86. M. C. Bradbook similarly notes the lack of physical intimacy between Zenocrate and Tamburlaine: “Even in his love for Zenocrate Tamburlaine scarcely descends to the human level. The one episode where he shows any feeling is in the dumb show” (Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 134).

16Barber, “Theatrical Magic,” 56.

17Gail Kern Paster, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 196. Sung-won Cho observes in “Longing for the Mother Queen: A New Historical Reading of All’s Well that Ends Well” that “maternity and virginity are not necessarily the opposing sides of female sexuality, but are complementary aspects of womanhood; they make a woman complete and even sanctified, as the Virgin Mary whom we worship because of that combination in her” (English Language and Literature [Seoul] 42, no. 4 [1996]: 873-94, 894).

18C. L. Barber, “The Death of Zenocrate,” 22.


20Dolan, 290.


22Tamburlaine’s preoccupation with the dangers of effeminacy encroaching upon the masculine world of war is actually seen for the first time in Part 1. After engaging in a lengthy rumination on beauty, he declares, “How unseemly is it for my sex, / My discipline of arms and chivalry, / My nature, and the terror of my name, / To harbour thoughts effeminate and faint!” (1. 5.1.174-77). His latent fears of effeminacy seem to resurface as he observes his sons and wife together.
23 Miller, 4.

24 Dolan, 287.


26 Critics have overlooked Tamburlaine’s apprehension about Zenocrate’s influence as a mother, so evident in this scene. Carolyn Williams, for instance, argues that “Marlowe nowhere presents Zenocrate’s influence as particularly baneful. The fact that two of her sons grow up to be brave suggests that Calyphas’s faults flow from defective nature rather than improper nurture” (“This Effeminate Brat’: Tamburlaine’s Unmanly Son,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 9 [1997]: 56-80, 70). This scene suggests just the opposite: Zenocrate’s influence is debilitating her sons. The play implies, ultimately, that Celebinus and Amyras grow up “to be brave” in spite of Zenocrate’s influence, not because of it.

27 Critics have noted that Zenocrate senses a kinship with Zabina when she discovers her lifeless body, and remarks on the nature of “fickle empery”: “Blush heaven, that gave them honour at their birth / And let them die a death so barbarous! / Those that are proud of fickle empery...Behold the Turk and his great empress!” (1.5.1.351-5). I believe that on her deathbed Zenocrate also senses the parallel between her life and Zabina’s: “I fare, my lord, as other empresses, / That, when this frail and transitory flesh / Hath sucked the measure of that vital air...Wanes with enforces and necessary change” (2.2.4.42-6). The cycle of fortune that brought Zabina to her humiliating end has also brought Zenocrate to a premature death.

28 Whitfield, 91.

29 Whitfield, 92.

30 Deats, 116.

Shepherd, 189.

David Fuller offers an insightful reading of Zabina's final speech that suggests she reveals guilt for abandoning a child, and thereby taps into a prevalent early modern anxiety, that of maternal abandonment: "Zabina guiltily juxtaposes the memory of an infant whose attention she rejected with the memory of a child who suffered in the war against Tamburlaine" ("Commentary to Tamburlaine Part I," in The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe, ed. Fuller [Oxford: Clarendon, 1998], 223.)

Coppélia Kahn, "The Absent Mother in King Lear," in Rewriting the Renaissance, 33-49, 38.

Phoebe Spinrad notes that Zenocrate's death scene does not appear in Marlowe's sources ("Medieval Summons, Renaissance Response: Tamburlaine, Parts I and II," in The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987], 134). See Spinrad for an examination of Tamburlaine death scenes in the context of both Medieval and Renaissance deathbed traditions. She concludes that in Zenocrate's death scene, "Everything [Tamburlaine] does is backward...rather than comforting Zenocrate he rages so that she must comfort him, and she must also give him the required deathbed instructions that he should be giving her" (134).


Phillippy, 61.


Ibid.

Phillippy, 58.

The sealing of her body also ensures that her body is grotesque no more; as Stallybrass has argued, a woman “could become the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the state” (126). So the embalming of Zenocrate might in fact also suggest Tamburlaine’s determination to protect the “integrity” of his empire.

Becker contends that Zenocrate’s death is “courageous,” and that her “acceptance of death gives her brief authority” (143). I would argue, however, that in her final words she minimizes her influence over her sons’ lives and cedes all parental authority to Tamburlaine.

Zenocrate’s pleas with Tamburlaine to spare her birthplace are largely unsuccessful. She begs, “My lord, to see my father’s town besieged, / The country wasted where my self was born— / How can it but afflict my very soul?” (1.4.4.69-71). He does ultimately agree to spare her father and friends (though her fiancé is not so lucky), but the town itself is “wasted.”

Cunningham, 21-2.

Greenblatt, 197.

He also alludes twice to the story of Zeus and his successful overthrow of his father.

Greenblatt, 212; Barber, “Theatrical Magic,” 65. Greenblatt goes on to say that the heroes in Marlowe “dissolve the structure of sacramental and blood relations that normally determine identity in this period…[rendering] the heroes virtually autochthonous, their names and identities given by no one but themselves” (213). While I
would argue that Tamburlaine does value blood relations enough to enact a bloody ritual to reclaim his sons, I agree that Tamburlaine relishes the opportunity to rebirth himself as well.

49Burnett, “Tamburlaine and the Body,” 42.
CHAPTER FOUR

RECUPERATING MATERNITY: QUEEN ANNA'S MASQUES

As Samuel Daniel's masque *Tethys' Festival* (1610) concludes, Queen Anna and her son Charles, the Duke of York, who appear in the masque as Tethys Queen of the Ocean and Zephyrus respectively, transform back into "themselves."¹ Daniel describes the scene as follows: "Suddenly appears the Queen's majesty in a most pleasant and artificial grove...and from thence...[she] march[es] up to the King conducted by the Duke of York...in a very stately manner."² "Appearing in their own form," the Queen, escorted by her younger son, approaches James, who is seated with their elder son Henry, for whom *Tethys' Festival* is dedicated as part of the celebration of his investiture as Prince of Wales. This unusual ending is certainly notable for its break with tradition; masque participants did not typically remove their guises as characters and return to their "true" identities while onstage. This final scene is also, however, a remarkable gesture by Queen Anna. Featured as the star of the masque—she is after all the "Tethys" in *Tethys' Festival*, her final move is one that unifies the royal family and firmly returns the focus back to James in not only a very "stately," but also in a very public manner.

As I will argue, Anna's movement towards James at the end of *Tethys' Festival* is indicative of her efforts to reunite the royal family, and more specifically, recuperate her
role as the matriarch within it. My examination will build upon recent works that attribute significant developments in Stuart culture to Anna. In large part, Leeds Barroll can be credited for recovering Anna’s reputation. She had historically been relegated to the status of a frivolous, even stupid, queen consort. Barroll has convincingly argued that Anna was integral, perhaps more so than either James or Prince Henry, to the Jacobean court’s artistic endeavors. Barroll’s efforts have drawn attention from other critics, such as Barbara Lewalski who views the masques that Anna produces as “entertainments of subversion” allowing Anna a forum to undermine James’s authority.

*Tethys’ Festival* seems to provide Anna with an ideal opportunity to shift focus from James and publicly assert her significance as both a queen consort and royal mother. Until the last moments of the masque, in which Anna moves toward James, she appears as a reigning monarch, at one point seated in an ornate golden crown, with her own daughter, Princess Elizabeth at her feet. I will argue that while, as Lewalski and others contend, Anna did assume subversive guises in some of her masque appearances, with *Tethys’ Festival* Anna chooses to focus instead on presenting an idealized unified royal family, one in which both the patriarch and matriarch are integral parts. In so doing, I will suggest that her involvement in Jacobean masque production was something with great personal stakes for Anna because it was her sole means of acquiring agency within the royal family.

Anna’s determination to present a representation of idealized maternity within a unified familial structure was the culmination of years of efforts to establish herself as a vital part of the Jacobean court. As an artistic patron, Anna commissioned a number of masques during her reign, and though the exact extent of Anna’s involvement in the
authorship of these masques is unclear, one contemporary described her as an “authoress” of at least one of her productions. With *Tethys’ Festival*, Barroll believes Anna was heavily invested in every detail of productions, noting: “It was the queen who chose the dancers…and who would give final approval as to how the whole mode of presentation was to be configured.” Anna’s interest in each detail of the masque may reflect the daunting nature of her agenda with *Tethys’ Festival*. Before addressing Anna’s efforts to recover her position as the Jacobean matriarch, however, it is important to first examine the factors that contributed to her alienation within the royal family.

I. Marital and Maternal Strife

Anna’s story is not frequently told. Until Barroll’s 2001 “cultural biography,” the only extant full length biography of Anna was Ethel Williams’ 1971 work. Born to a royal family in Denmark, Anna married James as a teenager, an act which led to permanent separation from her family, most significantly from her mother, whom she adored. Accounts of Anna’s life describe it as alienated. Danish in a Scottish and later English court, Catholic in a Protestant country, female in a male homosocial court, Anna seemed destined to a life of isolation. Yet Anna made efforts to ingratiate herself with her husband’s subjects. Arriving in Scotland without knowledge of the Scottish language, she learned to speak “broad Scots,” endearing herself to the Scottish people. Despite her rumored allegiance to Catholicism, a potential political disaster for James, she practiced her religious devotion in private, in an effort to appease her husband.
greatest alienation that Anna suffered, however, was a result of James’s determination to minimize her maternal role.

James’s marginalization of Anna’s maternal role took place in both the political and domestic spheres. As queen consort, Anna’s relationship with her Scottish and English subjects was necessarily limited, although some accounts suggest her eagerness to adopt a position as a maternal figure to her people. During Anna’s procession to be crowned queen of England, one observer recorded: “Our gracious Queen, mild and courteous, placed in a chariot of exceeding beauty, did all the way so humbly and with mildness salute her subjects, never ceasing to bend her body this way and that, that men and women wept with joy.”12 The phrase “bend her body” suggests a physical willingness to greet her subjects—such warmth on Anna’s part was especially striking in comparison with James, who was notoriously averse to public appearances. In describing James’s first drive through London, the Venetian ambassador reported that the English people “like their King to show pleasure at their devotion as the late Queen knew well how to do; but this King manifests no taste for them but rather contempt and dislike. The result is he is despised and almost hated.”13 Another contemporary account records: “In his publick Appearances...the Accesses of the People made him so impatient, that he often dispersed them with Frowns.”14 By contrast, as the Earl of Shrewsbury commented, Anna “spoke to the people as she passeth, and receiveth theyr prayers wt thanckes and thanckfull countenance, barefaced, to the great contentment of natife [sic] and forein people.”15 Anna’s “barefaced” encounters with people, both “natife” and “forein,” suggest her willingness to establish an intimacy with both the English people and with
foreigners, such as herself, and to compensate for James’s lack of interest in such a relationship.

Despite the fact that James showed no interest in cultivating a paternal relationship with his people through public appearances, as his predecessor so cleverly had done, he claimed to be both mother and father to his subjects. As Jonathan Goldberg notes, in the Basilikon Doron, James claims to be a “loving-nourish father.” Goldberg observes, “he terms himself, father and maternal nurse at once, giving his kingdom ‘their very nourish-milke,’ which they greedily engorge, depleting the royal gift. As father and mother, the king is sui-generis, self-contained as a hermaphrodite, an ideal form.”

James’s choice of words, “nourish-milke,” reveals his confidence in fulfilling any maternal longings that his subjects might feel. Though the people may feel greater affection for Anna, she was clearly not sanctioned by James to serve in any maternal capacity to his people. Whatever desire she may have had to serve as a maternal figure to English subjects may have seemed redundant in a court in which James was determined to embody both paternity and maternity.

Though as a consort Anna’s political relevance was necessarily limited, her personal role, as wife to the king, would seemingly ensure her relevance in James’s court. James’s own tumultuous family history had left him isolated, and Anna would ostensibly provide him with the family he had previously lacked. Prior to marrying Anna, James gave the Scottish people an explanation for his decision to marry: “The reasons were that I was alone, without father or mother, brother or sister, king of this realm and heir apparent of England. This my nakedness made me to be weak and my enemies stark.”

James, then, saw his lack of family as both a vulnerability and a liability. Anna would
find herself in a similar position, once she made the precarious journey from Denmark to Scotland; she was, for all practical purposes, without parents or siblings as well. The two, however, never found the family they lacked in one other.

James’s preference for the company of his male favorites rather than for his wife was apparent from the early years of their marriage, and certainly contributed to the rift that existed between Anna and James. As Lewalski observes, “the homosexual and patriarchal ethos of his court excluded her [Anna] from any significant place in his personal or political life.” Because of James’s devotion to his male courtiers, as Bergeron notes, “James’s true family often existed on the margins for him.” A position as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber offered a courtier special personal intimacy with the king that inevitably led the way to political power. Neil Cuddy remarks, “the Bedchamber displaced the Privy Chamber as the focus of the monarch’s private life…. The balance of power swung away, increasingly, from the Privy Council and a bureaucrat-minister towards the Bedchamber and the royal favorite.”

Robert Carr, one of James’s beloved favorites, proved to be a particular obstacle in Anna’s relationship with the king. Carr was sworn gentleman of the bedchamber in December 1607 and soon became the focal point of all of James’s attention. By 1612, at the peak of his powers, some believed he had more power than the king himself. Carr existed as a barrier between James and the rest of the court, including Anna, and his popularity infuriated other noblemen. In a letter to Sir John Harrington, Thomas Howard wrote, “You must see Carr before you go to the King, as he was with him a boy in Scotland, and knoweth his taste and what pleaseth. Carr has all the favours, as I told you before.” James made no efforts to confine his affection for favorites such as Carr to his
bedchamber. Francis Osborne commented about his behaviors with his favorites: "For the kings kissing them after so lascivious a mode in publick, and upon the theatre, as it were, of the world, prompted many to imagine some things done in the tyring-house, that exceed my expressions." Anna’s ultimate choice of the masque to dramatize an intact royal family may have been a reaction to such performances “upon the theatre...of the world.”

Despite James’s preoccupation with his favorites, Anna’s position as a royal mother might have seemed secure. Yet extant letters written between James and Buckingham, the courtier who rose to favor after Carr’s downfall, reveal that James cultivated an extensive familial community that excluded Anna. In one of James’s later letters to Buckingham, he writes: “For God so love me, as I desire only to live in this world for your sake, and that I rather live banished in any part of earth with you than live a sorrowful widow’s life without you. And so God bless you, my sweet child and wife, and grant that you may ever be a comfort to your dear dad and husband. James R.” As Bruce Boehrer notes of this letter, “Buckingham’s privileged status with the king is specifically a family status. He is at once James’s child and his wife, and James is both his father and husband.” James’s repeated invocation of familial roles, “child,” “wife,” “dad,” and “husband” suggests his preoccupation with fostering an alternate family. At the time, James was ironically, already “widowed”; Anna had passed away shortly before the writing of this letter. But rather than referring to his status as Anna’s surviving husband, James is more concerned with the possibility of becoming a metaphoric “widow” if he is ever separated from Buckingham.
As the aforementioned letter reveals, Anna’s role was not the only one supplanted by James’s favorites; James showed “far more affection to the children of Buckingham and his kin that he had shown to his own children.”27 James anticipated the next generation of favorites that Buckingham’s marriage could produce. The day after Buckingham’s wedding, he wrote to him: “My only sweet and dear child, Thy dear dad sends thee his blessing this morning and also to his daughter. The Lord of Heaven send you a sweet and blithe wakening, all kind of comfort in your sanctified bed, and bless the fruits thereof that I may have sweet bedchamber boys to play me with, and this is my daily prayer, sweet heart.”28 This letter reveals the expansive nature of James’s efforts to configure a new family. Buckingham, his sweet and dear child, is marrying a woman approved by James, “his daughter.” Though approving of this marriage, James insists on being an integral factor in their “sanctified bed,” subtly linking their marital bed to his “bedchamber.” Their marital bed will provide James with more “boys” whom he can cultivate in his “bedchamber,” —a suggestion that carries, like so many of his letters to Buckingham, both parental and erotic implications.29

No matter the political and personal significance of James’s favorites, no one could provide him with a legitimate heir but Anna. Motherhood might have appeared to Anna as her greatest opportunity to assert significance as both the Scottish and English queen consort. Anna would be, after all, the first queen consort in England for decades, and she would be providing England with a clear successor to the throne for the first time in generations. Her personal experiences as a mother, however, were marred by a string of tragedies. Even by early modern standards, Anna’s experiences as a mother were hard. As Amy Erickson notes, “it is often thought that many or even most children never made
it to adulthood...but overall, ¾ of children born alive lived to the age of 15."³⁰

Nonetheless Anna gave birth to seven children (and suffered at least three miscarriages),
only two of whom survived her.

Despite the deaths of so many children, Anna did not hesitate to stage childbirth
with all the qualities of a theatrical entertainment. The birth of a potential heir was
inherently dramatic; as Leeds Barroll notes, “the bearing of an infant was always fraught
with a suspense that dwarfed any masque.”³¹ In preparation for such an event, Samuel
Calvert reported that there was “a great preparation of nurses, midwives, rockers, and
other like offices to the number of forty or more.” Anna’s accommodations were
elegant—the child birthing bed “was so elaborately wrought and decorated” it cost
“almost four times the amount of one of Anna’s masques.”³²

Yet what Anna did not apparently anticipate was the drama that would ensue
following the birth of her first child, Henry. Contentions between Anna and James
escalated over plans for the baptism, which James insisted be elaborate. At one point, as
they quarreled over the details, James hurled especially vituperative accusations. John
Colville wrote that James “repented” his plans for an elaborate baptism because “he
beg[an] to doubt of the child.”³³ There is no evidence that James had any reason to
question Anna’s fidelity to him. This abrupt “doubting” of Henry’s paternity may suggest
instead the conflicted feelings James was soon to express toward his first-born son.³⁴

James’s accusations might in fact reflect James’s incipient feelings of jealousy
towards his elder son. Roy Strong notes, “From the beginning that relationship (James
and Henry’s) was doomed. As from birth Henry was viewed as a threat to James.”³⁵
Contemporary observers noted the tension between father and son. In a lengthy account
of Henry's accomplishments, the Venetian Nicolo Molin concluded, "it would almost seem, to speak quite frankly, that the King was growing jealous."\textsuperscript{36} As Henry developed into a young man, the relationship deteriorated further. As Bergeron notes, "the more people talked about Henry as James's successor, the more jealous James became."\textsuperscript{37} James's resentment of his son only intensified the eventual estrangement between James and Anna, as Anna adored Henry.

Henry's baptism also provides the first indication of James's willingness to replace Anna with a "surrogate" maternal figure. In the ceremony Anna was absent, and the Countess of Mar stood in her place. As Clare McManus has noted "Although non-aristocratic mothers (at least in England) usually did not attend baptisms because they had not yet been churched...Henry's baptism took place at about six months of age and so this reason seems unlikely."\textsuperscript{38} McManus speculates that Anna's absence was a result of her Catholicism, which may have forbidden her from attending such a religious service. Her absence may, however, have been the result of James's efforts to marginalize Anna's significance as mother to the heir. As McManus notes, "It seems to have been precisely the power of Anna's politicized maternity and her necessary proximity to the heir to the throne which, in being threatening to the King himself, demanded her exclusion from the baptism ceremony."\textsuperscript{39} Thus, James's decision to involve the Countess of Mar might have been a political move—as in Marlowe's \textit{Tamburlaine}, the father/king resents geographic "proximity" between the queen and heir.

James's choice of the Countess of Mar as a surrogate for Anna during Henry's baptism had greater implications as well, for she was also the woman James selected to serve as Henry's "mother" during his formative years. Royal tradition dictated that the
heir apparent would be brought up away from the royal palace, and therefore, away from his mother. In the case of infant Henry, a 1594 ordinance dictated that he would be raised at the Castle of Stirling, the home of the Countess of Mar and her son. The strongly worded ordinance insisted that “his Grace’s person [Henry] no wise be removed or transported forth of the said castle [of Stirling]...without the special advice, warrant, and command of our said sovereign lord and his Privy Council.”\textsuperscript{40} James’s control of the exact location of Henry was absolute, leaving Anna no role whatsoever in her son’s upbringing.

Anna vehemently opposed this separation from her child, and, in particular, opposed the selection of the Countess of Mar as Henry’s custodian. In one argument with James, Anna claimed “it was an ill return to refuse her [Anna’s] suit...and to prefer giving the care of her babe to a subject who neither in rank nor deserving was the best his Majesty had.” Anna reacted, then, not only to the separation, but also to the choice of “surrogate.” James responded by recalling the political dangers inherent in raising royal children: “if some faction got strong enough, she [Anna] could not hinder his boy being used against him, as he himself had been against his unfortunate mother.”\textsuperscript{41} James’s political considerations make Henry’s childrearing unique, and resonate with the very fears Elizabeth voiced regarding childbirth.\textsuperscript{42} James’s argument also implies, however, like much childrearing literature of the time, that a close maternal upbringing could have disastrous effects on a male child. This private marital conflict between James and Anna spilled into the court and beyond, as subjects took sides. George Nicholson, servant to the English ambassador in Scotland, reported, “No good can come between the King and
Queen till she be satisfied ament the Prince,” there being “division of this land into two factions almost to the parting of the King and the Queen.”

At times Anna would let the conflict regarding Henry subside, and she went on to give birth three more times during her tenure in Scotland. Her second and third children were daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret. While Elizabeth thrived, Margaret died at the age of 2. Her fourth child, Charles, was a very weakly boy, who was not expected to survive infancy. Yet none of these births lessened Anna’s determination to raise Henry, and she never fully relented in her pursuit of his custody.

In her final days in Scotland, Anna staged an event no less dramatic than the masques she would soon produce. Following Queen Elizabeth’s death, James departed for England to prepare to ascend the throne—Anna was to have followed him twenty days later. Seizing this rare opportunity away from James, she journeyed to the Castle of Stirling, accompanied by a strong number of noblemen, to reclaim her son. The Countess and her son denied her access, following their directions from the king. Agnes Strickland’s account reveals, “the queen threatened force, and some say, swords were actually drawn.” Three days passed without either side relenting. News of the standoff reached James, who worried about political fallout. As Barroll notes, “the incident increasingly alarmed supporters of the king because it coincided with James’s accession to the English throne, showcasing a never-resolved area of acute conflict between the king and queen.” Barroll’s language is telling: Anna was publicly “showcasing” her standoff at the most critical time in James’s political career, his accession to the English throne.
Adding further to the theatrical nature of Anna’s standoff was her dramatic behavior. Though pregnant, one observer noted that she “flew into a violent fury, and four months gone with child as she was, she beat her own belly, so that they say she is in manifest danger of miscarriage and death.” Anna did miscarry the child, and was severely ill for several weeks. This account of self-inflicted blows has prompted some scholars to conclude that the miscarriage was “self-induced.” If this is indeed true, Anna may have viewed her maternal body as her only locus of control, where she could refuse to bear another Jacobean heir until she was allowed access to her first child. Anna’s reaction to the loss of one child resulted in the loss of another.

Despite this tragedy, and perhaps because of it, Anna became more resolved than ever not to leave for England without Henry. James became increasingly concerned about the political ramifications of his marital strife. As Williams notes, “The King realized that steps must be taken to placate Queen Anna, as he had no wish to arrive in London as the husband of an estranged wife. He was also afraid that the succession might be endangered if the Queen continued to bear nothing but dead children and if the weakly Charles were to die.” James finally relented. After a five year separation, Anna and Henry were reunited at last, and he accompanied her on her journey to England.

Anna’s pursuit of parental custody of her son certainly had political as well as maternal motivations. Many historians believe she saw Henry as her only inroad to political significance in James’s court. Yet Anna’s passionate maternal instincts should not be overlooked, for even the child she miscarried during the Stirling Castle episode was not easily forgotten. As one French minister reports, as she made her trip to England, “She...brought with her the body of the male child of which she had been delivered in
Scotland, because endeavors had been used to persuade the public that his death was only feigned.\textsuperscript{51} Again, a move that might be seen as politically strategic might also be seen as emblematic of her determination to achieve physical proximity with her children—just as she was determined not to abandon Henry to a Scottish upbringing as she left for England, she was similarly driven to preserve her connection with her miscarried child.

Despite her personal trials, Anna was determined that her entry into England should celebrate her position as queen consort and matriarchal figure. Her grand entrance anticipated her later dramatic performances in the court masques. Unaccompanied by James, she was instead escorted into England by the two sons she had borne during her queenship in Scotland, Henry and Charles. As Williams notes, this was a “triumphal progress all the way, unimpeded by her husband’s dislike of crowds. With all eyes focused on herself and her two attractive children, she could win the goodwill of her new subjects with her gay smile.”\textsuperscript{52} This progress specifically anticipates her later effort in \textit{Tethys’}, in which she similarly stages a public showing where she is the center of attention and is surrounded by her children. This performance, however, is given without James’s surveillance. Bergeron notes this entry was a “victory” on several levels: “First, she was being received in her own right as queen of a new country without the presence of her husband-sovereign. Second, she had Prince Henry with her—surely a victory of sorts. The trip from Edinburgh marked the longest time that mother and son had spent together.”\textsuperscript{53} Unbeknownst to Anna, this blissful scene amidst her children would soon be followed by more maternal anguish.

Once in England, Anna’s pregnancies received even more attention, and her maternal body was under even greater scrutiny. As Barroll notes, the excitement
generated by Anna’s first English pregnancy was heightened because all of the ceremonies involved with the “queen’s pregnancy, lying-in, and delivery of a new child” were “ceremonies denied Elizabeth I.”54 The child, named Mary after James’s mother, died at the age of 2. Anna’s last pregnancy resulted in the birth of Sophia, who lived only a few hours. Following this delivery, an emotionally devastated and physically weakened Anna decided not to have any more children; from this point forward Anna and James lived in separate residences. Though past her childbearing years, and geographically and emotionally removed from her husband, Anna was not, however, resigned to relinquishing her significance in the royal family. Anna’s investment in her remaining children, Charles, Elizabeth, and especially Henry, prompted much of her masquing efforts. An examination of Anna’s involvement in masque production reveals that these artistic endeavors allowed Anna another opportunity to mother as well—through the cultivation of a surrogate family of performers and artists.

II. Anna’s Masquing

Masques allowed Anna the opportunity to appear as a variety of characters, including as, in Tethys, the apotheosis of maternity. At the same time, the act of producing masques also provided her with an opportunity to “mother” both the courtiers and writers who engaged in the creation of dramatic production with her. For years masques have received critical attention for their political implications,55 but only recently have scholars credited Anna with the flourishing of the masque within the Jacobean court. Critics including Barroll and McManus note the changes that occurred
with Anna’s production of masques. Barroll notes that “in Queen Elizabeth’s court these shows had been associated with men, not women,” and he credits Anna with “reconfiguring the masque.”\textsuperscript{56} Anna seized the masque as a forum in which women could be prominent, public participants in court entertainments—a significant move which allowed women, who might otherwise be excluded from the king’s intimate inner circle, to at least momentarily be the center of the court’s attention. Though critics have begun to examine the gender dynamics of Anna’s masques themselves, the ways in which Anna cultivated this masquing culture warrant further consideration. Through the fostering of gifted artists, in particular Samuel Daniel, and the nurturing of her courtiers, Anna created a surrogate family to rival the homosocial court from which she was excluded. Thus, she could partially compensate for the alienation she suffered within the royal family.

In her volume of poetry \textit{Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum} (1611), Aemilia Lanyer dedicates her work to Anna, whom she describes as that “Most gracious mother of succeeding kings.”\textsuperscript{57} She goes on to praise her actions as a patron: “The Muses doe attend upon your Throne, / With all the Artists at your becke and call” (lines 19-20). This brief dedicatory poem links Anna’s roles as a mother and as an artistic patron—two roles that seem to complement one another. Patronage allowed Anna the opportunity to find another outlet for her maternal yearning. Scholars have noted the connection between patronage and parental guidance. Marion Wynne-Davies has observed that in early modern courts, “The court’s relationship with literary productivity [was] sometimes parental, offering the nurturing support of patronage and providing the economic facilities for dramatic, and especially masque, output....Female patronage in early
modern Europe [was] an acceptable way for women to participate in literary creativity.” Wynne-Davies goes on to say that this “maternal patronage system” was a “seductive power for women.” Anna capitalized on this power available to her through the patronage system; at the same time, her immersion in the creative process in which she cultivated artistic endeavors may have also helped compensate for James’s early control of Henry as well as her other maternal losses.

Though Anna patronized artists who produced works in a variety of genres, the two artists chiefly responsible for writing her masques were Ben Jonson and Samuel Daniel. Of the six masques Anna produced, Jonson wrote four, and Daniel wrote two. Jonson, who resisted praising Anna, may seem an unlikely candidate for maternal nurturing. As Stephen Orgel succinctly observes, “the Queen was not the patron he [Jonson] sought.” He concludes that even though Jonson was technically “working” for Anna, he subverted the Queen’s interests to “fully support the King’s.” Orgel has examined how misogyny pervades Jonson’s work; his plays often feature the “wife as book, complaint, silent, obedient, open only when her husband opens her, the perfect embodiment of male desire.” The women of his masques, such as in The Masque of Queens, are “disarmed even as they are empowered.” I would argue that Jonson does not wholly disarm Anna’s mission. The queen found, however, a more willing ally, and I believe perhaps a kindred spirit, in Samuel Daniel.

Daniel seems to have flourished under Queen Anna’s support, arguably because of her nurturing, maternal, patronage. Daniel was to remain one of Anna’s favorite artists even after falling out of favor with James,—perhaps because Anna felt a kinship with Daniel as a fellow persona non grata within the court. Though Daniel wrote fewer
masques than Jonson, he held a number of positions in the queen’s household that Jonson never did: he served as groom of the Privy Chamber, and was made a gentleman-extraordinary of the privy chamber in 1613. As Barroll has noted, “Daniel seems to have been the continued recipient of more ‘favor’ from Anna than was Jonson.”63 Perhaps her enthusiasm for Daniel’s talent was most evident in her awarding Daniel with an acting company. In 1603, despite the fact that Daniel’s only experience as a playwright was as a writer of a “closet drama…while Jonson or other poets were proven theatrical professionals, Daniel was awarded an acting company himself.”64 The group over which Daniel was given authority was named “the Children of the Queen’s Revels,” a name that may reflect Anna’s maternal concerns along with identifying the actors as boys.

Through her association with Daniel, Anna was linked to a company that became notorious for staging plays that were satirically daring: Daniel himself wrote Philotas for the company, which many saw as a sympathetic treatment of the Essex rebellion. The play’s subversive criticism of James prompted the French ambassador to remark, “Consider for pity’s sake what must be the state and condition of a prince, whom the preachers publicly from the pulpit assail, whom the comedians of the metropolis bring upon the stage, whose wife attends these representations in order to enjoy the laugh against her husband.”65 Anna and Daniel enjoyed a symbiotic relationship—he flourished under her patronage, and she sanctioned an artist who allowed her to indirectly criticize her husband. Following Philotas, Daniel was temporarily out of court favor, but despite his status as an outcast, Anna supported him, and found other means (including appointments in her household) to honor him.
Scholars have noted that Daniel felt compelled to similarly honor Anna. McManus notes that the work Daniel was compiling prior to his death in 1619 was a "prose history of England under Anna’s patronage, a significant record of female literary and historiographical engagement." Daniel also apparently felt a stronger sense of loyalty to his female patron than Jonson did; in a dedication to his pastoral *Hymen’s Triumph* (1614), Daniel writes:

> never yet was Queene
> That more a people love have merited
> By all good graces, and by having beene
> The means our State stands safe established
> And blest by your blest wombe.67

Daniel goes on to praise her ability to unify:

For, we by you no claimes, no quarrels have,
No factions, no betraying of affaires;
You doe not spend our blood, nor states, but save:
You strength us by alliances, and your haires.

(lines 28-31)

Daniel speaks as one of Anna’s many children: “For, we by you no claimes, no quarrels have.” She has provided a unity that prevents petty arguments among her children/subjects—and has secured the nation’s future without “spend”ing her children’s blood. Her “blest wombe” and the production of *her* heirs, assure England of its continued strength. Daniel’s dedication recognizes Anna’s role as “mother,” and excludes James altogether. There is no mention of James or his role as father to the “haires.” Daniel depicts Anna as one who has single-handedly secured England’s future and produced the next generation of royalty.
Anna’s preference for Daniel, and her insistence on patronizing him even after he fell out of political favor, is symptomatic of her treatment of her hand-chosen courtiers. These courtiers, who surrounded her both on and off the masquing stage, provided Anna with an alternative to James’s homosocial court. Anna’s selection of her ladies-in-waiting was intensely personal, and she frequently angered James with her choices. Though James sent several English courtiers to attend upon her when she had made the move from Scotland to England, she rejected many of them. She preferred instead either the Scottish and Danish ladies she had been close to for a dozen years, or English ladies she selected. She also rejected most of the ladies selected by Robert Cecil to attend her, and chose instead an “unauthorized” group of women, many of whom had ties to the former Earl of Essex. As Barroll notes, “Anna seems already to have been engrossed by women who had never been closely allied to Queen Elizabeth; on the contrary, they were the sister and widow of the Earl of Essex, whom Elizabeth had beheaded, and the wife of one of the conspirator earls, Bedford.”\(^68\) Linda Peck observes that many members of the Sidney’s inner circle also entered Queen Anna’s service.\(^69\) Anna’s adoption of the Sidney and Essex groups of courtiers perhaps suggests her eagerness to immerse herself in close-knit circles. Her decision to cultivate a court that was uniquely her own, neither emulating Elizabeth nor following the politically correct suggestions made by Cecil and James, indicates her determination to surround herself with ladies who would form her own distinctive admiring community.

This community allowed Anna the opportunity to serve as a maternal figure to her courtiers, and she took an active role in the personal lives of her ladies. Anna, in fact, distinguished her court from Elizabeth’s by delighting in the weddings and birthings of
her courtiers. As Peck notes, "the Queen served as godmother and matchmaker to the Jacobean court....After the long reign of the virgin queen who begrudged the marriages of her ladies-in-waiting, the reign of James I celebrated uxoriousness."\textsuperscript{70} Perhaps because Anna sought to fill a maternal role, she selected courtiers who were her own age or younger. As Anne Clifford noted, she "showed no favor to the elderly company."\textsuperscript{71} Rather than deferring to older figures, Anna herself assumed the role of counselor to her young protégés, and loyalty defended them when necessary.

Anna's investment in the lives of her courtiers is most evident in accounts of her willingness to defend them when they risked political disfavor with James. In keeping with many historical accounts, Agnes Strickland depicts Anna as a frivolous woman who was at times "a spoiled child," yet Strickland still credits Anna for her fierce loyalty to her courtiers.\textsuperscript{72} Strickland quotes James Melville: "If ever...she found that the king had, by wrong information, taken a prejudice against any of his faithful subjects or servants, she always exerted herself to obtain information of the truth, that she might speak with the more firmness in their favour."\textsuperscript{73}

Anne Clifford, the youngest of Anna's ladies, became especially important to Anna, and Anna provided her with maternal guidance. Clifford married the Earl of Dorset, who proved to be a compulsive gambler. After spending his own money, he tried to force his wife to sell her lands in order to settle his debts. James supported the earl's demand, but Anna counseled the countess against relinquishing her property. As Clifford records in her diary, Anna warned her "not to trust my matters absolutely to the King lest he should deceive me."\textsuperscript{74} Forewarned that the king may not have her best interests at heart, Clifford refused to sell the lands and preserved her estates. Such actions by Anna
engendered loyalty in her courtiers, and these same courtiers surrounded Anna in her performances, as she dared to perform in unconventional, even shocking, masques.

III. Early Masques, 1604-05

If *Tethys’ Festival* was Anna’s attempt to present an idealized royal family in her efforts to recuperate her maternal role, the masques that preceded *Tethys’ Festival* reveal a variety of other strategies Anna employed to achieve significance within the court. Anna performed in six masques, the earliest of which was Daniel’s *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604). This masque, performed during the first Christmas celebration of James’s English reign, is noteworthy in part because of its predominantly female cast: Anna’s masque “broke a long-standing tradition at the English court by presenting not noblemen but noblewomen.”

This masque also marked the inception of Anna’s patronage of Daniel. His preface to *Vision* reveals an artist eager to embrace a collaboration with Anna and her women. In Daniel’s dedicatory comments, addressed to his original patron the Countess of Bedford, his language suggests his view of the masque as a joint effort between himself and the other participants. He begins by lamenting the intrusion of an outsider who dared to present an unauthorized written account of the presentation. He refers to the “unmannerly presumption of an indiscreet printer, who without warrant hath divulged the late show at Court, presented the eighth of January, by the Queen’s Majesty and her Ladies” (lines 4-6). After this formal introduction, he proceeds to outline his account of the creation of the masque, and in so doing repeatedly uses plural pronouns: “our purpose,” (line 32), “our present intention” (line 34), “our occasion” (line 35), “our
present purpose,” (line 41, my emphasis). In one remark, he notes that the goddesses who are represented in the *Vision* have a variety of aspects to them, and that “therefore we took their aptest representations that lay best and easiest for us” (lines 48-50, my emphasis). Though Daniel usually worked alone, unlike Jonson who typically collaborated with Inigo Jones, his repeated use of the plural reveals his awareness of engaging in a creative partnership with Anna. Perhaps Daniel prospered under Anna’s patronage in part because he acknowledged Anna and her ladies as creative collaborators, rather than as simply dancers performing at his direction.

This attitude contrasts with Jonson’s, whose preface to *The Masque of Queens* (another masque commissioned by Anna) typically defines him as separate and distinct from the ladies who are merely performing in his masque. Jonson remarks: “It increasing now to the third time of my being used in these services to her majesty’s personal presentations...For which reason I chose the argument to be a celebration...of fame”79 (my emphasis). He goes on to refer to himself as sole creator: “I was careful,” “I had an antimasque of boys,” despite the fact that Anna herself first suggested the incorporation of the antimasque80 (my emphasis). This difference in styles between Daniel and Jonson is one indication of their widely different relationships with Anna.

As the title of *Vision* suggests, the masque presents Anna and her courtiers as various goddesses. The goddesses appear and proceed to make gifts to the altar at the Temple of Peace. Anna appears in the masque as Pallas—not Juno, the “queen of queens.”81 This was Anna’s preference: Daniel notes that Anna herself “chose to present” Pallas (line 64). Anna’s decision to forego the position of “imperial Juno,” in favor of Pallas, might suggest that she is not invested in appearing as the leader of her ladies. Yet
Anna’s choice to portray Pallas in her first masque performance may reveal another agenda as well. Pallas is a martial character, attired with the “engines of war,”82 “warlike...in her helmet dressed / With lance of winning, target of defence: / In whom both wit and courage are expressed, / To get with glory, hold with providence” (lines 294-7). Such a militant presence seems a deliberate attempt to clash with James’s own professed pacifism. As Kathryn Schwarz notes, “Anna’s armory, the ‘weapons and engines of war,’ is iconographically perverse, celebrating female violence against the notorious peace-keeping of the king.” 83

In contrast to Pallas’s warlike presence, the final goddess who appears in Vision is Tethys. Certainly neither Daniel or Anna could have anticipated their collaboration in Tethys’ Festival several years later, but the description of Tethys is revealing: “Lastly comes Tethys, Albion’s fairest love, / Whom she in faithful arms doth deign t’embrace / And brings the trident of her power t’approve / The kind respect she hath to do him grace” (lines 344-7). Tethys appears as an erotic partner to “Albion,” who is a figure for James. Embracing him in her arms, she is consumed with showing him “grace” and giving him her symbol of power, the “trident.” Anna’s movement from Pallas in her first masque appearance to Tethys in her penultimate appearance charts her eventual movement away from subversive masque appearances.84

Vision also presented Anna with an opportunity to demonstrate her adequacy as successor to the previous queen, Elizabeth. Just as James was threatened by Elizabeth’s legendary monarchy, Anna too had to displace Elizabeth as England’s queen and matriarch. As noted earlier, Anna specifically cultivated a court which was distinctly her own, and did not adopt Elizabeth’s courtiers. But Elizabeth’s presence was no doubt still
felt amidst the court, as *Vision* premiered only nine months after Elizabeth’s death. Anna capitalized on Elizabeth’s popularity in *Vision* by suggesting a link between herself and her predecessor. Anna literally inhabits Elizabeth’s former space—both Anna and her women wore gowns that formerly belonged to Queen Elizabeth. As McManus has noted, “Anna’s adoption of the former queen’s costumes was the appropriation of her predecessor’s corporeal existence; in a visual reminder of physical presence of female rule, Anna shaped her body as Elizabeth’s had been shaped.”85 In one sense, Anna is establishing herself as a figure in Elizabeth’s tradition: appearing in her royal gowns, she is a patron of the arts, surrounded by loyal courtiers.86 The role that Anna chooses to play, Pallas, also ties her directly to Elizabeth—Pallas was one of the many icons frequently invoked in describing Elizabeth.

Scholars have overlooked, however, how Anna may have also felt threatened by Elizabeth’s significance not only as the legendary queen, but also as a mother figure to Anna’s own biological children. James asked Elizabeth to serve as godmother to Prince Henry, an honor she accepted. While that honor would not necessarily threaten Anna’s position as a mother, Anna seemed intent on delineating the differences between her biological maternity and Elizabeth’s metaphoric maternity. In a letter thanking Elizabeth for her christening gifts, Anna wrote: “how lovingly and worthily you have conceived of us and of our son, in whom God has blessed us”87 (my emphasis). She reiterates, “it has pleased God to bless us in our son, so near in blood belonging to yourself” (my emphasis). Anna’s repeated reference to “our son” is compelling. Certainly giving birth to a male heir (and potential future English king) gives Anna at least one advantage over the childless Elizabeth. The phrase “so near in blood,” draws attention to the fact that
though related, Elizabeth is still only tangentially connected to Henry and that, unlike Anna, Elizabeth is not perpetuating her royal bloodline.

As her children grew, however, Anna may have perceived additional reasons to feel threatened by Elizabeth. On two separate occasions, her children commissioned masque entertainments in which they fashioned themselves direct heirs of Elizabeth—revealing their enthusiasm for establishing themselves in the tradition of Queen Elizabeth. With Henry, the masque Oberon (1611) reveals how he "deliberately tried to establish himself as Astraea's heir: to transfer at least some of the iconography created for Elizabeth to his own person."88 Though Anna and Henry enjoyed a close relationship, dating from her desperate fight for his custody, Oberon's emphasis on Henry as a direct descendent of Elizabeth would seem to exclude Anna altogether. Princess Elizabeth similarly commissioned the Masque of Truth, (1613)89 which establishes her as heir to her namesake. Though her children frequently honored Anna as well—Henry especially—Elizabeth's maternal presence, even following her death, presented Anna with one more hurdle to overcome in establishing herself as the Jacobean matriarch.

With Vision, Anna carefully negotiated her appearance, so that she both paid homage to Elizabeth, yet established herself as distinct from the virgin queen. She dons Elizabeth's clothes, but creates a scandal in the way that she wears them. Dudley Carleton's famous remark reveals the effect of Anna's efforts: "Her clothes were not so much below the knee but that we might see a woman had both feet and legs, which I never knew before."90 Anna takes the opportunity to feature herself as erotic and sexual—a clear way to distinguish herself from the Virgin Queen. As Anna battles to establish her significance within the court, she is simultaneously a martial, militant
figure, flying in the face of James’s pacifism, and an erotic queen, contrasting the chaste queen who preceded her.

Though in *Vision*, Anna “shaped her body as Elizabeth’s body had been shaped,” with her next appearance in *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) Anna’s body is shaped in a way that Elizabeth’s never was—by pregnancy. In the masque, Niger, an Ethiop who is accompanied by his twelve daughters (including Anna), appeals to Oceanus for help in making his daughters white. They have heard that poets praise the beauty of white women, and were told by an oracle to seek a country ending with -tania (such as Britannia) where they would find the “solution” to their blackness.

Scholars have noted that Anna’s decision to appear with her courtiers in blackface—a choice Jonson describes as “her Majesty’s will,”—was a shocking move on Anna’s part.⁹¹ As Arthur Kinney notes, “her decision to dress up as a blackamoor enacted a sexual lust and a spiritual depravity that made the Queen, not the King, the center of attention and wonder.”⁹² If Kinney’s reading is valid, Anna might be building on the erotic figure she presented in *Vision*. Anna’s rehearsal of “sexual lust” contrasted with Elizabeth’s chastity and perhaps confronted James with her equivalent of the public display of affection he so often demonstrated for his favorites.⁹³

Despite critical interest in the *The Masque of Blackness*, the significance of Anna’s burgeoning pregnant body in the masque has been overlooked. Yumna Siddiqi, for instance, calls attention to the way in which, “the African body” is “repeatedly portrayed as uncontrollable and potentially overwhelming”; Siddiqi notes how Oceanus is apprehensive about Niger’s “transgression of his boundaries” which “is attributed to his daughters. Their uncontrolled weeping has caused him to overflow: ‘They wept such
ceaseless tears." Siddiqi ignores the other transgressive "overflowing" that is occurring within the masque. Anna's body is expansive—it too is exceeding normative boundaries, and rather than concealing her condition, the masque draws attention to her obvious fertility.

Jonson acknowledges Anna’s pregnancy with his text in a song: "Song to great Oceanus, / Now honored thus, / With all his beauteous race, / Who, though but black in face, / Yet are they bright, and Full of life and light" (lines 110-15). Jonson connects, then, the race of these women with their fertility—they are both black and "full of life." Linking pregnancy with exotic or racial otherness emphasizes the inherent mystery of pregnancy and childbirth; Anna seems to deliberately present herself as both overtly pregnant and overtly "dangerous" with her appearance in Blackness.

Adding to the mysterious nature of pregnancy in Blackness is the almost exclusively female community that surrounds Anna. Within the world of Blackness, Anna appears again, as in Vision, as one of a group of women, this time as a literal sister of her courtiers—and the male figures of the masque are exclusively paternal. In the world of "Blackness," the familial unit excludes any viable young men, despite Anna’s evidence of pregnancy. Once again Anna presents her alternative to James’s court; now her court is an exclusive gathering of female courtiers—young men are as unnecessary in Anna’s world as young women are in James’s.

Jonson would not, however, pen a masque that overtly slighted the king, and James is figured prominently within the masque as the "Sun" who will accomplish the impossible and "blanch" the Ethiops. The text even credits James with the ability to rectify nature’s imperfections: "His light sciential is, and, past mere nature, / Can salve
the rude defects of every creature” (lines 260-3). James, the text suggests, is capable of outdoing maternity, and achieving perfection. Yet as scholars have noted, James is ultimately not the figure who instructs these women in acquiring “whiteness.” Instead, Aethiopia, the goddess of the moon and of Ethiopians, guides them in the proper “rites” to obtain fair skin. A female, maternal figure is ultimately responsible for guiding Anna and her sisters, and James’s position is temporarily supplant by female power.

This demonstration of female power did not translate so easily into the domestic realm, however. Anna’s masque appearances apparently did little to improve her status with James. Her distance from him only became more substantial as the years passed, and by 1607 they lived apart. Perhaps this increased alienation prompted Anna to embrace a more conventional role in Tethys. Once again working with Daniel, she chose to forego the opportunity to make another shocking appearance, and instead made one last plea for family unity.

**IV. Tethys’ Festival**

With *Tethys’ Festival* (1610), Anna abandons her role as a fellow sister to her courtiers, and instead appears as a queen mother. This signifies a critical shift—from cultivating a sorority, to presenting herself as an idealized maternal figure. As the masque begins, her son Charles, in the guise of Zephyrus—the personification of a “gentle wind”—appears accompanied by two Tritons and eight nymphs. The Tritons announce the imminent arrival of Tethys and deliver her messages of goodwill to James and Henry. A Triton then narrates as Charles bestows gifts on Henry and James from Tethys; James
receives a trident, and Henry a sword, encircled by a scarf. Tethys and her nymphs, who are played by twelve of Anna’s courtiers and her daughter, Princess Elizabeth, finally appear and present gifts to the “Tree of Victory” (line 305). Before the conclusion of the masque, Triton calls for a “transformation of...delight” and this signals Anna’s, and the rest of the performers’, return to their true identities. This returns us to the scene with which I began. This “transformation of delight” marked not just the end to Tethys, but the end of Anna’s efforts at “transforming” her marginalized role through her masque productions.

The character of Tethys, as David Lindley notes in his edition of the play, “personified the fecundity of the sea, and by her husband Oceanus had more than 3,000 children who were all the rivers of the world.”96 Anna’s position as Tethys clearly defines her as the mother of her court and at the same time as one who is apart from the other ladies. No longer a “sister,” she is now their mother—and each courtier represents an individual river she has engendered. These ladies are not, however, the only “children” present in Tethys’ Festival. The description of the set design is filled with references to children. In the first scene, Daniel explains that there “were two pilasters...and these bore up a rich frieze, wherein were figures of ten foot long of floods and nymphs, with a number of naked children dallying with a drapery, which they seemed to hold up that the scene might be seen” (lines 95-7). Naked children suggest the abundant fertility that characterizes the entirety of the masque, and the presence of the royal children confirms this further. The Duke of York, ten-year-old Charles, representing “Zephyrus,” is accompanied by “eight little ladies near of his stature,” so that a parade of children appears surrounding the little prince (line 117). One observer noted the impression that
these “little ladies” made on their audience: “The little Ladies performed their Dance to the Amazement of all the Beholders, considering the Tenderness of their Years and the many intricate Changes of the Dance....which way soever the Changes went the little Duke was still found to be in the midst of these little Dancers.”97 These young girls were not simply props; they performed as active participants, perhaps anticipating their future as the queen’s courtiers. This seemingly endless supply of female courtiers only reinforces the notion of abundance and fecundity. At the same time, as the girls dance they are mindful to keep “the little Duke,” Charles, at the center of the activity—emphasizing the preeminence of the royal son.

The presence and participation of the royal children in the masque served specific agendas. As second in line to the throne, James felt less threatened by Charles than by Henry, and yet his relationship with Charles was still distant. Their estrangement could be attributed in part to the barrier of favorites that existed between them, but also perhaps to Charles’s closeness with Anna. Charles and Anna’s closeness rivaled her relationship with Henry. Godfrey Goodman, Bishop of Gloucester noted that “the Queen did ever love Charles better than Prince Henry.”98 Though some historians see little evidence to substantiate Anna’s preference for Charles over Henry, it is abundantly clear that Anna, unlike James, enjoyed a close relationship with this son who had been sick much of his young life. In any case, with Tethys Anna sees an opportunity to employ Charles as the gentle “Zephyrus” who delivers gifts from Tethys (Anna) to James. Anna’s choice of Charles as an emissary between the king and queen may be an effort to replace the usual intermediaries, such as Robert Carr, the King’s favorite at the time of Tethys, with one of the royal children. Anna’s effort to exclude external interlopers and replace them with her
son is in keeping with her overall effort in *Tethys* to reconcile her royal children to their father.

By the time that *Tethys* was produced, James’s jealousy of Henry had reached its apex. Henry had established a court of his own, one that not only rivaled his father’s but often drew courtiers away from James’s circle. Roger Coke noted that Henry’s court “was more frequented than the King’s, and by another sort of Men; so the King was heard to say, ‘will he bury me alive?’”99 The production of *Tethys’ Festival*, commissioned by the mother who had so fervently supported her son both personally and politically and performed to honor Henry as he officially became the Prince of Wales, would seem a likely forum to accentuate Henry’s own power and popularity.100

The masque instead, however, assures James that there is no hurry for Henry’s accession. In one of the songs of the masque, the chorus sings as the nymphs lay tributes at the “Tree of Victory”:

See how they bring their flowers  
From out their watery bowers,  
To deck Apollo’s tree,  
The Tree of Victory,  
About whose verdant boughs  
They sacrifice their vows,  
And wish an everlasting spring  
Of glory to the ocean’s king.

(lines 315-22)

As Graham Parry notes, this “Tree of Victory is not an emblem of Prince Henry’s future conquests, but of James’s achievements.”101 The masque’s focus on James is very specific; not only are his past deeds honored, but he too is associated with birth, verdancy
and renewal. The nymphs pray that James is granted immortality, or "an everlasting spring." Rather than a look toward Henry's accession, the masque emphasizes the present "glory" of James.

An earlier speech, delivered by the Tritons, who "bear Tethys' message" also celebrates James as a source of life:

Bear Tethys' message to the ocean King,
    See how she joys to bring
Delight unto his islands and his seas;
    And tell Meliades
The offspring of his blood
    How she applauds his good.

(lines 141-6)

Meliades represents Henry, and this brief stanza deftly honors both James and Henry, while emphasizing the bond between them. This passage problematizes Barroll's assertion that the masque "accentuates" the relationship between Anna and Henry. Though Anna is the mother of 3,000 rivers, in this stanza, Henry is the "offspring" of James's blood, and Anna removes herself from the equation altogether. Adding to the connection between father and son is the choice of the word "his" in the final line. The pronoun is somewhat ambiguous—but perhaps deliberately so. Either the offspring, Meliades, or the ocean King himself, whose blood produced Meliades, is "good."

Because the king and son are connected in blood, when one is "good" it is a positive reflection on the other—rather than rivals, James and Henry are, in fact, almost one and the same.

The gifts that Tethys sends to the king and prince also reveal Anna's efforts at reconciliation. The trident that James receives represents the triple kingdom that is under
his leadership, but it also stands as an “ensign of her love and of your right” (line 193). This present, then, is a love token from Anna, one that enforces her support of James’s reign. Her gift to Henry, however, threatens to undo all of her assurances of support to James. On the most basic level, James was notoriously frightened of bare steel—so the present of a sword to his son might be a scornful reminder of James’s squeamish nature. On an ideological level, James was a pacifist, and many saw Henry as a successor who promised greater military might. James’s relationships with his male favorites might also inform our reading of Anna’s gift, since Anna, not Henry’s reputedly effeminate father, is arming him. Yet the speech the Triton delivers mitigates the sword as a threat. He describes the sword, “Which she…Astraea (the goddess of justice)found.” Astraea instructed that the sword was “not to be unsheathed but on just ground” (lines 197-8).\textsuperscript{104} The sword is encircled by a scarf: “This scarf, the zone of love and amity, / T’engird the same; wherein he may survey / Enfigured all the spacious empery / That he is born unto another day” (lines 200-3). The scarf, which was embroidered by Anna, features a map of Britain, and serves to remind Henry of the sufficiency of such an empire; Henry is specifically instructed not to hastily engage in war. While the presentation of such a gift, an overtly phallic symbol, is rife with possible interpretations, the “sheathing” of the sword suggests Anna’s insistence that Henry not rush his maturity as either a man or king.\textsuperscript{105}

Though Anna is eager to pacify James with her tribute to Henry, she is simultaneously interested in presenting herself as a figure of great import as well. Her task in \textit{Tethys’ Festival} is to unify the royal family, and that requires the presence of a worthy matriarch. Contributing to the splendor of her own presence is the anticipation of
her arrival, anticipation that Daniel carefully cultivates. Court decorum required that women not speak in their masque appearances, and while this restriction would ostensibly diminish a woman’s significance in the masque, in the case of *Tethys’ Festival*, it in fact contributes to Anna’s grandiose appearance. Instead of appearing on stage and delivering speeches honoring James and Henry herself, Anna/Tethys is anticipated by the audience for a lengthy period of time. The Tritons, who claim that Tethys’ “intelligence …moves the sphere” (line 150), only intensify this anticipation by announcing early in their speech: “Tethys…comes herself to pay / The vows her heart presents” (lines 130-3). Later in the midst of their speech they insist “the mighty Tethys, queen of nymphs and rivers…will straight appear, And in a human character be seen” (lines 150-3), and finally again promise, “her all-gracing presence…straight resolves t’adorn the day” (line 165).

Once Anna/Tethys does appear, accompanied by her “daughter” nymphs, the effect is stunning. Daniel takes pains to describe the opulence of her throne, which was “all covered with such an artificial stuff as seemed richer by candle than any cloth of gold. The rests for her arms were two cherubims of gold; over her head was a great scallop of silver” (lines 240-3). Yet the most riveting aspect of Anna’s appearance might be the presence of her royal daughter, Elizabeth, who sits “at her feet” (line 288). Little is known about Elizabeth and Anna’s relationship. Most scholars agree they were not especially close—in any case, this masque was the only instance in which the two female Stuarts appeared in a performance together. Elizabeth’s significance in the masque is a bit unclear—she is described as “the darling of the ocean,” perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the connection between herself and James. Though this reference calls attention to her royal blood, at the same time she is just one among thirteen rivers, all
who are daughters of Tethys. Rather than focusing on her unique status as the royal
daughter, the masque trivializes her role by surrounding her with “sisters.”

At the end of the masque when Charles accompanies Anna as they “march up to
the King” (line 408), there is no mention of Princess Elizabeth. Perhaps this is an
oversight by Daniel and/or Anna, or perhaps Anna’s focus is the unification of James and
his sons. Anna might see the marginalization of Elizabeth as inevitable, as her daughter
follows, in some respects, in her own footsteps. In any case, this geographic separation of
Elizabeth from her family is prescient; she would leave England soon after the masque to
marry Frederick the Elector Palatine, and she would never see her mother again.
Elizabeth’s departure was, in fact, symptomatic of the overall disintegration of Anna’s
royal family that followed on the heels of Tethys.

V. Final Years

Anna’s attempt at family unity is made all the more poignant in retrospect, as the
royal family’s dissolution would follow soon after the production of Tethys. The death of
Henry, the vibrant young prince who had inspired such maternal fervor in Anna from his
birth, was a devastating shock for Anna. He fell ill with typhoid fever in October 1612
and died in early November. Reports of Anna’s grief consistently reflect her anguish—at
one point she was apparently in danger of dying herself. The ambassador Antonio
Foscarini wrote “the Queen’s life has been in the greatest danger owing to her grief. She
will receive no visits nor allow anyone in her room, from which she does not stir, nor
does she cease crying.” Anna’s reaction to Henry’s death was one of self-imposed
isolation—rather than striving for the familial unity that she had so brilliantly staged the previous year, she now preferred to grieve in seclusion. The family’s disintegration continued in the spring of 1613 with the departure of Princess Elizabeth to Germany, following her marriage. Her remaining child, Charles, provided much comfort to Anna, and yet she could not bring herself to attend Charles’s investiture ceremonies. Henry’s investiture had been the occasion for *Tethys’ Festival*, but now such ceremonies only reminded her of loss.

Anna also declined physically, exacerbating her emotional downward spiral. Bergeron describes her final months: “Anna suffered a serious psychological struggle during the last decade of her life, which resulted in or from the physical reality of her illnesses. Her melancholy grew from a profound loneliness that dominated her relationship with her family,”¹⁰⁸ and whether her physical condition contributed to her emotional distress or vice versa, Anna began a period of rapid decline. Arguably, loneliness dominated not only the “last decade” of Anna’s life, but the entirety of her marriage, fueling her masque endeavors, and ultimately leaving her defeated.

Perhaps as a result of her growing melancholy, Anna’s appearance in masque productions promptly ended the year following *Tethys’ Festival*. Though she would attend masques commissioned by James, by 1614 she had discontinued her patronage of masque performances altogether. Critics debate whether her decision can be directly attributed to Henry’s death. It seems more likely that Henry’s death only intensified her sense of alienation within the family and court, and that this alienation finally led her to abandon masquing. Pauline Croft notes that Anna’s courtiers began to desert her: “With the death of Henry and the departure of Elizabeth for the Rhineland, the king’s emotional
links to his family were weakened...the queen retreated into the shadows...her female court ceased to attract the service of English noblewomen. As Anna observed the dissolution of the female community she had so carefully nurtured, she found herself abandoned by the surrogate family she had fostered.

Anna died on March 2, 1619, at the relatively young age of 46; she spent the last years of her life at Hampton Court. Towards the end, just as her husband's proclivities and her children's deaths had left her abandoned, the courtiers whom she had nurtured deserted her as well. In a letter dated January 2, 1619, John Chamberlain writes, "We begin now to apprehend the Queen's danger....Yet I hear the courtiers lay about them...and plot for leases of her land, for the keeping of Somerset House, and the rest, for implements and movables, as if they were to divide a spoil." The once convivial Anna seemed to crave isolation: she "dreaded crowds of people around her" and during the last night of her life she requested her maid to "lock the royal bedchamber." She who had hoped to be a mother to the royal family, to her court, and even to England, spent her final moments with her sole surviving son, Charles.

Following Anna's death, James was, characteristically, uninterested in her funeral and burial. Because of a dearth of funds, the funeral was postponed for a lengthy period of time. Bergeron refers to this postponement as "the final indignity" that Anna suffered—when Anna's burial did take place, James, also characteristically, did not attend. Charles, whom Anna had selected to serve as the intermediary messenger in Tethys' Festival to communicate between his mother and father, was Anna's main consolation during her final years, and the chief mourner at her funeral. James Maxwell's sentimental poem written as an elegy for Anna's death emphasizes their bond:
ELIZA so laments, her mother Anna
That languishing she yles, black, pale and wann... But most of all, Prince CHARLES her hopeful Sonne,
Bemoanes his Mothers death; as though undone
He were by this great losse; me thinkes of Teares
A Christall Tombe he to his Mother reeres. 114

Though Maxwell’s speculation about “Eliza,” or Princess Elizabeth’s grief is just that—speculation—Charles was extremely close to his mother, and Maxwell unwittingly distinguishes between Charles’s and James’s grief for Anna with mention of a “Cristall Tombe.” James never took steps to adorn Anna’s tomb with any sort of monument—Charles’s tears were as close as Anna would get to a formal memorial. Through Charles’s tenure as king, his wife, Henrietta Maria, would continue Anna’s tradition of masque patronage—but the Caroline court’s legacy is overshadowed by the ultimate execution of Charles, Anna’s only surviving son.
NOTES

1In keeping with much recent scholarship, I will refer to the subject of my essay as “Anna” rather than “Anne.” The queen consort referred to herself as “Anna.”


5Scholars such as Roy Strong have argued that Henry’s death prevented a new Renaissance within the English court (*Henry, Prince of Wales and England’s Lost Renaissance* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1986]).


Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 123.


Queen Sophia, Anna’s mother, was known for her unusual (for the nobility or royalty) attention to her children’s upbringing, a characteristic that clearly influenced Anna’s own approach to motherhood. One of Lord Cecil’s messengers remarked that Sophie was “a right virtuous and godly princess which with motherly care and great wisdom ruleth her children” (Williams, 3).

Though for years scholars debated Anna’s rumored Catholicism, recent scholarship seems generally convinced that she was indeed a practicing Catholic. Though a potential liability for the fiercely Protestant James, the king often found ways to exploit his wife’s rumored allegiance to the papacy through connections to Catholic nations that he might not otherwise have had.

Qtd. in Williams, 95

Williams, 94.


John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions and Magnificent Festivities of King James I, his Royal Consort, Family . . . 4 vols.* (London, 1828), 1:265. The Earl of
Shrewsbury also remarked, “that attractive vertue of our late Queene El” was “imitated by our most gratious Queene.” Anna’s efforts to “imitate” Elizabeth will be considered in greater detail later in the essay; for the present, it is important to note Anna’s efforts to replicate Elizabeth’s maternal connection with her people.


18Anna reportedly suffered from homesickness: “Many times she falleth into tears, wishing herself...with her mother in Denmark” (Williams, 60).

19Lewalski, 15.


22Qt. in Williams, 137. Carr had indeed worked as a page (an “incompetent” page according to Williams) under James, and rumors suggested Anna had prompted his dismissal from that role. This only contributed to the animosity between them.


24Carr was implicated in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in one of the biggest scandals of the Jacobean period. For a thorough examination of the Overbury scandal, see
Lindley's *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1993).

25Goldberg, 84.


27Bergeron, *Letters*, 115


29Boehrer notes that Buckingham was “renowned both for his mushroom-like irruption into the king’s favor and for the scores of relatives he insinuated into the king’s court” (90).


31Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 104.

32Ibid.

33Qtd. in Bergeron, *Royal Family*, 55.

34Questioning the legitimacy of a male child is a recurring topos throughout the plays discussed in this work. See my earlier chapters on *King John* and *Tamburlaine*, pages 57-9, 99-100.

35Strong, 14.

36Qtd. in Strong, 15.

38 McManus, 80.

39 McManus, 81-2.

40 Qtd. in Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 21.

41 Qtd. in Williams, 54.

42 See Chapter 1, page 29.

43 Qtd. in Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 23. Anna did not hesitate to get involved in Scottish political factions—she was even suspected of involvement with a conspiracy against James—though no evidence of this was ever found. Anna may have sensed her instability within James’s household and sought political allies to gain stronger footing in the court. Once in England, Anna seemed to withdraw from factional politics for the most part—and as I will argue, utilized the masques as a tool to establish her relevance in the court.

44 If Anna had not demanded custody of Henry, she would have been forced to leave him in Scotland even as she and the rest of the family moved to England. If not for her intervention, Henry would have been raised with a Scottish rather than an English upbringing.


46 Barroll, 28.


48 Barroll, 36.

49 Williams, 71. It is worth noting that James’s own mother, Mary Queen of Scots, in 1567, staged a similar siege on the Castle of Stirling, in an effort to obtain custody of her son. Mary was, by this time, suspected in the murder of Lord Darnley, her husband and James’s father, and was resolutely denied access to her infant son. The Earl of Mar,
James’s custodian, declared that “he had in his keeping the treasure of the kingdom and would not risk losing it” (Qtd. in Jane Dunn, Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004], 298). In obtaining her son, Anna succeeded where James’s mother had failed.

50 Agnes Strickland, one of Anna’s early biographers, notes that the “heart of the young queen was alive to the most passionate instincts of maternity” (32), and even faults Anna for “indulg[ing] the mere instincts of maternity” (367).

51 Maximilian de Bethune, Memoirs (Edinburgh, 1805), 3:115-6. Barroll cautions that Sully is the only source that records the story about Anna traveling with the body of her miscarried child.

52 There was some apprehension on the part of the English people regarding their new queen; word had spread that Anna was ruthless in her political machinations in Scotland. Yet as Karen Middaugh notes, “The Queen’s public’s belligerence ended at the English border. When Anna and her children crossed into England...she greeted her new subjects with a loving graciousness reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth herself” (“The Golden Tree: The Court Masques of Queen Anna of Denmark” [Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1994], 66.)

53 Bergeron, Royal Family, 71.

54 Barroll, 104.

Barroll, 75-6. McManus focuses on the gender dynamics present in the masques of the first decade of James’s reign, which were “almost entirely dominated by women” (97).


Wynne-Davies, 91.

Among the many artists she patronized, some of the most prominent included John Florio, who taught Anna Italian. She also commissioned Inigo Jones, the sometime-collaborator of Jonson’s. She enjoyed the visual arts as well and patronized artists including Isaac Oliver and Paul van Somer.


Ibid., 145.

Ibid., 146, 164. Suzanne Gossett’s “‘Man-maid, begone!’: Women in Masques,” English Literary Renaissance 18, no. 1 (1988): 96-113, also argues that “Jonson’s masques for Queen Anne…emphasized the passivity of the queen and her ladies” (105). She believes that “Jonson did not present the queens as the active agents he knew they were” (100).

Barroll, Anna of Denmark, 70.

Ibid., 67.

Qtd. in Williams, 38.

McManus, 101.

Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 45.


Peck, 70.


Barroll agrees that her “persistence and personal loyalties” shaped “her courtly activity in England” (“The Court of the First Stuart Queen,” in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, 198).

Strickland, 368, 369.

*Diary of Anne Clifford*, p. xxxix.

Though each of these masques is worthy of close examination, I will be focusing specifically on Anna’s first two masque appearances, in order to provide a sense of Anna’s early masquing strategies, and one of her later appearances, *Tethys’ Festival*, which I believe is emblematic of an overall shift in her efforts to acquire significance in James’s court and life.

Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 97.


As mentioned earlier, Daniel became a favorite of the queen’s, but he was originally brought to her attention by one of her closest courtiers, the Countess of Bedford. Like many of Anna’s ladies, the countess was an active artistic patron and danced in several of
Anna’s masques. As Peck notes, “the important position women held in early Stuart court patronage” has “remained opaque . . . Leading aristocrats such as the Countess of Bedford, the Countess of Pembroke and the Dowager Countess of Derby created literary and political salons at their houses” (68).


80 Ibid., lines 12, 13.

81 Juno was portrayed by the Countess of Suffolk, who appears wearing “a crown of gold on her head” and presenting a “sceptre” at the temple (lines 60-1). As Barroll notes, the Countess of Suffolk was the wife of James’s new Lord Chamberlain, so by featuring her as Juno, rather than as a lower ranking lady, the masque incorporated an appropriate “hierarchalized” order (91). The role of Juno, however, was clearly Anna’s for the taking—she instead selected the role Pallas Athene.

82 Interestingly, Barroll notes that the “figure of Pallas Athene, or Minerva, the goddess of wisdom,” ultimately came “to be deeply associated with Anna of Denmark” (149).


84 Some critics contend that even in *Vision* Anna is not, in fact, subversive. Joan Rees notes in her introduction that the goddesses in *Vision* “have a strong sense of social duty . . . and the final word is a prayer that the ‘real’ effects of the blessings only ‘represented’ in the masque will be vouchsafed to king and kingdom” (20). Other critics have concurred that each goddess represents a quality that is ostensibly embodied by James.

85 McManus, 107.
In a recent article, James Knowles examines Anna’s adoption of Elizabethan iconography, and argues that “Anna’s use of Elizabethanism illustrates how the queen consort both asserted her status and fashioned a distinct, gendered space, differentiating herself from her husband” (“To Enlight the Darksome Night, Pale Cinthia Doth Arise”: Anna of Denmark, Elizabeth I and the Images of Royalty,” in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. Clare McManus [New York: Palgrave, 2003], 21-48, 23). Though Elizabeth might have indeed inspired Anna in her efforts to establish her own “distinct, gendered space,” Elizabeth’s ubiquitous presence, even in death, also threatened Anna’s role as the matriarch of the Jacobean court.

Qtd. in Williams, 51-2.

Anne Barton, “Harking Back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline Nostalgia,” *English Literary History* 48, no. 4 (1981): 706-31, 715. Jean Macintyre in “Queen Elizabeth’s Ghost at the Court of James I,” *Ben Jonson Journal* 5 (1998): 81-100, also comments that in *Oberon*, “Prince Henry is less the heir apparent to James than to his godmother Elizabeth” (83). Again, Anna may have felt that her position as a mother was jeopardized by Elizabeth.

Though Elizabeth commissioned the masque, it was never actually performed.


95 Anna did appear as a queen in Jonson’s Masque of Queens, which was produced by Anna in 1609, just a year before Tethys. Her courtiers appeared alongside Anna as various famous queens. Though Anna was distinguished by Jonson as the “worthiest” queen (line 389), Bel-Anna, she still was content to appear as one among many powerful women, and not as a maternal figure. This is not the case in Tethys.

96 Lindley, 232.


98 Qtd. in Strong, 16.

99 Qtd. in Bergeron, Royal Family, 92.

100 Henry’s closeness to his mother was legendary—he even shared physical similarities with Anna (not unlike Tamburlaine’s sons, who resembled Zenocrate). John Chamberlain reported that “the Prince in favor growes very like the Queen his mother” qtd. in Roy Strong, Henry, Prince of Wales and England’s Lost Renaissance (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 12.

It is worth remembering that though women appeared on the masque stage, they did not speak. Tethys’ message is delivered by a male performer.

Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*, 123.

The introduction of “Astraea” is significant as well, as Astraea is one of the many figures associated with Elizabeth. In Knowles’ recent article on the links between Anna and Elizabeth, he argues that *Tethys* is the “most complete and complex expression of Anna’s court’s Elizabethanism” (42).

Anna, who had fought so hard to obtain custody of Henry, might also wish to postpone his inevitable maturation into adulthood.

See John Pitcher, “‘In those figures which they see me’: Samuel Daniel’s *Tethys’ Festival,*” in *The Court Masque*, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 33-46.

Qtd. in Bergeron, *Royal Family*, 107.

Bergeron, *Royal Family*, 137.

Pauline Croft, *King James* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 89.

As Barroll notes, Anna’s own mother, Queen Sophia, survived her—as well as, of course, James, who died six years later in 1625.

*The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), 2:196-7. James’s primary concern was Anna’s lack of a written last will—though she reportedly told Charles that all of her belongings
should go to him, James paid no heed to that and appropriated her goods for himself. His current favorite, Buckingham, received one of Anna’s homes.

112 Williams, 200.

113 Scholars note that the absence of the monarch at the consort’s funeral was not unusual. Yet James’s dilatory response to “staging” the funeral, and his apathy about creating a monument for Anna’s grave (which never happened) is nonetheless revealing.

114 James Maxwell, Carolanna...A Poeme in Honour of Our King, Charles-James, Queen Anne, and Prince Charles (London, 1619).
EPILOGUE

Queen Anna, like the other figures in my study, suffered a premature death. Yet in some ways, Anna stands apart from the other subjects of this work. While dramatic queen mothers such as Constance, Zenocrate, and Videnia, are killed off after posing a threat to the prevailing patriarchy, Anna, having provided the heirs she was obligated to birth, was essentially forgotten by the monarch. James’s ostracism of Anna resulted, certainly, from his preference for his royal favorites. But his marginalization of Anna may have also been an effort to circumscribe her power within the court. Though in her final years Anna appeared conciliatory towards James, as evinced by her performance in Tethys’ Festival, her behavior as a young mother revealed her willingness to undermine his power. Anna’s siege on the Castle of Mar, her refusal to abandon her son, and most significantly, her self-inflicted miscarriage, emphasized the power she possessed due to her status as a royal mother. Anna refused to bear any more children until she had obtained custody of the heir apparent, Charles, and she refused to join James in England, where he was assuming the throne, until he relented to her demands. James’s ultimate exclusion of Anna from his court may have been, in part, a response to such a demonstration of maternal power. In any case, Anna’s experiences, like those of the dramatic figures in my study, demonstrate the inevitable perils early modern queen mothers confronted, and further illuminate Elizabeth’s decision to avoid such pitfalls.
As this work has demonstrated, pervasive early modern fears regarding both maternity and queenship left many people wary of the potential power available to a queen mother. Yet accounts of modern-day queen mothers suggest that such fears have not entirely abated. In particular, Princess Diana provides us with a rich example of a queen mother who continues to unsettle the British monarchy, even in death.

Most recently, Princess Diana’s “secret tapes” have been publicly broadcast.¹ An excerpt from these tapes reveals a Diana who, not unlike Queen Anna, saw her pregnant body as her only weapon against her royal husband:

Charles said I was crying wolf and I said I felt so desperate and I was crying my eyes out. And he said, ‘I’m not going to listen. You’re always doing this to me.’ He said, ‘I’m going riding now.’ So I threw myself down the stairs, bearing in mind I was carrying a child. The Queen comes out, absolutely horrified, shaking she’s so frightened. I knew I wasn’t going to lose the baby, quite bruised around the stomach, and Charles went out riding. And when he came back, you know, he—it was just dismissal, total dismissal.²

Diana’s action, in which she consciously endangered her own life as well as the life of the future heir, mirrors Anna, who similarly “flew into a violent fury, and four months gone with child...beat her own belly.”³ Despite Diana’s effort to gain her husband’s attention, Charles “went out riding” and was apparently unmoved by his wife’s suicide attempt. Her actions literally rattled the monarch, however. Queen Elizabeth was, according to Diana, “shaking” with fright.

This image, of England’s sovereign “shaking” at the sight of Diana’s pregnant fall, is emblematic of Diana’s lasting effect on the Windsor household. Despite Diana’s ostensible success as a royal mother who provided two male heirs, many believe that, in the wake of Diana and Charles’ bitter divorce, the royal family was both frightened by
her immense popularity and by her position as mother to Princes William and Harry.

Despite the fact that she regularly spoke out against the royal family’s cruelty towards her, Diana’s position as mother to the future king guaranteed her a role in the British establishment.

In the years since Charles and Diana’s unprecedented divorce, some British subjects have called for Prince William’s accession in place of his scandal-ridden father.⁴ We can only speculate how Diana, known for both her maternal devotion to her sons and her acrimony towards much of the royal family, especially Charles, might have reacted to such an opportunity for her son. She would have found herself, again, in a position eerily reminiscent of Anna: a royal wife, supplanted by her husband’s “favorite,” and a royal mother with a very close relationship to her elder son who enjoys a burgeoning popularity rivaling his father’s. Diana’s death, of course, changed everything.

Even in death, however, rumors surround Diana that resonate with anxieties about her ability to mother more biological children. As recently as January 7, 2004, officials were once again addressing rumors that Diana had been pregnant at the time of her death. Dr. John Burton, a former royal coroner who was present at Diana’s autopsy, insisted: “She wasn't pregnant. I have seen into her womb.”⁵ The graphic nature of Burton’s avowal suggests an urgent need to dispel the persistent pregnancy rumors.

The incessant nature of such rumors signals a pervading interest in Diana’s unique position as a mother to the future monarch. If Diana was pregnant at the time of her death, the father of the baby was, presumably, Dodi Al Fayed—an Islamic, Egyptian multimillionaire. Had she lived, as one critic recently noted, Diana might have had a “new generation of glamorous Muslim children becoming Hello! celebrities in their own
right." A divorced Diana giving birth to children of another race and religion while still maintaining her status as the mother of the king would certainly prove alarming to the British establishment, demonstrating again a queen mother's unique ability to alter the status quo through biological maternity. The persistent rumors suggesting Diana was pregnant echo the similar speculation that dogged Elizabeth during her reign, and reveal a pervasive fascination with the figure of the royal mother and her inimitable hold over the future of the monarchy.
NOTES

1These tapes were originally recorded in 1991 by Diana in response to interview questions posed by journalist Andrew Morton. Morton used these tapes to pen the tell-all biography Diana: Her True Story—In Her Own Words. In March 2004, NBC broadcast the tapes for the first time.

2Princess Diana: The Secret Tapes, first broadcast March 5, 2004, NBC.

3Calendar of State Papers...Venice, ed. Horatio F. Brown (London: 1900), 10:40.

4In June of 2000, the BBC reported findings that “48% of those responding to The Guardian poll thought the crown should skip Charles altogether and pass to William on the Queen's death.” “The princely pin-up,” BBC News, June 16, 2000 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/794023.stm).


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