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ABSTRACT

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Women as Threat in French and English Drama (1553-1610)

This thesis establishes the extent to which theatrical treatments of the notion of women as threat, in England and France from 1553 to 1610, participated in contemporary pro-feminine discourses, and identifies the specificities of female representation in drama as a genre. In studying the diverse theatrical representations of female threat (e.g. political, sexual, ethnic, verbal), it draws on recent studies of gender, sexuality and race in Renaissance France and England. The thesis engages with a broad corpus, which includes relatively little-studied French dramatists such as Etienne Jodelle, Gabriel Bounin, Robert Garnier and Antoine de Montchrestien, and focuses on inconsistencies in representations of femininity, with a view to revealing the ideological tensions and contradictions in the plays' depictions of threatening female characters drawn from Biblical, classical, or more recent history. This research therefore enhances understanding not only of late sixteenth-century drama, particularly in France, but also of early modern concepts of sexual, class, and racial difference. The thesis illustrates the contested nature of the discourses of class, gender and race in contemporary social debate in this period, indicating the differences between French and English cultures in the modalities of the representation of women, acknowledging the plays' ambivalence in this respect, rather than minimizing it or explaining it away. It is an interdisciplinary work, drawing on gender and feminist theory, social history, new-historicism, post-colonialism and theories of sexuality, in order to explore concepts, discourses and representations of normative and non-normative femininity in a number of plays. In the plays the female characters are represented as negotiating and subverting the cultural constraints imposed on women, and the gendering of power, violence, language and sexuality. The first chapter analyses the representation of women and power, through the transgression of gender codes and appropriation of masculine values. The threat that women represent is manifested by their rebellion against, resistance to and subversion of patriarchal power and structures, which enable them both to question and to validate them, as power is both fuelled and destabilised by resistance. The second chapter considers the extent to which certain forms of violence are sanctified and others abhorred, in order to acknowledge the threatening potential of female violence and to understand the strategies of social repression of women's violent instincts and masculine qualities both within the plays and as part of their overall social context. Verbal and psychological violence are addressed in the third chapter which analyses the representation of women as rhetorical threat. Chapter Three demonstrates how women can seduce men with their words, not only to arouse desire but also to provoke action. Seduction can also be physical when the male characters are represented as dependent on women's beauty, as explored in Chapter Four. The preceding chapters point to one common feature, the imbrication of the issue of gender with those of sexuality, race and class; this is the main concern of the fourth chapter, where the issue of female sexuality is tackled through its link with race.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Presentation

This thesis is a comparative study of a selection of English and French tragedies from the period between 1553 and 1610. The thesis aims to investigate, from a feminist perspective, how and why women were represented as a threat, and to whom or to what. I seek to analyse the ambivalence in the representation of women and the feminine as threat in my corpus of plays by attending to the textual tensions and contradictions in the playwrights' representations of women, focusing on aspects which discourses of the *querelle des femmes* present as most threatening (female power, violence, eloquence and sexuality). As will be examined, the staging of threatening women – through their resistance, rebellion and struggle within or against a political or social arena – does not necessarily mean that the plays offer an anti-feminine representation of women. I seek to identify the pro- or anti-feminine potential of my corpus of plays and determine the extent to which the dramatists use strategies of containment and/or of subversion, and the complex effects of such strategies. I therefore outline the ways in which playwrights attempt to destabilise and/or stabilise the standard discourses on women, or more interestingly to do both, by accepting the potential of a dramatic discourse to be trapped in insoluble tensions which simultaneously appropriate and subvert the dominant discourse.

The plays in my corpus present ambivalent and contradictory representations of threatening women and constantly negotiate between anti- and pro- feminine discourses whilst never giving a final answer and offering a complex representation of women as threat. Whilst women were expected to be 'chaste, silent and obedient',[1] the plays of my corpus stage the unruly woman or the threatening woman, who was conceived as opposite to the ideal, through her invasion of the public sphere and her sexual promiscuity which was also linked to

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[1] Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).

public speaking. I will demonstrate that the plays are as ambivalent as *querelle des femmes* texts and escape any simplistic categorization. By taking a comparative approach, the thesis investigates and acknowledges the ambivalence of a discourse which represents threatening female figures, but also explores how seemingly non-threatening female characters can be regarded as subversive, in demonstrating that inoffensive tools can mask serious threats.

This thesis enhances our understanding of Humanist plays by showing that they have richer gender implications than previously thought, notably by using the English plays to enrich and illuminate our perception of the first Humanist tragedies. Indeed, though many Humanist plays are titled after women and take female characters as their main focus and despite the importance of gender in contemporary concerns, and the various studies of early modern gender issues in general, there is no study of gender for the 1553-1610 period, which saw the emergence of French theatre.

Through the comparative perspective, my readings of English plays are also illuminated by the French plays, where apparent forms of disempowerment can be analysed as threatening and potentially subversive and obvious forms of deviance can be examined, paradoxically, as less threatening and inherently contained. In all the plays of the corpus, the threat that women represent is multifaceted and pervasive and cannot be limited to a single form of threat. The female characters' transgression of gender and social codes applies to various categories and can be illustrated in various spheres, as will be put forward in the thesis.

In the thesis, I distinguish between plays that seem to be anti-feminine at first, as they stage 'obvious' threatening women who transgress patriarchal codes, and plays that seem to be staging unthreatening women or tragic heroines and that seem to be pro-feminine, which characterises the French plays in my corpus. The thesis investigates and acknowledges the ambivalent representation of threatening female figures in William Shakespeare's *Henry VI 1*, *2*, *3*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* and *Coriolanus*, John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1595) and Gabriel Bounin's *La Soltane* (1561). It also explores how seemingly non-threatening female characters can be regarded as subversive by analysing the paradoxical potential threatening power of disempowering tools in Etienne Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive* (1553) and Robert Garnier's *Porcie* (1568) and *Les Juifves* (1583). The thesis will

finally offer a unique post-colonial analysis of Humanist plays, using English material as a critical framework to explore and illuminate the representation of the racial other in the French plays, Antoine de Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise ou la liberté* (1596) and Nicolas Chrétien des Croix's *Les Portugais Infortunés* (1608).[2]

Scholars are becoming increasingly aware of the continuities in the gender discourses of the early modern period. This work participates in this effort to provide more comparative studies to understand possible dialogues and exchanges between countries, and to analyse how dramatic traditions can corroborate or complicate each other, especially on the issue of gender, in order to shed light on the continuity between feminist debates of the Renaissance and today.

2. Context: 'Men beware women' and the *Querelle des femmes*

> Those who are not threatened by their fellow men are far more likely to recognise woman as a counterpart; but even for them the myth of the Woman, of the Other, remains precious for many reasons, they can hardly be blamed for not wanting to light-heartedly sacrifice all the benefits they derive from the myth: they know what they lose by relinquishing the woman of their dreams, but they do not know what the woman of tomorrow will bring them.[3]

Simone de Beauvoir influenced much subsequent thought by arguing that the myth of Woman is a powerful one that needs to be protected within patriarchal societies in order for men's idea/ideal of women to be preserved. Feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have argued that any attempt to define women is to submit to a phallocentric discourse;[4] women can never be defined since they are positioned as unrepresentable or undefinable through the vagueness and

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[2] The datings of Shakespeare's plays are explained in more detail in the 'Note on the editions used' on p.36.

[3] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, 2 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), I, p. 14.

[4] Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 119-21.

polyvalence of the terms used to define them that strategically produce confusion.[5] Kate Millett defines sexual politics as the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex; such a process of power relations, based on 'patriarchal binary thought'[6] relies on the definition of and differentiation between two separate groups. Hence in Millet's view, two opposing sets of gender attributes were culturally defined so, as firstly, to be stereotyped, secondly, to be kept separate from each other in the categories of feminine and masculine, and thirdly, to remain exclusively associated with their appropriate biological partners (masculine/male and feminine/female).[7] These theories shed an interesting light on Renaissance patriarchal discourse, which struggled to define and construct women in a strategic use of binarism and opposites. Indeed, in the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, women were strategically defined by theoretical, medical, ethical, political, ideological and literary discourses that aligned them and femininity with disorder and inversion, to produce a 'natural' justification for woman's submission and exclusion from public affairs. Women were constructed by physiologists, anatomists and physicians as disorderly, complex, confused, and an imperfect version of the male. Nature imprinted its authority physically and medical discourses were used to justify the superiority of men over women, to define gender roles, and to make the visible difference between male and female the main difference in the world. But sexual difference was not only the most crucial distinction, it was also the frailest, as French and English Renaissance societies believed in the one-sex model, which positioned men as the norm; women were regarded both as 'the' sex and also as a 'secondary' or 'defective' sex.[8] The one-sex model both reflects and complicates a feminist

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[5] Julia Kristeva, 'Women can never be defined', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 267-68 (p. 267).
[6] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 104 (on Helene Cixous).
[7] Moi, p. 26.
[8] See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Garland, 1997). The one sex model was based on the medical theories of the Renaissance which examined the different fluids of the body, blood, semen, milk and their quality to define a hierarchical order between man and woman. The philosophical, legal and religious traditions born in Antiquity, from the basis of the medieval views on female nature and role, and Renaissance medicine, continued to follow Aristotle's and Galen's model of the female body as inferior. But as noted by Ian MacLean, Fallopio's description of the female genitalia in 1561 marks the beginning of the end of the Galenic theory and of parallelism between male and female organs, see 'The Notion of Woman in Medicine, Anatomy, and Physiology', in *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, ed. by Lorna Hutson, (Oxford Readings in Feminism Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 127-56 (p. 134). See also Joan

construction of women as ‘a sex which is not one’, the ‘other sex’ or a ‘second sex’. Feminist theories enable me to take a different view, consider differently and shed new light on my corpus of plays whilst emphasizing the continuity in the feminist debate.

From a feminist perspective, women have always been perceived by men as a threat in patriarchal cultures, but because of contextual factors this perception is particularly relevant in Renaissance France and England. Indeed, these cultures were beset by gender anxiety and obsessively concerned with debates over women’s nature, status, and perceived changing living conditions, with female rule or regency adding a political urgency to the more theoretical issues debated in the ongoing *querelle des femmes* or controversy about women.[9] This collective anxiety about women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is reflected in this huge body of literature, known as the *querelle des femmes*, which questioned, reinforced or enriched the existing discourses on women.[10]

It is necessary to clarify the terms and the main tropes of the *querelle des femmes* or controversy about women, since in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the dramatists examined in this thesis wrote their plays, there was a set of existing conventional and codified discourses on women from which they could not escape; the plays will therefore be situated within the discourses of the *querelle des femmes*. This tradition crystallised around the issues of power, action, speech, and chastity, issues which were discussed not only in France and England but throughout Northern Europe. These discourses included traditional views of women embedded in the philosophical and medical theories of the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as views on women developed by Christian thinkers. These various medical, ethical, political and religious discourses aligned femininity with

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Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[9] For a clear and concise summary of the terms of the debate in France, England and throughout Renaissance Europe, see Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 11-65.

[10] Such as Henri Corneille Agrippa, *De nobilitae et praecellentia foeminei sexus*; Giovanni Boccacio, *De mulieribus clari*s; Symphorien Champier, *La Nef des dames vertueuses* (1503); Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames* (1405); François de Billon, *Le Fort inexpugnable de l'honneur du sexe féminin* (1555-1560); Gratien du Pont, *Les Controverses des sexes masculin et femenin* (1534); Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames* (1442); Nicole Estienne, *Les Misères de la femme mariée* (1595).

inferiority, disorder, rebellion and inversion.[11] However, a series of humanist pamphlets, books, poems and treatises on marriage, family and education examined the woman's question, and some humanists launched critical re-examinations of these ideas inherited from the ancient and medieval past.[12] They aimed to redefine women's nature and role, femininity and feminine qualities, also using biblical, historical and classical women as examples to praise and celebrate women's nature and feminine qualities, to reject the main accusations made against women or to describe women's lives and experience. In France and England, the translation of humanist treatises and major works about women, as well as the rise of printing, made possible the dissemination of popular taste for pamphlets on the controversy about women.[13]

The *querelle des femmes* considered the superiority or inferiority of women, assessing patriarchal domination, and though initially it was about the creation story, it evolved and was applied to other issues. Religious patriarchy found its origins in Scripture and in the story of creation which was initially debated in *querelle des femmes* texts: whilst in the first creation narrative, woman is positioned as the spiritual equal to man, in Genesis 2 and 3, woman is defined as a subject of, and helper to man. This story of creation justifies her political subjugation and her ontological inferiority.[14] However, this view was contested by many pro-feminine authors, such as Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, in *On the Nobility and Preeminence*

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[11] See Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top' in Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies,* pp. 156-185, (p. 156).

[12] Such as Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus. See Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, pp. 1-11.

[13] For an overview of the various discourses on women and their development in French literature, see *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Christine Meek (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); Madeleine Lazard, *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985); Evelyne Berriot Salvadore, *Les Femmes dans la société française de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990); Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On the texts of the controversy about women in England, see *Half Humankind, Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640,* ed. by Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F.McManus (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), pp. 12-15. For an overview of the early sources of literary misogyny and its development see Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument About Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of Year 1568* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1944). On the Renaissance, see Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956); Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

[14] In the first creation narrative, God created man in his own image, 'in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27), in the second, God created Eve from Adam's rib (2:21-23), which was understood as a proof of Eve's subordination to Adam.

of the Female Sex, which defines women as the ultimate creation: 'for when the creator came to the creation of woman, he rested himself in this creation, thinking he had nothing more honourable to create; in her were completed and consummated all the wisdom and power of the Creator; after her no creation could be found or imagined.'[15] Pro- and anti-feminine authors also debated the role that Eve played in the story of the Fall and engaged in a vigorous debate about whether Eve, as a woman created from Adam's rib, shared in his dignity and questioned the role she played in the introduction of human misery to the world.[16] The strategy of blaming women for all the evil in the world is characteristic of anti-feminine texts, and is significant to the world of tragedy. Hence, the thesis will analyse the role given to the female characters in the disorder depicted in the plays, and their influence on the hero's tragic fall, in order to position the plays within this theological discourse.

Patriarchy is also to be found within the family sphere as the father or husband was to be the head of the family and had control of the social, political and economic lives of his dependants, notably of his wife, in the household. Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxorial* (1416) is an important text, as it was to establish the terms of the Renaissance discourse on the household, which had to be well-ordered, and advocated self-effacement and transparency in women. By contrast, the playwrights studied in this thesis chose to stage unconventional and assertive female characters, who do not respect the boundaries of the household and invade the public sphere. Limiting women to the private sphere of the house was linked to a fear that they could intervene in the public realm, as exemplified by Juan Luis Vives who recommends that because of their very nature, women should limit themselves to familial duties and to the household:

> Therfore you women that wyll medle with comen matters of realms and cites and wene to governe people and nations with the braydes of your stomackes you go about to hurdle down townes afore you and you light upon a harde rocke. Where upon though you brouse and shake countres very sore, yet they scape and you perysshe. For you knowe neyther measure nor order, and yet whiche is the worst poynt of al you wene you

[15] Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation of the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans. and ed. by Albert Rabil Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 47. Agrippa's text is the most explicit case for women and had an influence on Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* (1540) and Francois de Billon's *Le Fort Inexpugnable de l'honneur du sexe femenin* (1555).

[16] See Lyndan Warner, *The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance France. Print, Rhetoric and Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-25.

> know veray well, and wyll be ruled in nothynge after them that be expert. But you attempte to drawe all thynge after your fantasye without discretion. [...] All this same meaneth that you shall not medle with matters of realms or cities. Your owne house is a cite great inoughe for you.[17]

As exemplified here by Vives, these literary and ideological backgrounds constructed women as potentially threatening if they transgressed gender categories and the limits imposed upon them, or if they refused to respect their subordinate place and obey patriarchal authority in the private and public spheres. The woman discussed in the *querelle des femmes* is often a wife, either the ideal woman providing the comfort one might desire in a companion, or a threatening adulterous woman. Indeed, marriage became a pressing social, political and moral issue for both Catholics and Protestants, and had a threefold purpose: procreation, avoidance of extramarital sin, and mutual companionship.[18] Female sexuality was justified only for procreation and to avoid the disgrace and scandal of illegitimate children, as dramatised in the corpus by Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.

In addition, the *querelle des femmes* texts relate to the origins of the control of man over woman, as well as their respective rights and duties, but also share a concern with issues of authority and subordination. The threat that women represent to patriarchy can be expressed through the transgression of these two concepts, authority and subordination, which were crucial to the definition of patriarchy and patriarchal power in the Renaissance**.** The issue of authority and the difference between authority and power are of importance in the woman's question within a political background which saw female rule or regency.[19] If it was believed that the courage of a man was in commanding and of a woman in obeying, the political situation questioned such beliefs and demonstrated that the expectation of passivity

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[17] Juan Luis Vives, *On the Education of a Christian Woman* (1523), Book II, Chapter 5, translated by Richard Hyrde in 1540, quoted in Jordan, p. 119.

[18] See Michael A. Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage: Aspects of Rabelais's Religion, Ethics and Comic Philosophy* (London: Arnold, 1958). The *querelle du mariage* took place at the interface between tradition (ancient as well as Christian) and innovation (Humanism as well as religious reform). The debate on marriage, celibacy, sexuality and the Bible quotation, 'It is not good that the man should be alone' (Gen. 2:18), was known as the *querelle du marriage* and it became an integral aspect of the gender debate.

[19] Sixteenth-century France saw the regencies of Louise de Savoie (1515; 1522-1526) and, more importantly for the time period covered by this thesis, of Catherine de Medici's regencies: in 1552, while her husband Henri II left the kingdom for the campaign of Metz; in 1560–1563 during the minority of her second son, Charles IX; in 1574, during the absence of her third son, Henri III, in Poland. In England, Mary 1st ruled from 1553 to 1558, followed by Queen Elizabeth 1st (1558-1603).

in women was only prescriptive, and that the reality was different in a period when the ideal of womanhood was a difficult model for ordinary women to follow, in the flux of economic and social circumstances. The 1560-1640 period was a time of rapid and often unsettling demographic and economic change which had a profound impact on social and gender relations.[20] The extent to which the Renaissance was a period of social, economic and ideological changes for women has been analysed by Joan Kelly in her famous essay 'Did Women have a Renaissance?', which questioned the long-lasting belief of Jakob Burkardt that the Renaissance was a period of general betterment.[21] Other critics have put forward the limits to the humanist promotion of education for women as it was envisaged in order to respect domestic patriarchy and their subordinate roles. Even the major work by a male writer on female education, Vives' *On the Education of a Christian Woman*, saw female education as based around the requirements of chastity and a future in a household.[22] Indeed, through education, women could threaten to achieve intellectual equality with men; when women humanists are celebrated by their male counterparts, it is in terms of an abstract intellectual ideal ('warrior-maiden, virilis animi, grieving spouse, majestic in suffering'), or in terms of a social ideal (chastity, obedience, modesty, constancy, beauty), therefore inherently containing the threat they might pose to patriarchal domination.[23]

This thesis demonstrates that the plays do not explicitly articulate views on the woman's question but reflect patriarchal anxiety, which was triggered by the social changes of the period, and their immediate literary context characterised by such debates about the woman's question. As in previous *querelle des femmes* contributions, the plays can be analysed as participating in the debate on women's nature via a new genre: drama. The corpus is therefore situated within this debate on women's nature, as the female characters are represented as negotiating and

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[20] See Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London: Routledge, 1993); Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); *Royaume de femynie: pouvoirs, contraintes, espaces de libertés des femmes de la Renaissance a la Fronde,* ed. by Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier and Eliane Viennot (Paris: Champion, 1999); *Changing Identities in Early Modern France,* ed. by Michael Wolf (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

[21] Joan Kelly, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' in Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, pp. 21-48.

[22] Jordan, p. 173.

[23] Lisa Jardine, 'Women Humanists: Education for what?', in Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, pp. 48-82, (p. 68).

subverting the cultural constraints imposed on women, and in that sense, I seek to identify the pro-feminine potential of the plays.

While anti-feminine writings often position women as a threat to the social order, pro-feminine texts of the *querelle des femmes* were polemical, arising in opposition to misogyny and protesting against the defective notions of womanhood fostered by misogynists.[24] These pro-feminine texts also identify how women are positioned by misogynists as dangerous or threatening, illuminating the mechanism of misogyny. They reveal how limited the authority and power granted to women were, and how difficult it was for women to come to terms with the ideology of patriarchy, which sustained such limitations.

Quite paradoxically, the corpus of plays selected stage precisely the threatening woman who questions the period's assumptions about women's abilities and proves the limits of gender boundaries and, as such, inspires and plays with men's fear of losing masculine prerogatives. The plays' representation of women disrupts the period's gender codes and expectations of women by representing behaviours that would conventionally be considered masculine as something that can be appropriated by women. However, as will be seen in the thesis, it is not only by questioning issues of authority and subordination and appropriating what were defined as masculine values, but also by redefining feminine values that the female characters are presented as a source of danger. The variety of gender violations dramatised in the plays serves to call into question and demystify the standard and traditional features of sex and gender categories. The threatening female character creates the perception of insecurity in the male characters, and a male audience, by questioning the existing assumptions about women which defined them as submissive, fragile and weak. The plays participate in playing with gender anxiety by depicting strong and threatening women in the fields of power, action, speech and sexuality. In both the French and English plays, the female characters are represented as threatening in different and specific ways, varying within the corpus. However, as will be explored in the thesis, the threat that all these women represent is not unique, but rather escapes any simple categorisation.

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[24] *Early Feminist Theory*, 6-7, quoted pp. 44-45, in *Half Humankind*.

3. Choice of corpus and interest of a comparative analysis

Though women were indeed regarded and treated as the second sex in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, and even more so in theatre, where they were physically absent from the stage (in England but not entirely in France[25]), all the plays of the corpus share the important characteristic of expressing anxieties about independent female action and the threat it poses to male dominance. It is necessary to examine how the selected French and English tragedies from the period 1553-1610 period compare and relate to one another on the issue of 'women as threat' and how the French and English plays of the corpus complicate, contradict and debate with one another.[26] Any choice of plays and period risks generalization, but in an attempt to clarify, explore and compare the differences and similarities between the evolving French and English theatrical institutions and output, the 1553-1610 period provides a coherent historical and theatrical timeframe. The thesis adopts both an evolutionary and a comparative perspective, as the corpus allows coverage of the period of emergence and evolution of the modern French theatrical institution, by contrast with an existing theatrical culture where religious and secular drama were essentially distinct. The date of 1610 forms a suitable end-point and is coherent for historical reasons (the assassination of Henri IV), but also because after the first decade of the seventeenth- century, the French stage 'reaches the level' of that of Elizabethan drama, with the first professional playwright, Alexandre Hardy, and the creation of the first acting company playing in a permanent public theatre in Paris, the Hotel de Bourgogne. This period and its playwrights have been already extensively studied.[27] My work

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[25] As will be discussed here, despite the lack of formal evidence, it seems that actresses were not entirely absent from the French 'popular' stage, as amateur theatre and touring companies in provinces employed women. See for instance document 54, 'Valleran makes a good impression in Bordeaux, 1592', which makes an explicit reference to Valleran's wife playing the female roles in Valleran's company, in W.D. Howarth, *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era, 1550-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 69-70; See also Aurore Evain*, L'apparition des actrices professionelles en Europe* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

[26] *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method,* ed. by Alfred Owen Aldridge (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969).

[27] Raymond Lebègue, *Tableau de la tragédie française de 1573 à 1610* (Paris: Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 1944); ibid., *Études sur le théâtre français* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1977);

of re-evaluation can thus end in 1610, as my comparative analysis also aims to voice the literary merit of five under-studied playwrights and their plays, Etienne Jodelle (1562-1598), Robert Garnier (1545-1590), Gabriel Bounin (1520-1604), Antoine de Montchrestien (1575-1621) and Nicolas Chrétien des Croix (?).

Besides, the period covered by the corpus (1553-1610) can be qualified as an 'age of conflict' both in France and in England, with variations, specificities and also parallels between the two countries.[28] A chronological perspective, relating theatrical contexts to historical and political backgrounds, explains changes in trends and differences between playwrights and between the French and English plays' representation of women. I avoid static categorizations and formulations which can falsify a more complex reality as the plays changed over time, with the emergence of different genres and/or evolution within genres. Therefore, temporal and generic distinctions will be taken into account, as well as possible changes of tastes and adaptation of aesthetics to changing material conditions.

In France the first humanist plays chose to represent women from Greco-Roman tragedy or historical and biblical women. One can assume that the Greco-Roman stories were considered good models to start with, but also that they enabled the first playwrights to position themselves within the *querelle des femmes* and offer a unique perspective on burning contemporary issues: power and violence, resistance and rebellion, and the presence of the 'Other' (sexual and religious). It is interesting to note that the first French plays focus on the political aspect of the stories of famous women (Cleopatra, Portia, Sophonisba) and locate women within a political context, dramatizing their resistance to the patriarchal order. Indeed, what was also at stake in the *querelle des femmes* was the real power of woman and its potentially positive and negative effects. The period covered by the thesis, saw a peak in the debate over women's nature, but the context was also

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ibid., *Etudes sur le théâtre français II, Le Théâtre des temps modernes* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1977); ibid.,, *Le Théâtre français de l'âge classique: le premier XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2006). Charles Mazouer, *Le Théâtre français de la Renaissance* (Paris: Champion, 2002); Alan Howe, *Le Théâtre Professionnel à Paris: 1600-1649* (Paris: Centre historique des Archives nationales, 2000).

[28] Neil Kenny, 'Introduction', in *Writers in Conflict in Sixteenth-Century France: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Quainton*, ed. by Elizabeth Vinestock, David Foster and Malcolm Quainton (Durham: Durham University Press, 2008), pp. 1-21 (p.11). Likewise, Shakespeare's histories coincide with a period of war and depression, his tragedies with a period of peace and prosperity. As noted by Walter Cohen, 'the conflicts that underlie Shakespearean tragedy, like the oppositions on which satiric comedy turns, are not military or economic, but social', in *Drama of a Nation: Public Theatre in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 308.

marked by the unusual phenomenon of female rule or regency both in France and in England, questioning political and domestic patriarchy. The issue of female power and authority is indeed crucial in all the plays of my corpus, but one might wonder to what extent and on what issues the French and English plays differ.

Unlike in England, the rule of a queen was impossible in France, following the Salic Law of 1464, which prevented any woman from inheriting the French crown; this was the culmination of a gradual reduction of the power of the French queen which had taken place over the previous two hundred years.[29] Under the Salic Law women were excluded from power, but there were exceptions which did not disprove the rule, such as when wives, widows or mothers took the place of men, awaiting their return, or their coming of age, as under Louise de Savoie or Catherine de Medici. As will be seen in the thesis, the issue of female power is explored more fully in the English plays than in the French plays due to the different political contexts. One might suspect that female regency, as in France, was regarded as less threatening than female queenship. The rule of regents was perceived as an accident due to circumstances, a temporary situation which did not raise the issue of female authority as urgently as queenship. Nevertheless, although both secular and religious authority was considered patriarchal, this did not mean that regents had no role to play or could not find a space to assert their authority, as exemplified by the regency of Catherine de Medici.

The issue of women's ability to rule simmered in England as first Mary, and then Elizabeth came to the throne. The year 1553 marks both the first French historical tragedy, *Cléopâtre Captive,* but also the accession of Mary I to the English throne; she was succeeded by Elizabeth in 1558. The thesis focuses on plays written under the reign of Elizabeth I, and chooses as a main point of comparison its most famous representative, William Shakespeare. The selection of French and English plays have been co-ordinated in order to offer a coherent and balanced comparative perspective; hence, as the French corpus is based on historical, biblical and Roman plays, I have chosen to study Shakespeare's first tetralogy, *Henry VI 1, 2, 3*, *Richard III*, and two Roman plays, Shakespeare's first

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[29] Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, p. 95. See Claude de Seyssel, *The Monarchy of France*, trans. by J. H. Hexter, ed. by Donald Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). For the debate on gynaecocracy in England, see Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question 1558-1568* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); ibid, *Tudor Dynastic Problems: 1460-1571* (London: Allen, 1973).

revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* and his last Roman play, *Coriolanus.* In order to be coherent with the French corpus, the genre of tragedy has been selected, as the genre of comedy developed later in France, and also because the historical and biblical female figures debated in the *querelle des femmes* are represented in tragedies. My selected genre therefore produces a coherent corpus of English and French plays within which any similarities and differences emerge more clearly. Shakespeare is the main interest among the English works, but I will make reference to some plays by other playwrights to complement and enrich understanding of this period's drama throughout the thesis. These local comparisons will help bring out the wider implications of my work, and nuance my findings. Furthermore, in order to add a complementary perspective and in accordance with the French corpus, I have included John Marston's *Sophonisba*, to compare it with the French version of the play by Antoine de Montchrestien, *La Carthaginoise ou la liberté*. These two versions of the story of Sophonisba illustrate one of the major differences between the two corpora: whilst the English play is concerned with the threat of female sexuality and men's desire for women, the French play focuses more on women's beauty and man's love for them. Indeed, though debated in *querelle des femmes* texts, the theme of sexuality, as opposed to love, is absent from the French corpus for reasons of *bienséance.* I have opted not to focus strictly on representations of the *femme fatale* or simply on the representation of women as sexual threat, partly because the threatening figure of the natural woman has become an obvious form of threat, but also to make the comparison balanced, as sexuality is absent from the French plays covered by the corpus. I have therefore chosen to analyse another form of threat, through the less widely studied issue of the representation of sexuality and race, which is at the heart of *Titus Andronicus*.

I have chosen not to include Shakespeare's great tragedies for various reasons, notably because one of the aims of the thesis is to re-evaluate neglected 'voices' and because the female characters in the Great Tragedies have been extensively studied and identified as representing a threat to the male characters. However, they seem to be either obstacles or agents which allow the tragic hero to grow and achieve the final recognition and once this part is played they simply

'vanish';[30] Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan die silently without even being noticed, simply erased from the action and from the return to order. In the thesis, I question both simple analyses of Shakespeare's plays as 'feminist', and readings that define the strong women as nightmare female figures or analyse heroic images of women as suspect since misogyny in Shakespeare's drama and its culture is inescapable.[31] Such readings do not take into account the complex characterization of threatening women by homogenizing the potential ambivalence of female characters. Indeed, Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) is the first explicit feminist engagement not only with Shakespeare but also with his contemporaries; her work gave birth to a controversy. Confronting those, like Dusinberre, who argue for a more sympathetic vision of women in Elizabethan drama, oppositional feminist criticisms regard Shakespearean plays as 'archetypal blueprints for patriarchal control.'[32] The ongoing debate was not limited to the vision of women in English Renaissance drama, but also examined it in relation to the living conditions of English women, with Linda Woodbridge's major essay *Women and the English Renaissance.* Other oppositional feminist critics chose to examine issues of gender and genre, such as Linda Bamber in *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (1982), while Coppélia Kahn and Janet Adelman opted to tackle the issues of patriarchy and power, phallocentrism and misogyny in English Renaissance drama.[33]

The tetralogy of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus* have been selected because, like the French plays, they are relatively obscure as they have not attracted studies

[30] See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* (London: Routledge, 1992); Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (London: University Of California Press, 1981).

[31] For instance, Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 97-98. Bamber analyses the character of Tamora simply as a 'surreally threatening female figure', and Jardine analyses here as a character careless of verisimilitude in the interests of the frisson of horror, to be derived from threatening womanhood, who does not carry actual dramatic weight because she is too extreme.

[32] *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Literary Theory,* ed. by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (London: Garland, 1997), p. 367. Pam Morris explains that feminist criticism addressing the role of gender in Shakespearean drama can be divided into two phases: a first, formative phase which may be said to begin with Anna Jameson's pioneering *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women* (1832) which is the first full-scale critique of women in Shakespeare and a second, institutional phase (1975-present), in *Literature and Feminism*, ed. by Pam Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 1.

[33] See Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Dympna Callaghan, *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

that consider the female characters other than as negative figures. These plays stage 'obvious' threatening female characters, or even female villains, but the thesis contextualises the English plays within the debate on women's nature, and analyses them in relation to strategies used not only in anti-feminine but also in pro-feminine writings of the *querelle des femmes*. Similar strategies will be put forward regarding the representation of threatening women in these plays to demonstrate that their depiction of women is not clear-cut. I re-read the English plays in the context of the *querelle des femmes* and offer a re-examination of the English plays, through the lens of the French plays, in order to reassess the role given to female characters by focusing on the ambivalence of their portrayal. Two main strategies have been identified and must be outlined in order to analyse how these plays use similar approaches. Firstly, impersonating and voicing an attack to question and destabilise anti-feminine discourse is a common strategy used by pro-feminine writers who needed attacks on women in order to come to their defense.[34] Another strategy used by defenders of women, such as Champier in *La Nef des Dames Vertueuses* (1503), is to publicise male vice in order to amplify female virtue and dignity. Indeed, before reminding the reader of positive examples such as Mary, Lucretia's purity and Judith's wisdom, Champier recounts the sins of famous women (such as Medea killing her children or Delilah betraying Samson) but he traces the principal cause back to men.[35] Likewise, Christine de Pisan denounces the double standard:

> However, should a woman fall into error, usually thanks to a man's incessant scheming, lo and behold, they declare this to be due to woman's innate weakness and inconstancy. Considering that they think women are so feeble, they should, rightly speaking, show greater tolerance of female frailty and not accuse women of dreadful sins that they consider to be only minor peccadilloes when they themselves are guilty of them. For there is

[34] As noted by Gray Floyd-Warner, with the exception of Dupont and the anonymous Louenge des femmes, few authors in the sixteenth century attempted to only argue the inferiority of woman without offering a counter view, in *Gender, Rhetoric and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 119.
[35] Floyd-Warner, p. 80.

> no law, no written text, which says that they are allowed to sin more than women, or that their vices are more excusable.[36]

Moreover, my thesis questions critics who position women in Shakespeare's history plays as marginal, and argues that in *Henry VI*, the female characters play a major role in the Hi/Story, offering a reading of the female protagonists as actors, agents, and tragic heroes of the plays.[37] I argue that the role given to women in *Henry VI* and *Richard III* cannot be analysed as unproblematic or unambiguous, and question Linda Bamber, who states that women in these plays never offer any metaphysical complications, never raise issues of identity for the masculine self.[38] I demonstrate that they expose and unveil contemporary issues, notably the crisis of masculinity, by questioning the latter's privileged codes.

The thesis questions any simplistic discourse and offers a new space to interrogate the definition of female tragic heroism. In my analysis of the characters of Porcie, Cléopâtre and Sophonisbe/a, I examine the 'saving stereotypes of female heroism', which Lisa Jardine defines as inoffensive models of female heroism, because their agency is seen as merely reiterating traditions of female passivity.[39] I demonstrate that such a definition is debatable in my corpus, as the representations of the female characters question a discourse which equates heroism with male characters.

The specificities and differences in political and social backgrounds will be acknowledged in each chapter, but some initial differences have to be clarified to understand further the choice of corpus. First, the difference between the characterization of women in Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, notably in the great tragedies has been a major issue: scholars have analysed the extent to which Shakespeare endorses the well-known misogyny of James I and his

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[36] Christine De Pisan*, The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. by *Rosalind Brown-Grant* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 151.

[37] On the definition of the female tragic hero, see *The Female Tragic Hero in English Renaissance Drama,* ed. by Naomi Conn Liebler (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); George Ross Ridge, *The Christian Tragic Hero in French and English Literature* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1983); Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, *The Female Hero in American and British literature* (New York: Bowker, 1981); *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French literature,* ed. by Kathy M. Krause (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Jane Chance, *Woman As Hero in Old English literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

[38] Bamber in *Comic Women, Tragic Men* states: 'the feminine in the history plays is more difficult to characterize briefly than it is in the comedies and romances; perhaps it is best described as unproblematic. The feminine Other may be unambiguously hated, as Joan is in *1 Henry VI'*, p. 21.

[39] Jardine*, Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 193.

Court in his Jacobean plays or if they simply reflect a change in the audience's taste.[40] Even though under James I, Shakespeare's company became the King's Men, and performed to the court 138 times between 1603 and 1613, compared with 32 times in the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign,[41] commercial success was increasingly more important than aristocratic patronage.[42] The presence of women in the audience has also to be taken into account, as plays were the products of an entertainment industry: women regularly attended the theatre and, as many scholars have pointed out, the success of any play depended on and required the receptiveness of women.[43] Because I focus mostly on Elizabethan plays, I do not take sides in the debate around the difference between Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean plays in my analysis of *Coriolanus* (1608-09).

Secondly, the differences in the staging conditions have to be clarified. In France, because of a lack of formal evidence about performance records for the plays studied in the thesis, arguments must be based on conjectures.[44] Whilst Shakespeare and his contemporaries have inspired strong interest in early modern performance studies, in France the discipline is far from being well established in relation to Humanist drama. I will therefore refer to performance studies in a piecemeal fashion to inform my arguments. In the absence of other evidence, I have

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[40] Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theatre in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Kernan believes that Shakespeare's plays written under James I aimed to suit the King's tastes and his well-known misogyny and also to celebrate him. He regards *Macbeth* as a celebration of the King's lineage through the figure of Banquo and *King Lear* as a play which reinforces the power of the King, p. 177.

[41] Kernan, p. 16.

[42] Stanley Wells explains that the desire to have the favour of James I and his court, no doubt, influenced the style and interests of Shakespeare's Jacobean work, in *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide* ed. by Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7. Kernan himself notes that 'the King's Men profited from such favor primarily in terms of prestige rather than immediate material terms. In other words, the priority remained to please spectators at the playhouse', p. XV. See also Una Ellis Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation* (London: Methuen, 1965); Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[43] See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8; Findlay, pp. 1-10; Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance*, pp. 251-52. Not only did women have power as consumers but there is proof of their implication in the financial sphere of the theatrical world as financial investors by serving as gatherers who were responsible for collecting money from spectators as early as the mid-1580's, in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents,* ed. by S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 159.

[44] Evidence of professional theatrical activity before 1545 is sparse. The dating of the French plays is based on the date of publication; there are also very few records of performance but Cléopâtre *Captive* might have been performed at the court of Henry II in 1553, *La Soltane* before Catherine de Medici in 1560 and in 1595 in Frankfurt by the touring company of Charles Chautron.

used critical material available on medieval English Renaissance staging practices as the best available frameworks for reflections on the staging of Humanist plays, especially since my main point of comparison is the use of boy actors/young men to play female roles, both in *colleges* in France and in England during the period covered by the corpus.[45]

My comparative analysis of French and English drama will question and supplement Walter Cohen's unique comparative analysis of English and Spanish drama in his book *Drama of a Nation*, where he states that only Golden Age Spain and Tudor-Stuart England drama present similarities and as such offer relevant material for a comparative analysis of European theatre of the Renaissance.[46] According to Walter Cohen, what ultimately distinguishes English and French drama of the period is that French drama was the drama of the ruling class, whilst English drama was 'the drama of a class, but it [was] also the drama of a nation'.[47] On this basis, he claims that 'Spanish and English plays stand apart from all other European drama because they synthesise native popular and neoclassical learned traditions.'[48] As will be discussed, the theatrical institutions of early modern Paris and London were subject to a combination of commercial demands and aristocratic pressures as the playwrights had to pay homage to their patrons. I contend that the theatre's economic, social, political and ideological heterogeneity precludes such simple categorizations, as those offered by Cohen. The public theatre in England emerged from a conjunction of theatrical, social, economic, and political forces after Elizabeth's accession in 1558, which eventually resulted in the establishment of internal stability.[49] The French civil wars explain partly the delay in the

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[45] The first actresses performed as early as 1545 in the company of Valleran Le Comte but there is no clear record of the repertoire of plays staged at the Hotel de Bourgogne, so it is impossible to know if the tragedies from my corpus were performed there or if the female roles were played by actresses. However, one has to acknowledge that all plays have a double potential: they can be regarded as object of reading and as such one can hypothesize that a woman was visualized for female roles, replicating thus the range of differences that exist in performance.

[46] In *Drama of a Nation*, Cohen's argument is that neither Italy nor France were able to produce a national drama: 'in Italy, the failure to produce a national drama resulted not from the lack of a genius but from the lack of a nation', p. 104. Cohen acknowledges the difficulty of differentiating radically between English, Spanish and French drama: 'even more than Italy, France represents a crucial negative test for an argument attempting to explain the distinctiveness of England and Spain', p. 104. However, in my thesis, unlike Cohen, I will not overstate the causal relationship between texts and contexts.

[47] Cohen, p. 151.

[48] Cohen, p. 17.

[49] Cohen, p. 308.

evolution of drama. The first humanist plays were initially written by scholars for their students and destined to be played in colleges by boys/men. They were intended and designed for an upper-class and learned audience, in amateur, elite, occasional and private spaces. However, there is no reason not to think that the first playwrights did not intend their work to spread to other theatrical spaces and to a less limited audience; the playwrights must have thought of a broader audience since scholars have demonstrated that humanist drama was meant to be performed and not read. Indeed, another major difference between the French and the English plays in my corpus resides in the crucial role given to rhetoric in Humanist plays. The plays represent the tragic dilemma of the female heroine and have been criticised for their lack of action. In France, despite the lack of formal records and evidence, it has demonstrated that Humanist plays were written to be performed and not only read.[50]

The very fact that staging practices in France were still influenced by medieval traditions, and that touring companies performed in provinces, could mean that the audience might have been similar to a medieval audience, i.e., a popular and mixed audience.[51] If one takes into account the presence of touring companies in provinces, it can be argued that the variety in the places of performance and the influence of the medieval staging conditions and practices could have offered this fusion between popular and aristocratic stage traditions. This means that in both countries a mix of commercial and aristocratic demands shaped the evolution of drama and of the public theatres, and that playwrights catered for the tastes of heterogeneous audiences in France too. Therefore, the humanist plays emerged from a dramatic culture which potentially articulated and

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[50] See Lebègue, *Tableau de la tragédie française de 1573 à 1610* ; *Études sur le théâtre français* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1977).

[51] See also Elliot Forswyth*, La Tragédie française de Jodelle à Corneille (1553-1640)* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1962); Geoffrey Brereton, *French Tragic Drama in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Methuen, 1973); T.E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the XVIIth century: A study in the Advent of the Italian order,* 2nd edn. (New York: AMS Press, 1986); *Les Lieux du spectacle dans l'Europe du XVIIème siècle, Actes du Colloque du Centre de recherches sur le XVII° siècle européen,* ed. by Charles Mazouer *(1600-1700)* (Tubingen: Narr, 2006); Gillian Jondorf, *French Renaissance Tragedy: the Dramatic Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Olga Anna Duhl, *Le Théâtre français des années 1450-1550: état actuel des recherches* (Dijon: Presses universitaires de Dijon, 2002); Madeleine Lazard, *Le Théâtre en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980); ibid, *Aspects du théâtre populaire en Europe au XVIème siècle: actes du colloque de la S.F.D.S* (Paris: Sedes, 1989).

depicted socially subversive actions and potentially divisive social perspectives before a potentially socially diverse audience of men and women of different ranks.

4. Methodology

Since my aim is to place the plays within their political, historical and social contexts, various theoretical approaches such as feminism, New Historicism and post-colonialism will be used throughout the thesis. The eclecticism of the methodology used in the thesis will enable me to open up more issues in order to analyse a plural and ambivalent reality. As will be demonstrated, the plays can be seen as both index and vehicle of the power relations, social attitudes and economic factors in their immediate and respective contexts.

Feminists, such as Elaine Showalter, have argued that men cannot be feminist in the fullest sense, as the work of a man will always interpret his culture from a man's point of view, but this does not necessarily mean that men cannot sympathise with the female position. I acknowledge that depictions of women in the work of male playwrights can be compromised by male-centred perspectives that result in possible distorted representations of female experience,[52] but it can also be argued that many Renaissance men saw the female position as reflecting aspects of their own social positions, for a man of this period would have been obliged to contend with the effects of social class and sexual hierarchy. Besides, an analysis of gender cannot focus only on women and femininity but must also take into account representations of masculinity**,** though one needs to offer a plural and diverse approach to masculinity and not equate it with patriarchy.[53] Both feminist

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[52] Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. by Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 22-41; she writes, "one of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented and that through the study of stereotypes of women, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be", p. 27; see also *Men in Feminism*, ed. by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987).

[53] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 77-81; ibid, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 183-88. R.W. Connell has called for a recognition that at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted, alerting us to the fact that many variant masculinities existed (and exist) in tension with each other. Consequently men, like women, can be

and early modern notions and understandings of patriarchy are necessary if we are to understand the complex distribution of authority between the sexes. The historicisation of patriarchy has been central to the concerns of women's history and gender history, although there has been conflict over its meaning and usage.[54] For many feminist theorists and historians, the defining feature of patriarchy is men's systematic domination of women but, like attempts to define femininity, definitions of masculinity are indirectly revealed by prescriptive attempts to preserve them and men who undermined the normative ideal can also be described as deviating from it.

The *querelle des femmes* texts developed constructions of women according to the cultural ideology of the period and the thesis highlights the ways in which the plays present the woman's question in the context of the various positions taken up by the *querelle des femmes*. The thesis aims to interpret the ways in which the plays understand the 'feminine' and femininity and to pay attention to the place of the feminine as a discursive construct. In analysing the representation of women in my corpus, one has to take into account that the views present in the plays can be prescriptive rather than descriptive and that many texts of the *querelle des femmes* cannot be characterised as either pro- or anti- feminine. The plays both reflect and question the dominant ideology of their times about gender, which rests upon certain fundamental assumptions about women that are believed to be true at a certain period and therefore do not appear to bear the character of assumptions. One has to distinguish between these existing assumptions about women and the plays' responses to them, which both reproduce and challenge essentialist conceptions that positioned women as threat. Each chapter will identify the conventional assumptions, regarding one the four specific issues tackled in the thesis, in order to understand how the plays' representations of women can be considered as threatening to a Renaissance audience or readership. I also consider the historical,

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subordinated and marginalized by 'hegemonic' gender constructions which deliver the 'patriarchal dividend' only to the complicit.

[54] Patriarchy was central to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political thought which approached kingship in terms of paternal rule, through analogy with the household. See Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-21; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth- century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

political, social and theatrical conditions under which the plays were written and performed, in order to uncover the playwrights' shifting positions within the *querelle des femmes* and the potentially subversive elements of their representation of women as threat.

Following early modern scholars, who have stated that the terms 'feminist' or 'pro-woman' or 'anti-feminist' or 'misogynistic' should be avoided when referring to the period, the terms 'pro-' and 'anti-feminine' will be privileged and used in order to acknowledge the particularities of the social and discursive conditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[55] Indeed, the thesis starts from the postulate that both pro- and anti-feminine texts can be ambiguous and self-contradictory, and it is precisely this ambiguity and those contradictions which are the interest of the thesis. I refuse to simplify and homogenise by categorizing the inner complexities of a text. Indeed, as has been put forward by many scholars, defending women and praising women's qualities did not necessarily question anti-feminine discourse; conversely, as will be argued here, representing women as threat does not necessarily mean that the plays are simply and only marked by an anti-feminine discourse. I oppose early modern feminist scholars who consider that the texts of the *querelle des femmes* are designed *either* to praise *or* to blame women. In that sense I follow the feminist philosophy of Penelope Deutscher, who has argued for the need to avoid homogenising the contradictions and tensions that mark discourses on women, since doing so contributes to stabilizing and simplifying the discourse on gender which is not present in the text, and in so doing actually validates patriarchal ideology.[56] I put forward the various and heterogeneous effects of representing women as threat, achieved in the plays by either reproducing or questioning the anti- and pro-feminine discourses on women, but the thesis will not aim to draw together these multiple meanings; rather, it seeks

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[55] For the use of these terms, see Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1997); ibid., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Marc Angenot, *Les Champions des femmes: examen du discours sur la supériorité des femmes (1400-1800)*, (Montréal: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1977); *Jean Bouchet, oeuvres complètes I: Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin*, ed. by Adrian Armstrong (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006); Adrian Armstrong notes: "nous préférons le terme ' pro-féminin', tout en soulignant qu'employer un terme autre que 'féministe' a deux inconvénients: cela masque d'abord, la continuité bien réelle, tant rhétorique que politique, entre les débats de la Renaissance et ceux des XXe et XXIe siècles", p. 31.

[56] Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

to reveal contradictory impulses within a text and acknowledge the impossibility of any fixed textual interpretation. I am suggesting in my work that the modalities of the representation of 'women as threat' can have various and ambivalent effects, which must be put forward in order to understand the playwrights' positions within the so-called 'feminist' discourses. However, I decline to engage in, and categorise, the representation of women in the plays as either pro- or anti- feminine since by doing so, by stabilizing their representation, the analysis would run the risk of participating in a phallocentric discourse and of simplifying textual and performative complexities. I demonstrate that the plays' representation of women as threat points in conflicting directions, simultaneously supporting and undermining its own propositions.

As will be explored, the plays of my corpus complicate any simple readings, by representing women who use, and are empowered by qualities regarded as masculine and who subvert feminine codes and qualities. Natalie Zemon Davis notes that the exceptional woman-on-top or the virtuous virago, were a resource for feminist reflection on women's capacities,[57] but one has to be suspicious of any discourse of praise; indeed respect for women can be analysed as simply a veil for misogyny and can be a way for men to re-affirm gender boundaries.[58] Therefore, one has to question a so called pro-feminine discourse and 'unveil' the mask of respect and praise. I contend that if the strategy of praising women hides a real discourse which aims to marginalise women, the opposing strategy whereby women seem to be condemned (which would be the 'declared or apparent level') could also work as 'a veil' for the real or latent discourse, which would be potentially subversive. The textual ambivalences conveyed by the plays' representation of women as threat will be identified by analysing the possible link between moments of instability or contradictions in the plays and the weakness or difficulty that the playwrights face in their representation of women as threat. One can find an emphasis on phallocentrism and misogyny but also demonstrate how misogyny and phallocentrism are mitigated in the same text: this 'constitutive

[57] Zemon Davies, 'Women on Top', in Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, p. 172.
[58] Sarah Kofman, *Le Respect des Femmes (Kant et Rousseau)* (Paris: Editions Galinée, 1982), p. 55: "le respect des femmes est toujours l'envers glorieux, moral, de la 'misogynie' des hommes." She also notes "le respect des femmes, sentiment apparemment très moral, n'est-il pas un masque qui recouvre- et tente peut être aussi de réparer- toute une opération de maîtrise?" p. 14.

instability is simultaneously destabilising and stabilising'.[59] The plays' instability and ambivalence produce discourses that exploit the very tension present in the texts of the *querelle des femmes* on the issues of women and power, violence, eloquence and sexuality.

The thesis aims to analyse ways in which this textual instability (or ambivalence) in the plays subverts or supports phallocentrism, and the definitions of gender and gender roles of the Renaissance, by demonstrating the potential of these two concepts, ambivalence and threat, to stabilise and destabilise discourses on women (whether pro- or anti-feminine or both). The very concept of ambivalence could be considered threatening since choosing to depict ambivalent female figures who depart from established gender discourses is in itself threatening, and more interestingly, because one might see textual instability or ambivalence as both constitutive and subversive of phallocentrism. In other words, when the plays reflect anti-feminine discourse, this does not necessarily mean that the playwrights comply with patriarchal discourse and vice versa. Indeed, subversion is to be located within the dominant discourse; it is a response to it, and therefore cannot be isolated from it.[60] I identify the effects of such instabilities and ambiguities that co-exist within the discourses on women as threat in the plays, and their potential for subversion in both reflecting and resisting the dominant discourse.[61]

Moreover, the thesis acknowledges the permeability of the literary and the historical, showing that literary works and especially plays are the product of collective negotiations and exchanges between text, playwrights and audiences.[62] I situate drama in an explicitly political, social and ideological framework. Such readings of the plays can provide strategies that emphasise the contradictory elements of a text and the 'traces of social struggle'[63] that produced the text, as

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[59] Deutscher, pp. 3-4.
[60] Deutscher, pp. 3-4. The question of whether ambivalence is inherently subversive will be considered below. As will be shown, Renaissance theatre can be seen to function to contain the dangerous prospect of non-essential gendered identities that its very composition inevitably opens up. On this issue, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[61] Deutscher, p. 15.
[62] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiation: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. VIII.
[63] Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.

theatre not only reflects but produces social changes and contestation.[64] I will thus question certain forms of new-historicist analysis which claim that subversion was produced only to be contained, in order to help sustain dominant power structures. I argue that theatre is both subversive and recuperative and question the extent to which the representation of women as threat is recuperated, by presenting the mechanisms that enable the playwrights to do so and the effects of such strategies. I acknowledge that power defines itself in relation to what threatens it, but the thesis goes a step further by examining how the representation of women as threat is subject both to containment and subversion; no clear-cut discourse can be admitted, especially if one takes into account the staging practices in France and England and the prospect of performance which precludes any stabilised and homogenised interpretations.

Theatre is a cultural agent that can create and sustain ideology and determine which conflicts of interests are represented and how they are framed.[65] One has to take into account the culture from which the plays emerged but also the interaction and exchange of social energies conveyed by theatre, in a period when power was a spectacle and a spectacle could be an assertion of power. But I will not turn the plays into an illustration of something assumed to be prior to the text or into a political event or a social phenomenon, since such readings deny the plurality and contradictions present in a text. I also avoid generalisations about 'woman' that transcend racial, ethnic, sexual, and class categories, as adopting these would lead me to participate in anti-feminine discourse.

5. Structure of the study

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[64] I will both acknowledge and contest Stephen Greenblatt; he explains that theatre allows 'the circulation of social energy and that all works of art are products of negotiation and exchange', in Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations,* p. 5; this view is shared by Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) and Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[65] On the stage controversy in France, see Henry Phillips, *The Theatre and Its Critics in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); ibid, 'La querelle du théâtre en France et en Angleterre', in *France et Grande-Bretagne de la chute de Charles Ier à celle de Jacques II (1649-1688)*, ed. by Christopher Smith and Effrieda Dubois (Norwich: Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies, 1990), pp. 151-61.

The research questions that the thesis answers are not only how far and in what ways women are represented as threat in the plays but also the effects of such strategies.

Since both the French and English plays in my corpus can be positioned within the context of the *querelle des femmes*, I will draw attention to the common issues by analysing the French and English plays together in each chapter. The four chapters illustrate the increasingly complex challenges to established gender discourses and focus on the four major and interrelated issues identified previously: women and power, violence, speech and sexuality.

The first chapter is devoted to single dramatic works from England and France which are analysed and compared in detail so as to demonstrate the specificity and complexity of the two corpora and political backgrounds. The second chapter broadens the focus, in order to illustrate the flexible critical perspective that I consider essential to my comparative analysis, an approach founded on a sense of the complexity of individual plays, as well as their increasing connectedness. A complementary methodology is used in Chapters Three and Four as I analyse French and English plays in parallel sections, to bring out the increasing similarities between them. Chapters Two and Three follow a chronological evolution, since they also aim to demonstrate a change or evolution between plays and playwrights.

In Chapter One, I analyse the representation of women and power, through the transgression of gender codes and appropriation of masculine values in *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane.* The issue of power relationships and their possible reversal is crucial in these plays. I analyse how power in the plays is a means through which women are controlled, but also the very thing that they are seeking to gain; the threat that women represent is manifested by their rebellion, resistance and subversion of patriarchal power and structures, which enable women both to question and to validate them, as power is fuelled by resistance.

In Chapter Two, on women's violence in *Cléopâtre Captive* by Jodelle, *Porcie* and *Les Juifves* by Garnier, *Sophonisba* by Marston, *Henry VI 1,2,3* and *Titus Andronicus,* I consider the degrees to which certain kinds of violence are sanctified and others abhorred, in order to acknowledge the threatening potential of female violence and to understand the strategies of social repression of female

violent instincts and qualities defined as masculine both within the plays and as part of their overall social context.

Chapter Two focuses on physical violence, while verbal and psychological violence are addressed in Chapter Three. Women's power over men can be also asserted through words, as is seen in Chapter Three on women as rhetorical threat in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI 1,2,3, Richard III, Coriolanus, Sophonisba* by Marston*,* Garnier's *Les Juifves* and Bounin's *La Soltane*. Because of the political context as well as the literary context which saw the emergence of female voices, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period in which perceptions of women's speech underwent a change; women's increasing verbal involvement in, and even invasion of, the public sphere was regarded as threatening to male dominance. Therefore the representation of female speech in the plays has to be examined by taking into account how condemnations and devalorisation of women's speech played an important role in determining women's status. Besides, women can seduce men with their words, not only to arouse desire but also to provoke action.

Seduction can also be physical when the male characters are represented as dependent on women's beauty, as will be seen in Chapter Four, where the issue of sexuality is also tackled through its link with race in *La Carthaginoise* by Montchrestien, *Sophonisba* by Marston, *Titus Andronicus* and *Les Portugais Infortunés* by Nicolas Chrétien des Croix. The preceding chapters point to one common feature, the imbrications of the issues of gender, sexuality and race, which is the concern of Chapter Four. The question of woman's desire and sexuality runs parallel to the question of power and violence**:** by invading the sphere of violence, women invade the public sphere and a construction of female violence as savage and barbarous can be regarded as a way to contain the threat raised by that invasion. I analyse the greatest threat for Renaissance men, the confrontation of the white woman and the male exotic other, and put forward strategies of 'sexualisation of race' and 'racialisation of sexuality' in the plays; this analysis provides a context for the questioning of the 'orientalist' and 'counter-orientalist' discourse in *Les Portugais Infortunés* as a specific test case.

A note on the terms used

I will use the terms ‘Renaissance’ to refer to a period rather than a cultural movement and more specifically will refer to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, rather than ‘early modern’ to emphasise the specificities of the historical contexts. To distinguish between French and English drama of the period covered by the thesis, I will use the terms Elizabethan or Renaissance drama for England and ‘humanist drama’ for France because they have become standard terms.

A note on the editions used

The New Cambridge Shakespeare editions of the three parts of *Henry VI* by Michael Hattaway are used in the thesis for various reasons. First, Hattaway’s edition is less interventionist and offers a consistent editorial approach, whereas the Oxford and Arden editions are edited by different editors. Hattaway’s edition has also been chosen for the clarity of its footnotes and its rich introduction.

For general issues of dating and authorship regarding the three parts of *Henry VI,* see *The Complete Works, William Shakespeare*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Introduction, p. 19 and pp. 175, 176, 197 and 217-18. To summarise, *Henry VI Part 2* was possibly written before 1594; *Henry VI Part 3* was first printed in 1595 and a second edition, a quarto (Q2), was printed in 1600. *Henry VI Part 1*’s first and only substantive text was published in the First Folio, and the traditional view is that *Part 1* is a collaborative work written later than the two other plays. Taylor and Wells explain why the *Henry VI* plays were possibly not entirely Shakespeare’s work. Collaborative authorship was common in the period, and as a young playwright, Shakespeare may have worked with others in composing these early works. It must be pointed out here that no major differences between folio and quarto versions are relevant to my study. Moreover, as pointed out by Hattaway, even if the plays were in whole or in part not by Shakespeare, it should not affect the way we read them.

Issues of dating of Shakespeare’s plays are acknowledged here but will not be approached again in the thesis, as they do not affect my argument. The order in which Shakespeare’s plays were written has also divided scholars. Many scholars

date *Titus Andronicus* to the early 1590's, such as Jonathan Bate, who suggests that the play was written in late 1593. Likewise Taylor suggests a dating before 1594, as the play is entered by John Dante in the Stationers' Register on 6 February 1594. As for *Richard III,* it was entered in the Stationers' Register on 20 October 1597. For *Coriolanus*, Parker suggests late 1608 to early 1609 as the likeliest period of composition.

Jonathan Bate's Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus* has been chosen for its rich introduction, which contextualises the play, and closely surveys critical approaches to the play and its recent performance history, but also offers a complete and radical reappraisal of Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy.

I have chosen to use the Oxford edition of *Richard III* by John Jowett and *Coriolanus* by R.B. Parker for their attempts to offer an edition that brings us closest to the play as it would have been staged in Shakespeare's theatre. Though the Oxford editions are more interventionist, as stage directions are added or expanded to clarify the actions, the introductions provide very rich materials, as they include and engage with recent historicist and gender-based approaches.

As for the rest of the corpus, the editions used in the plays are either the only ones available, notably for the French plays*, La Soltane* by Bounin and *Sophonisbe* by Antoine de Montchrestien, or the most recent ones in the cases of Garnier's and Jodelle's plays and Marston's *Sophonisba*.

For other plays by Shakespeare I have simply used *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997) for convenience and also because it is widely available.

A note on spelling

I have normalised the spelling when quoting from early editions of the French plays by distinguishing between i/j and u/v.

CHAPTER I: WOMEN AS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THREAT

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider one of the most central issues in the discourse of the *querelle des femmes*, female power, as it was one of the greatest sources of anxiety both in France and in England in a context marked by anomalous female rule, which questioned political and domestic patriarchy.[1] As will be seen, the common feature of the plays analysed in this chapter is that they stage ambitious women who are able to rule in a period which saw anxiety about female rulers in France and in England. They represent women as political and social threats through their transgression of conventional gender roles in the public sphere. The female characters in the plays are depicted as empowered by values and codes regarded as masculine, and as violating patriarchal codes, becoming a threat to regal authority through their involvement in the political and public realms. I will analyse the various strategies used to represent women and power by analysing and comparing Shakespeare's tetralogy *Henry VI* and Gabriel Bounin's *La Soltane*, notably by relating the plays' representation of women as social and political threats, to the historical and political contexts.

The three parts of *Henry VI* feature women in untraditional roles as political actors who exercise significant power in the conduct of state affairs.[2] These roles

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[1] John Knox, *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558).Women's rule was perceived as an anomaly, and the female ruler was perceived as a monster, an inadequate man. The debate about female rulers has been surveyed in Louise Olga Fradenburg, *Women and Sovereignty* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: The Knox Debate* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994); Susan M. Felch, 'The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women', *Sixteenth Century Journal,* 26 (1995), 805–22; *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. by Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany: University of New York Press, 1995); Ruling queens and queen consorts (wives of kings) are discussed in Lisa Hopkins, *Women Who Would be Kings: Female Rulers of the Sixteenth Century* (London: St. Martin's, 1991); Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Conroy Derval, 'Reines, invraisemblable rois?' in *L'Invraisemblance du pouvoir: mises en scène de la souveraineté au XVIIe siècle,* ed. by Jean-Vincent Blanchard and Hélène Visentin (Paris: Presses universitaires Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), pp. 89-122.

[2] Jean Howard observes that 'in the canonical plays of the second tetralogy, by contrast, not only are women's roles reduced both in size and number, but the field of women's action is also constricted:

must be carefully examined and be viewed in the context of a process of national consolidation and self-definition. The vogue for national history plays in late sixteenth-century England appears as an important component of the cultural project of imagining an English nation, as these plays incited patriotic interest in England's past and participated in the process by which the English forged a sense of themselves as a nation.[3] The tetralogy of *Henry VI* is relatively less studied and has not attracted much interest from a pro-feminine perspective, as the plays seem to represent obvious threatening female characters, who transgress social and political codes. However, these plays give a crucial role to women, and stage not only the powerful woman but also the warrior woman who goes to war.[4] I will acknowledge the specificity of these plays' representation of women by demonstrating that they both corroborate and question misogynist assumptions about women and power. I will highlight, through my analysis of the characters of Joan and Margaret, the conflicting contemporary attitudes towards the warrior woman by putting forward the pro-feminine potential of the plays. Moreover, the differences in political context will be taken into account to analyse the specificities of each country's representation of women and power. I will use the English plays to illuminate the French play, *La Soltane*, and compare their representations of the difference between authority and power within the context of the *querelle des femmes*.

La Soltane by Gabriel Bounin is the first French tragedy about a relatively recent event, rather than a classical or biblical one (1561), and is dominated by Rose's political stratagems and plotting to have the sultan's son, Mustapha, killed and to ensure her own sons' political future.[5] Rose's character can be seen to embody all the fears created by the political context in France which saw the regency of Catherine de Medici, a mother and a foreigner. Catherine de Medici's attempt to reunite the two faiths in the Edict of January (1562) was heavily criticised by Catholics; but quite tellingly, she was criticised as a mother and as a

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the few female characters who appear on stage are typically confined to domestic settings and domestic roles', in Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 24.

[3] Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 18.

[4] This figure is also present in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies, such as Cordelia in *King Lear* and Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

[5] Gabriel Bounin, *La Soltane,* ed. by Michael John Heath (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1977).

wife ('they wondered how could the regent, wife, and mother of a king of France advocate the Huguenots' legal right to exist within the kingdom, when the king's own coronation oath required their suppression.')[6] Because regency 'always retained within its framework the disorder, dissolution, and dissonance it was designed to banish',[7] the representation of Rose's claims for power in *La Soltane* needs to be carefully examined with a view to establishing how far she is identified as the source of political violence, division and disorder.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, respect for gender codes was one of the bases for the maintenance of social order, which in this context involves patriarchal structures that institutionalised male dominance over women. Patriarchy was regarded as the 'natural order' of things, and the basis of society was the respect for sex roles and the power relations associated with them.[8] But Shakespeare and Bounin chose to depict women who refuse to respect and submit to their subordinate role, and thus endanger social order. Playing with their societies' anxiety about the frailty of gender boundaries, the dramatists create female characters who transgress gender roles and conventional behaviour notably through their claims to power.

In this chapter, I will therefore first identify the various strategies used by women to claim power and the anxiety resulting from their violation of gender and political codes when they are represented as threats to patriarchal and regal authority. As will be seen, in Shakespeare's tetralogy *Henry VI* and *La Soltane* the female characters use, subvert and are empowered by qualities and values considered as masculine but also by feminine values and qualities, a strategy for

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[6] Mark P. Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation France: 1500-1648* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 25.

[7] Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 14.

[8] Relations between gender disorder and the patriarchal order have been discussed for instance in Jouanna Arlette, *Ordre social: mythes et hiérarchies dans la France du XVIème siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1977); Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Natalie Zemon-Davis, 'Women on Top' in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 124–51; David Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England,* ed. by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 116–36; Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

which Elizabeth and also Catherine de Medici were famous. Indeed both Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici used what Luce Irigaray calls 'mimicry' or 'strategic essentialism', which can be defined as a form of resistance where women imperfectly imitate stereotypes about themselves so as to show up these stereotypes and to undermine them, using and subverting so-called disempowering tools and playing with gender codes, to question the anti-feminine discourse that saw women as unfit for power.[9] After identifying the strategies used by women to threaten patriarchal and regal authority in the plays, I will question the extent to which the potential subversiveness of representing women and power can be regarded as a tool to contain the social and political threat they can embody in the plays. I will demonstrate that by questioning the roles of women in the social disorder depicted in *Henry VI. 1, 2, 3* and in *La Soltane*, one might put forward a strategy of both containment and subversion as the ambivalent representation of women and power both subverts and supports the arrangements of the playwrights' societies, notably the patriarchal definition of gender roles in the period.

1.2. 'This it is when men are rul'd by women': Manly women, Amazons and Viragos in *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* [10]

Political power in Renaissance Europe was given legitimacy through paternal and patriarchal authority in both theology and politics. However, in reality political patriarchy proved rather paradoxical in the context of female regents and queens. Anxieties about women's ability to rule simmered in England as first Mary then Elizabeth came to the throne. Because of the theoretical impossibility of queenship in France, defined by Salic law, female regency was associated with external issues such as male minority or captivity and was regarded as an exception due to circumstances and therefore was more acceptable than queenship. Women in power had to face ideological definitions of woman as ontologically inferior and politically subordinate, and also the literary background that debated the issue of

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[9] See Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and The Subordination of the Feminine: *This Sex Which Is Not One'*, in *A Feminist Literary Anthology,* ed. by Mary Eagleton, pp. 316-17 (p. 317).
[10] William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I.1.62, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E.Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 507-943.

women in power. For instance, Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* (1540) addresses the question of woman's rule, and argues the pro-feminine and traditional point that a woman is capable of governing, if only or primarily when no legally or politically suitable man is available, as in the case of regency. On the other side, Vives shows resistance to women's rule in *Instruction of a Christian Woman* for guidance in the education of Mary Tudor:

> Vives' instructions to Mary make it clear that he does not think that she, as a woman, can function as a monarch. For she cannot produce an heir to the throne without marrying, and she cannot marry and govern, since for a woman of any rank whatever not to be subordinate to her husband in all respects is to violate the laws of nature and thus to lose the 'worship' or respect her rank entitles her to. [11]

Women who attempted to rule in their own right were perceived as anomalies, monsters, deformed women, or insufficiently male in anti-feminine writings. According to John Knox, a woman with political authority first violates a law of nature; second, disobeys Scripture; and third, disrupts 'good order' which is maintained by having 'the "head" govern the "body"'.[12] Other writers, though not directly opposing female rule, viewed the requisite, active virtues of a monarch (courage, strength, leadership) as contrasting with the traditional, passive virtues of femininity (silence, modesty, obedience).[13]

However, contrary to their societies' expectations of passivity and meekness in women, Shakespeare and Bounin chose to depict female characters 'stout of courage, fierce, testy, crafty, subtle, industrious, politic'.[14] More threateningly, the female characters in *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane* are portrayed as empowered by ostensibly masculine qualities such as courage, daring, boldness and resolution. In *Henry V Part 1*, Margaret and Joan are endowed with the manly qualities of courage and military valour. Joan even shows that women can potentially be

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[11] Jordan, p. 118.

[12] Constance Jordan, 'Representing Political Androgyny: More on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I', in Anne M.Haselkorn and Betty Travitsky, *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 157-77 (p.158).

[13] *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives,* ed. by Mary Beth Rose, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. XXI.

[14] L. Lemnius in *The Touchstone Of Complexions,*1633 cited in Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination 1500-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 61.

physically superior to men, as exemplified by her defeat of the Dauphin[15] and thus questions the discourse that defines women as physically inferior. Whilst Joan demonstrates that she can be a 'warlike mate' (*Part 1*, I.2.92) to the Dauphin, Margaret demonstrates that she is able to raise and lead an army and to go to war, becoming a military threat to the power of King Edward:

> I spy a black suspicious threatening cloud,
> That will encounter with our glorious sun
> Ere he attain his easeful western bed-
> I mean, my lords, those powers that the queen
> Hath raised in Gallia have arrived our coast
> And, as we hear, march on to fight with us.[16]

In *Henry VI Part 3*, Margaret takes over the king's and her husband's role, thus transgressing patriarchal and political codes. But the acquisition of masculine qualities does not only empower the female characters and threaten the male characters' masculinity, as by exposing the frailty of the definitions of gender roles, the playwrights confront men with the potential power of women when they transgress the limits assigned to their sex. Indeed, another issue faced by *querelle des femmes* writers was how to praise a woman for fulfilling an active, often military office, that was culturally defined as 'masculine', for example in the case of the Amazon Queen Penthesilea, Semiramis, Joan of Arc or Cleopatra. These women's achievements are valorised in gendered terms: as those of women overcoming their nature to accede to a virile heroic ideal and surpassing the expectations of either sex, in Jean Bouchet's *Temple de la Bonne Renommée* (1516) for instance.[17] On the other hand, Boccacio's influential *Concerning Famous Women* (1365) praised one hundred and six notable women, but singled out for praise women who possessed the traditional virtues of chastity, silence and obedience, whilst women who were active in the public realm, notably rulers and

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[15] William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry VI*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), I. 2 93-105. Joan's 'masculine' qualities might have also been used for propagandist purposes, to suggest the effeminacy of the French ruling class (particularly the Dauphin) and this partly reflects a discourse of nation whereby French aristocrats are represented as physically and morally feeble.

[16] William Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), V.3.4-9.

[17] Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 172.

warriors, were often depicted as being punished for entering the masculine sphere, for example through defeat in battle as in the cases of Joan of Arc and Cleopatra. Likewise, Penthesilea and Semiramis, though praised for their heroic behaviour, ultimately lost and this could validate misogynist attacks as well. Indeed, praising qualities coded as masculine in women or promoting the masculine as an ideal, as in the Boccacean tradition, sets up 'masculine' and 'feminine' as symbolic positions and does not necessarily equate with a defence of women. Some *querelle des femmes* authors believe more than others in the gendering of certain qualities: a female warrior may threaten the assumptions of some authors more radically than others, though a non-expert audience or readership would be likely to see her as a threat to their existing assumptions about what the two sexes can and cannot do, deconstructing the supposed ideal, challenging and even undermining its value.

In *Henry VI 1,2,3*, the 'manly' women, Joan and Margaret, are represented as threatening to the social order when they violate patriarchal codes through involvement in the political and public realm. Indeed, as stated by Warwick, Margaret's intervention (even verbal) into the male realm of politics is regarded as inappropriate.[18] As for Joan of Arc, she presents herself to the Dauphin as a messenger sent by God's mother, and as some kind of prophet whose mission is to 'free [her] country from calamity' (*Part 1*, I.2.80), thus excluding her power from the patriarchal world of the Father and endangering patriarchal power. Joan is indeed a figure of female deviance that carries the seeds of revolution with her as she rebels against political authority and as such she is given a moving plea for peace.[19]

Clothing offers a further means by which to challenge social order. In this period clothes were an essential means by which to distinguish both genders and social classes. Some issues were more important in England than in France and the *querelle des femmes* took a different form in the two countries.[20] The issue of cross-dressing is at the heart of the pamphlet war, notably the *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir,* and is an issue specific to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, as the figures of the manly woman and the womanly man were made to signify the

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[18] William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry VI,* ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), III.2. 208-10.
[19] *Henry VI, Part1*, III.3.44-57.
[20] Jordan, p. 301.

effacement of rank, and of a possible decline into anarchy, as dramatised in the tetralogy of *Henry VI* through the figure of the Amazon.[21] Hence the threat posed by Joan, a woman in manly attire, concerns issues of gender, class and rank. Joan violates the norms by dressing not just as a man, but as a nobleman (a knight), consequently upsetting social hierarchy:

> By adopting male dress of a lavishness which signalled superior class and authority, Joan took upon herself a kind of visual authority which overrode her womanhood and her inferior class origins. As the charges against her show, *both* these functions of her dress were seen as blatant and unforgivable challenge to social and political order.[22]

By violating gender roles and transgressing the limits assigned to their sex, masculinised female characters confront men with the threat of gender reversal. As Thomas Laqueur points out, in the sixteenth-century, 'to be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes. Sex before the seventeenth-century was still a sociological not an ontological category.'[23] The theory of the one-sex model, developed by Galen in the second century A.D., though contested by some, dominated European thinking about sexual difference from classical antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century.[24] Early modern moralists constantly reminded men that manhood was not a state, a natural condition, but that it was to be 'achieved not through biology but through an effort of will'.[25] Besides, the one-sex-model stated that women's genitals were simply

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[21] Polemics, pamphlets and pseudonyms characterized the English *querelle* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before the English pamphlet wars on gender, *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* (1620), a complex, contentious literature about men, women, sex, love and marriage was reaching English readers in early printed translations, see Anne E.B. Coldiron, *English Printing, Verse Translation, and the Battle of the Sexes, 1476-1557* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.1. The authors of the pamphlets *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* associated signs of gender with signs of social status. On the relation of these pamphlets to contemporary drama, especially to *The Roaring Girl*, see Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 64-92.

[22] Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters,* p.157; see also Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism (*London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981).

[23] Laqueur, p. 8.

[24] The one-sex model was also contested and challenged. The first unequivocal challenge to this notion is in the work of the French physician Dulaurens in *Controverses Anatomiques* (middle of the sixteenth-century to 1609?).

[24] Orgel, *Impersonations,* p.19.

[25] Orgel, *Impersonations,* p.19.

inverted male organs, and that women were essentially men, in whom a lack of heat kept the organs inside.[26] Instead of being divided by their sexual organs, it was believed that men and women had common ones. Many stories reported that women could change miraculously and 'turn into men' by externalizing their sex, echoing a fantasy of physiological change which was feared by men in the Renaissance, since the visible penis (or lack of it) was the only sign which entitled a person to have the name of 'man' or 'woman'.[27] As Laqueur points out, for this society, it was as if 'the body was unable to resist the pressures of blurred gender, and can at any moment actually change to match its social perversion'.[28] Even more frightening for men, Renaissance physiology (especially Galen) believed that 'we [men] all begin as female, and masculinity is a development out of and away from femininity',[29] thus endangering the distinctions between the sexes and above all men's social position as 'the boundaries between male and female are primarily political; rhetorical rather than biological claims regarding sexual difference and sexual desire are primary'.[30]

Theatre and women raised the same anxiety in the Elizabethan society, the fear of men's effeminacy. Renaissance anti-theatricalists, like the two famous pamphleteers Gossom and Stubbes, believed in the power of theatre to transform men and attacked cross-dressing. They feared that costume could *really* alter the male body beneath the costume and identified the boy-actor with the part he was playing, believing that the actor *becomes* his part in order to play it well.[31] Consequently, the boy-actor acting the role of a woman can indeed turn into a woman, especially when his performance was particularly convincing. Phillip Stubbes in *Anatomie of Abuses* defines men in woman's clothes as 'monsters of both kindes, half women, half men'[32] and quotes the Deutoronomical Law which

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[26] See Laqueur, pp. 35-42; Laqueur quotes a French author, Guillaume Bouchet: 'la matrice de la femme, […] n'est que la bourse et verge renversées de l'homme (the matrix of the woman is nothing but the scrotum and penis of the man inverted)' p. 63.
[27] Laqueur, p. 127. It was believed that an increase of heat in the body of women that could happen during puberty or by having 'active sex' could break the 'interior-exterior barrier' and turn a woman into a man. Laqueur mentions Ambroise Paré 'On Monsters and Travels' and the 'Marie-turned-Germain' story picked up by Montaigne in his travel journal.
[28] Laqueur, p. 125.
[29] Laqueur, p. 20.
[30] Laqueur, p. 19.
[31] Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 14.
[32] Stubbes quoted in Orgel, *Impersonations,* p. 19.

stated that 'garments [were] set down for signes distinctive between sexe and sexe',[33] thus acknowledging that costumes were a distinctive sign of gender, in order to attack the boy actor whose disguise was also for him a means to alter sex. Joan's role as leader of the French army involves her in the same transgression against God and the social hierarchy that was repeatedly charged against the players in Shakespeare's England: wearing a costume and playing a part that belie her true social rank and natural sex. Clothing can construct and deconstruct gender and gender differences and cross-dressing can challenge notions of binarity, questionning the categories of 'male' and 'female', whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural.[34] Cross-dressing problematises the question of gender reversal and sexuality in the Renaissance as transvestism often involves the 'exhibition' of ambiguity. The boy actor's and Joan's cross-dressing throws into question the binary categories of 'male' and 'female' and as a result they become a transgressive and ambiguous figure, which disrupts and creates a crisis, not simply of the categories of male and female, but of category itself.[35] The *Henry VI* plays also expose the artificiality of gender roles and codes, through the figure of the threatening Amazon, who is not only a manly woman but also a warrior who makes men play the woman's part:

> they murdred certaine of their husbands […] if they brought forth daughters, they norished and trayned them up in armes, and other warlik exercises […] If they were delivered of males, they sent them to their fathers, and if by chance they kept any backe, they murdred them, or else brake their armes and legs in sutch wise as they had no power to beare weapons, and served for nothynge but to spin, twist, and doe other feminine labour.[36]

Joan and 'Captain Margaret' (*Part 2*, I.6.75) are indeed 'amazons' in their mingling of male military qualities and female sexuality, a combination condemned

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[33] Stubbes quoted in Orgel, *Impersonations*, p. 4.
[34] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 10-11.
[35] Garber, p. 17; see also her introduction 'Clothes Make the Man', pp. 1-21 and 'Dress-codes or the theatricality of difference', pp. 21-41, for her analysis of cross-dressing in the Elizabethan period.
[36] William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1575), ed. by Joseph Jacobs, 3 vols. (New York: Dover, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 159-61.

in Shakespeare's time ('those mannish queans are most degenerate'[37]). But the figure of the Amazon was marked by ambivalence; Elizabeth herself was associated with it but also with the figure of the 'virago', as exemplified by the following testimony by Thomas Heywood:

> Let me not here forget the Campe at *Tilbery* in which her Majestie was in person, and that if the *Spaniard* had prevailed by Sea to have given him battaile by land, appearing in the head of her Troopes, and incouraging her Souldiers, habited like an *Amazonian* Queene, Buskined and plumed, having a golden Truncheon, Gantlet, and Gorget; Armes sufficient to express her high and magnanimous spirit […] All these Heroyicke Ladies [i.e amazons] are generally called *Viragoes*, which is derived of Masculine Spirits, and to attempt those brave and Martial Enterprises, which belong to the honour of men, in which number, this Penthesilea hath prime place.[38]

As this very phallic description illustrates, masculinity and femininity of mind or soul were thought capable of existing in people, irrespective of their biological definition but these powers were largely restricted to aristocratic women.[39] These 'male spirited' women were called by the Elizabethans 'virago'[40] and could behave in a manlike (*viriliter*) fashion as rulers of lands,[41] go to war and even be women rulers acknowledged by their peers to exercise political power, like Elizabeth or Margaret in *Henry VI Part 3.* Margaret is indeed depicted as a perfect commander and king, encouraging her army and calling on the masculine values of pride and honour to infuse courage in them.[42] She embodies the best qualities in the masculine tradition: fearless courage, toughness, arrogant defiance, and daring:

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[37] Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance,* p. 75, quoting *An Apologie for Women-Kinde* (1605).

[38] Thomas Heywood, *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the Most Worthy Women of the World* (London, 1640), p. 96.

[39] *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Victims or Viragos,* ed. by Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), p. 12; see also chapter by Kimberly A. Lo Prete 'Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women', pp. 17-39.

[40] Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Harvester Press: Brighton, 1981), p.35. See also *Amazons, Savages, and Machiavels: Travel and Colonial Writing in English, 1550-1630: An Anthology*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[41] Meek and Lawless, p. 12.

[42] Likewise, Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage (1586)* interrogates questions of sex, gender, and sexuality, issues incessantly debated in both the *querelle des femmes*, and the drama of the period. But it can also be argued that *Dido* reinscribes rather than questions gender stereotypes, positioning feminine passion in opposition to masculine reason. Dido exemplifies the stereotypical female ruled by passion, playing the expected stereotyped gender roles. Her representation in Marlowe is marked

> This speak I, lords, to let you understand,
> If case some of you would fly from us,
> That there's no hoped-for mercy with the brothers
> More that with ruthless waves, with sands, and rocks.
> Why courage, then! What cannot be avoided
> 'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear.
> *(Part 3*, V.4.33-38)

Prince Edward's reaction echoes Thomas Heywood's praise of the Queen:

> Methinks a woman of this valiant spirit
> Should if a coward heard her speak these words,
> Infuse his breast with magnanimity
> And make him, naked, foil a man-at-arms
> *(Part 3*, V.4.39-42)

Margaret's speech echoes the Queen's speech before the arrival of the Armada. Elizabeth, wearing armour, claimed that she had 'the body of a weak and feeble woman but […] the heart and stomach of a King.'[43] Here the queen seems to be retaining some of her femininity, in order to take a leading role in a man's world. Likewise, Margaret in *Part 3*, V.4 knows that she is in a difficult situation since all the other male leaders have died[44] and she is aware of her soldiers' despair and possible desire to abandon her cause. She is left on her own and thus needs to redefine her position, using the pronoun 'we' to involve her army but also the royal 'we' to indicate that she is assuming a public function ('we will not from the helm to sit and weep', *Part 3*, V.4.21) and states that the soldiers are not fighting for one individual, i.e. for her, but for the king and the country;[45] she knows indeed that she must now reinstate herself in a female position to convince the soldiers:

> Lords, knights, and gentlemen, what I should say
> My tears gainsay: for every word I speak
> Ye see I drink the water of my eye

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by ambivalence as the queen of Carthage initiates much of the action and is represented as a fluent orator; but the play also reflects the early modern culture's apprehension concerning the woman regnant and the maternal body. See on these issue, Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997), p. 123.

[43] Quoted in Angela Pitt, *Shakespeare's Women* (London: David and Charles Abbot, 1981), p. 27.

[44] *Henry VI, Part 3,* V.4.12-16 and 33-38.

[45] *Part 3*, V.5.76-78.

(*Part 3*, V.4.73-75)

Margare has now to play the woman's part, like Elizabeth at Tilbury.[46] Indeed playing with ambiguity and sexual ambiguity seems to have been necessary for a woman claiming political authority in sixteenth-century France and England. As Leah Marcus has demonstrated, Queen Elizabeth I's speeches are characterised by a gradual masculinisation in epithets used to refer to herself in her public speeches:

> [she] presented herself to the nation as both man and woman, queen and king, mother and firstborn son. Especially in years of particular crisis and at the end of her reign, we can observe her building the myth of her own androgyny in order to palliate the political anxieties aroused by her presence as a 'frail' woman on the throne.[47]

Elizabeth I's and Catherine de Medici's rules were linked to the performance and even hyperperformance of acceptable gender identities. Katherine Crawford has analysed how, in order to create and defend her position, Catherine de Medici had to strategically use gender ideology:

> [...] basing her claim to power and authority on accepted notions of female behaviour as a wife, mother, and widow. She then augmented those roles with political dimensions while contending that she remained within the

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[46] Elizabeth's use of public ceremonies and orations to enhance her power has been explored for instance in Sandra Logan, 'Making History: The Rhetorical and Historical Occasion of Elizabeth Tudor's Coronation Entry', *Journal of Medieval & Early Modern Studies,* 31 (Spring 2001), 251–82. Because of her peculiar status as an unmarried queen, Elizabeth I has merited the most attention, both in the early modern period and today. Important discussions of the reality and symbols surrounding her reign include Louis Montrose, 'Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations,* 1 (1983), 61–94; P. Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994; Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Whether Elizabeth actually gave the Tilbury speech has been debated in Susan Frye, 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', *Sixteenth Century Journal,* 23 (1992), 95–114, and Janet M. Green, '"I My Self": Queen Elizabeth I's oration at Tilbury camp', *Sixteenth Century Journal,* 28 (1997), 421–45.

[47] See Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Readings and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 66.

> boundaries of acceptable female behaviour [...] The slippage between her performances and the reception of them produced much anxiety.[48]

The female characters in the plays considered in this chapter are similarly characterised by such understanding and manipulation of gender codes. The Amazons, Margaret and Joan, are represented as empowered by an awareness of the frailty of gender codes and the opportunity to manipulate them, at a time when respect for gender roles was the only way to differentiate between sexes. These female characters, but also Elizabeth and Catherine de Medici, demonstrate how ambiguity and mimicry were necessary for a woman claiming political authority in the sixteenth century. Mimicry can be indeed defined as a phase when 'one must assume the feminine role deliberately, which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it.'[49] These fictional and real women show that they are able to play with, use and subvert gender codes through the appropriation of masculine roles, questioning thus the anti-feminine discourse that saw women as unfit for power. By playing with mimesis, the female characters resist such discourse elaborated in/by a masculine logic and make visible by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.[50] The female characters expose the frailty of gender definition and allow an embodiment of the feminist claim that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed roles by playing the woman's part when they need to and the man's part when they want to involve or invade the masculine spheres of politics and power. They demonstrate that they are fully aware of the role society expects them to play, and of the mechanisms which underpin a patriarchal society's control of women and power.

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[48] Crawford, p. 9. She adds that 'at this moment of religious division, civil unrest, and political crisis, the development of the early modern state turned in part on the pivot of feminine political performance. In displaying her (unthreatening) self as the royal widow and concerned mother, Catherine claimed a political niche based on her feminine virtues', pp. 24-25.

[49] Irigaray, 'The Powers of Discourse', p. 316.

[50] Irigaray, 'The Powers of Discourse', p. 316.

1.3 Disorder is a woman? Unveiling women's roles in *La Soltane* and *Henry VI 1, 2, 3*

According to Stephen Greenblatt, on the Renaissance stage subversion was produced only to be contained in a way that glorified and helped to sustain the dominant power structures of Elizabethan England.[51] I will now first consider the extent to which Greenblatt's statement can be applied to the plays by analysing the role given to women in the plays' representation of political disorder. I will raise the following questions: to what extent can it be said that the women in Shakespeare's *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and in *La Soltane* are defined as opponents and subverters of the historical enterprise and as agents of political disorder? By staging the threat of women in power, can it be said that Shakespeare challenges the logocentric, masculine historical record or is the very staging of women as political threat inherently a way to contain it? [52] I will demonstrate that the three parts of *Henry VI* and *La Soltane* reproduce the anti-feminine discourses that define socially and politically deviant women as agents of disorder, transgressors and subverters but that the repetition of the dominant discourse might be subversive in itself since a subversive discourse both refers to and resists the dominant discourse.[53] Indeed as will be discussed, textual instability or ambivalence is both constitutive and subversive of phallocentrism.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England**,** women were represented in a paradoxical double bind as 'they were despised for powerlessness, but even more for their strength because they should not seek power or compete with men'.[54] The plays reproduce this paradox as 'male virtues become female vices; reward and generosity, vengeance and protection are strengths and virtues when exercised by kings, but become partiality, intrigue, and personal wickedness when practiced by queens' but this double bind can in itself produce ambivalence.[55] Indeed, Rose in *La Soltane* demonstrates that she is a perfect disciple of Machiavelli and has assimilated the rules of *The Prince*, contrary to the male

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[51] See Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 21-65.
[52] Phyllis Rackin, 'Anti-historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories', *Theatre Journal*, 3 (1985), 329-44 (p. 329).
[53] Deutscher, p. 31.
[54] See Marylin Williamson, '"When Men Are Rul'd by Women": Shakespeare's First Tetralogy', *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987), 41-59 (p. 42).
[55] Rackin, 'Anti-historians', p.329.

characters.[56] According to Machiavelli, a good ruler needs to display *ingegno*, which means exceptional wit or inventiveness, cunning, ingenuity, *prudenza*, prudence or practical reason and *inganno*, skill at plotting and deceiving as exemplified by Rose's plan to convince the Sultan of Mustapha's treason:[57]

> J'avolerai vers Soltan epointé de fureur,
> La de mon seul regard je lui ferai horreur,
> La tant je l'épeurerai moi fine caute et fainte,
> Me voiant que le cœur lui tremblotera de crainte.
> La je n'aurai maintien, visage ne couleur
> Qui ne s'aille changeant, par l'horrible frayeur
> Qui m'ira forcenant […]
> (II.731-37)[58]

Rose's speech to convince Rustan to become involved in her plan of murder is a mixture of flattery and an attempt to attract his sympathy through her plea and her 'mielez propos' (I, line 345) she 'distils her plan' like poison, never saying things directly, and, like a cunning adversary, never attacks frontally. Rose interrupts Rustan's long and lamenting monologue, describing it as useless and claiming that action, resolution and pragmatism are the only worthy values:

> Allons allons Rustan, trop tarder riens ne vaut,
> Braves c'est maintenant que monstrer il se faut.
> Fortune les hardis et hautains favorise
> Et des acouardis devance l'entreprise.

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[56] On the reception of Machiavelli in France and England, see Mario Praz, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethans* (London: H.Milford, 1928). As Praz explains, the popular legend of Machiavelli, the wicked politician, originated in France, [...] at the time of Catherine de Medici: it represented the culmination of that anti-Italian feeling which spread among French people under the rule of the Florentine sovereign', p.1, (especially if one takes into account that Machiavelli dedicated his book to Catherine de Medici). In France, Innocent Gentillet's book, *Discours Contre-Machiavel,* first published in 1576, complicated the influence and reception of Machiavelli. On the influence of Machiavelli and Machiavellism in Shakespeare's writing, see John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2002), pp.1-30.

[57] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 38; see *The Prince* 'the one who knows best how to play the fox comes out best, but he must understand well how to disguise the animal's nature and must be a great simulator and dissimulator,' in Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by W. K. Marriott (1908), rendered into HTML and maintained by Jon Roland of the 'Constitution Society', Chapter 18, 'What Fortune Can Effect In Human Affairs, and How To Withstand Her' <http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince18.htm> [accessed September 2010].

[58] Gabriel Bounin, *La Soltane,* ed. by Michael John Heath (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1977).

(II.715-18)

Rose recommends dissimulation, role-playing and deceit to trick Mustapha and achieve her goal, qualities which are crucial to ruling. Thus, the typical female negative qualities of dissimulation, changeability and cunning become essential qualities for a good ruler, and the female characters in both *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane* know how to play the fox, to disguise their real nature and real intentions and to flatter others and are therefore given the qualities of a good ruler as defined by Machiavelli.[59] Indeed though the female figures in *Henry VI* and *La Soltane* are represented as a threat to social and political order because of their violation of shared norms and values which aim to maintain cohesion and more importantly peace in society, they prove to be better rulers than the male characters.[60] In her analysis of Freud, Sarah Kofman distinguishes between 'the level of what Freud's texts really do, or describe, as opposed to what they declare'.[61] This can refer to a strategy of valorising and disavowing women at the same time; it is a movement which questions and rejects prejudices against women, that acts in conjunction with, and which might hide strategies to marginalise women. Therefore, if a strategy of praising women can hide a secondary and veiled discourse, which aims to marginalise women, the opposing strategy whereby women seem to be condemned (which would be the 'declared level' this time) could also work as 'a veil' to the real discourse, which would be potentially subversive.

The ambivalent representation of women in power and women and power has contradictory effects, as the involvement of women in political life can be seen

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[59] Pitkin, p.38. An important aspect of foxy cunning is the capacity to hide one's intentions, to disparage oneself or even pretend idiocy: 'praising, speaking, seeing, and doing things contrary to [his] purposes in order to please, adapting himself to their pleasures and preferences', in Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses,* ed. by Bernard Crick, trans. by Leslie J. Walker, rev. by Brian Richardson (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1974), 3:2 (G424).

[60] By contrast in Marlowe's drama, although the three commanding queens, Dido, the Queen Mother Catherine in *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), and Isabella in *Edward II* (1592), are sometimes treated sympathetically, all validate what Munson Deats defined as 'the alleged contemporary queasiness concerning female sovereigns; both excoriated and celebrated as notorious queen, or noble queen', in *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, p.116. Besides, according to Kate Chedgzoy, 'in Marlowe's dramatic worlds women are conceptualised as the objects and medium of power rather than its agents: these are plays which both expose and participate in the subjugation and objectification of women by men', in Chapter 15, 'Marlowe's men and women: gender and sexuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrich Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 245-62 (p.249).

[61] Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 107, 158.

as a tool used by the playwrights to allow reflection on the definition of the good ruler. Through the representation of women and power, the plays dramatise the danger that a weak ruler represents to social order. In the tetralogy of *Henry VI* and *La Soltane,* the male characters in power are either depicted as weak and passive, or, like Henry, they stand for goodness alone, which is not sufficient for the acquisition and maintenance of political power. Indeed, the scandal of *Henry VI Part 3* is not that a woman is a general, but that a man, and a king, can perform none of the actions expected of a father and king. Henry is depicted as mild and weak, full of 'the milk of human kindness'[62] and his political inability is also expressed in the numerous scenes where he remains passively silent, whilst the other male characters, and above all Margaret, make decisions and give orders, as illustrated by Clifford's decision to exclude him from the fight ('I would your highness would depart the field / The Queen hath best success when you are absent', *Part 1*, II.2.73-74). Faced with Henry's political inefficiency, Margaret has to compensate for his lack of authority. Henry leaves the parliament ('My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best / Do or undo, as if ourself were here', *Part 2*, III.1.196-97 and 223-25) and Margaret is left on her own to make a decision about Gloucester's treason. Even more dangerously, Henry is not able to choose his political advisors judiciously; on the contrary he listens to everybody's advice, particularly to Margaret's. In Act III.1, in a very long speech, Margaret tries to convince him that Gloucester represents a political threat and can cause social dissension; she plays the role of the political advisor, whilst Henry listens passively to her. [63] As the chorus in *La Soltane* points out, the real political threat comes not only from unworthy and deceitful people, the 'courtesans' and the 'parasites' ('Tous ces courtisans Parasites, / Qui par simulées poursuites, / Soubs fauses armes et semblans / Vont les Rois abusant, II.1175-78), but even more dangerously from the political ruler when they are easily deceived and unable to surround themselves with suitable advisors.[64]

The female characters' transgression of political codes can be explained by the weakness of the male characters, which was a traditional biblical justification

[62] William Shakespeare*, Macbeth,* I.5.15 in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E.Howard and Katherine E.Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 2555-619.
[63] *Henry VI, Part 2*, III.1.4-41.
[64] *La Soltane,* II. 1173-96.

for women assuming power in the *querelle des femmes*.[65] But if the playwrights reproduce this traditional discourse to justify the female characters' involvement in power and if they represent socially or politically deviant women only as a pretext or as a tool for larger polemical purposes, the role that they play in the tragedies is therefore limited. The threat they can represent to the social and political order is consequently contained. It is therefore necessary to examine the role given to the female characters in the political disorder depicted in the plays and the extent to which the threat they represent can be regarded as inherently contained by limiting their political agency or authority.

Indeed, one needs to distinguish between power and authority; authority can be defined as an attribute of a person, as a form of power, and as a legitimate form of power. Authority is also agency in the sense that it is practical, it refers to actions that should or should not be taken; it is also the right to act and the acceptance by others of this right.[66] Power needs legitimacy and this legitimacy can be called authority.[67] The plays dramatise and problematise the tension between women's claims for power and claims for authority. Authority – the legitimate right to exercise power – was normally defined in patriarchal terms in the early modern period, but as Elizabeth's rule and Catherine's regency demonstrate that such discourse can be destabilised and questioned as they manage to achieve alignment between power and authority throughout their reigns or regency. The plays dramatise Margaret's and Rose's struggle to fully achieve authority in their own right, to legitimate their power and be accepted by the male characters. Because of the very exceptionality of their position and of their interventions in the male domain of public power, Margaret and Rose are perceived and treated like surrogate men, but as such women were rare to the point of being uncanny, they arouse intense anxiety in a male audience. As the plays show, whatever power the women in *Henry VI* and *La Soltane* exercise, it is defined in terms of menace to patriarchy. But whilst Margaret achieves temporary authority at the end of *Part 3*

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[65] As best exemplified by Deborah in the Old Testament. For a detailed analysis of such representations of Biblical women, see Armstrong, *Le Jugement*, pp. 419-517, on Deborah, p. 423.
[66] Richard E. Flathman, *The Practice of Political Authority: Authority and the Authoritative* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p 34; on the confusion between authority and power, see pp.1-13 and pp. 126-48. Flathman notes that 'power is the ability to act or affect something strongly. Authority is the power or right to enforce obedience', p. 126.
[67] Flathman, pp.152-53 (on Hannah Arendt's theory of power).

when she leads the army and is accepted as the 'legitimate' ruler, *La Soltane* represents only Rose's claim for power and authority for her sons, and as such, like the female regent in France, she does not seem to threaten patriarchy and the monarchy. Therefore, though women are represented as potentially threatening to patriarchal codes, the alignment of power and authority is either only temporarily achieved or fails to be completed. But it is precisely the disruptive tension, between the claim for unauthorised power and authority, that underlies the representation of women as social and political threat in *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane.*

But if women have limited authority and agency, how can they be described as both source and symbol of the disorder depicted in the plays?[68] The male characters accuse the female figures of being the agents of the social disorder enacted, thus reproducing the stereotypical biblical discourse on women which positions them as daughters of Eve. Are these accusations represented as justified in the plays and does that mean that the female figures are represented as the agents who trigger the tragedy and the social disorder enacted in the plays? To what extent can it be said that the playwrights validate the anti-feminine discourse on women of the Renaissance by reproducing it?

Disorder seems to be related to the feminine and in the world of Machiavelli, Fortune, the agency that destroys the overextended state and the overambitious individual, is feminine and is indeed described as a woman:[69]

> I conclude therefore that, fortune being changeful and mankind steadfast in their ways, so long as the two are in agreement men are successful, but unsuccessful when they fall out. For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under, it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a

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[68] See for instance David Bevington, 'The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI'*, *Shakespeare Studies*, (1966), 51-58; see also Kristin M. Smith 'Martial Maids and Murdering Mothers: Women, Witchcraft and Motherly Transgression in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*', *Shakespeare,* (August 2007), 143-60.

[69] Pitkin, p.138. Pitkin notes that '[fortune] was identified as female, and her changeability was regarded as typifying the fickle unreliability of women,' p.138. She explains also that Fortune was described as a figure of temptation, p.155. See also Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974); Patch analyses the evolution of the meaning associated with Fortune, neutral in it origins, the idea of fortune as capricious, variable or unpredictable was an addition made in late Roman times, p.10.

> lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her.[70]

The three parts of *Henry VI* are united in their representation of women as a principal cause of England's problems: 'fundamental to the play's brutal representation of political disorder, then, is its emphasis on the gender disorder at the heart of the English state and the English family'.[71] From the first scene of *Henry VI Part 2*, Margaret and her wedding to Henry are blamed for being the source of political tensions and social disorder and the marriage between Margaret and Henry threatens to erase history itself:

> Fatal this marriage, cancelling your fame,
> Blotting your names from books of memory,
> Razing the characters of your renown,
> Defacing monuments of conquered France,
> Undoing all, as all had never been!
> (*Part 2*, I.1.96-100)

In this first scene, Margaret and Henry's wedding is described as the cause of a potential return of disorder and the play on the verb 'undo' reveals also how it is Margaret's sex and sexuality that are regarded as the heart of the problem.[72] It seems indeed that women push existing tensions over the edge and thus expose or 'unveil' them. Indeed division and contestation are there from the start between the different male protagonists; as seen previously, disorder enters these plays because of the king himself and because of the rivalries between other male characters. Besides, Margaret's role in Gloucester's murder is quite limited. Although she accuses him of treason, she needs the support of men to validate her speech ('My Lord of Suffolk, Buckingham and York / Reprove my allegation, if you can, / Or else conclude my words effectual', *Part 2*, III.1.39-41), and when the 'pact' is concluded the male characters exclude Margaret from it ('and now *we three* have

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[70] Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 25 <http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince25.htm > [accessed September 2010].
[71] Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 65.
[72] See also William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale,* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 2873-2955. In I.2, Hermione becomes the focus of the rivalry between Polixenes and Leontes who were like 'twinned lambs' in their younger days and who experienced a fall from Paradise only when they felt sexual passion and had their first encounters with women.

spoke it', *Part 2*, III.1.80) i.e. York, Suffolk and Winchester. The horrors, mistakes and treasons enacted by the male characters in the plays can be seen as displaced onto the female deviants, who become scapegoats in what appears to be an attempt to consolidate male identity.

In this sense the incoherence of Joan's characterization can be justified by the need to find a scapegoat for the opprobrium raised by the male characters' treason and perfidy: 'Joan's transformation into the strumpet who turns from one male to another becomes the emblem for similar turning and betrayals within both sides of the conflict.'[73] This notion is supported by the Dauphin's quick and easy change of opinion about Joan, but it reveals the changeability of the Dauphin more than of Joan. He praised the achievements of the 'glorious prophetess' in I.6 after her victory, but he condemns her severely for the French defeat in the next act (*Part 1,* II.1.50-54). However, Joan reacts as a soldier: when the male characters are blaming each other for the defeat, she argues that the defeat was caused by a strategic mistake on the part of the whole army (*Part 1,* II.1 73-76). Her view is supported by Talbot, her English enemy but also her counterpart. During his confrontation with the Countess of Auvergne, in Act II.3, he distinguishes between his 'shadow' and his real 'substance' (his army), thereby validating Joan's view that victory or defeat cannot be caused by one person.[74]

In *Henry VI Part 1,* Joan is always represented through the varied and changing perspectives of male characters. This is best exemplified in her description as the 'English scourge' (*Part 1,* I.2.129), an ambivalent role since a scourge is both an instrument of punishment for men's evil and an evil in its own right. Her ultimate disappearance from the stage can also be interpreted variously. Joan's denial of her father has been regarded as allowing her to 'receive her father's curse as patriarchal power triumphs'[75] before she is erased from the stage. But her disappearance does not mean the end of social disorder; on the contrary, *Part 1* ends with a subversion of the codes of comedy (which ends with a wedding to symbolise the return to order), and the last lines of the plays announce even more social disorder: 'Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king: / But I will rule

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[73] *Henry VI Part 1,* introduction, p. 27.
[74] *Henry VI Part 1,* II.3.59-65.
[75] Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 182.

both her, the king, and realm', (V.5.107-08). As Deborah Willis notes, 'Suffolk's boast points toward a restoration of gender hierarchy which at the same time implies disorder within male-male relations.'[76] Thus the male order is not reinforced or ratified by the purgation of the threat that Joan, the female social deviant, represented at the end of the play. Likewise at the end of *Part 3*, Margaret, the 'tigerish queen', is completely disempowered in order to contain the threat she represents by repositioning her in the feminine subject position which she has so long rejected. Fainting, lamenting and begging for death at her captor's hands, Margaret is finally taken from the stage and ends up defeated.[77] It seems indeed that:

> the extraordinary venom directed against Margaret within the play, and the gratuitious cruelty with which Shakespeare invests her character, reveal both her convenience as scapegoat for the chaos around her and also the theatrical capital that could be made by staging the cultural fantasy of the monstrous Amazonian woman.[78]

The threat the female characters represent is therefore subjected to various strategies of containment. One of these, implemented by playwrights, is to position them as pretexts or dramatic tools and also as scapegoats. Another, implemented by male characters, is the attempt to position the female deviant within the biblical discourse, which was based on a dichotomous definition of women. In *Henry VI Part 1*, faced with the threat created by the male characters' inability to define her, the male characters attempt to make her fit into stereotypical female categories. Joan is indeed compared to threatening female figures, such as the Amazons from the Old Testament, by the Dauphin, but when defeated by her in I.2, he compares her to Deborah and Judith, who were admittedly strong women, but who belong to the reassuring Biblical discourse. For them, she can only be 'puzel' or *pucelle*, whore or virgin, and the near-homophony suggests that these two categories ultimately collapse into one and that femininity can be delineated in monological terms.[79] In this way male characters attempt to control, stabilise and simplify the

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[76] Willis, p. 185.
[77] *Henry VI Part 3*, V.5.38-82.
[78] Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 94.
[79] Professor Francois Laroque mentioned in a discussion the various meanings of the word 'pucelle' which can be understood in English as 'puzel' and means 'whore' but is also similar to the word

definition of women's nature and to reincorporate the female deviant into the patriarchal order, and thereby to contain the political and social threat posed by ambivalent figures such as the manly woman and the Amazon. The plays actually demonstrate how the anti-feminine discourse is trapped in its own contradictions: women are indeed represented as transgressors and violate social order, but male characters also participate in the violation of social order. In *La Soltane*, the character of Rose uses the threat of parricide to trigger an even more threatening sign of social disorder, when it is the father/ruler who orders the killing of his own son; because of that, the Soltan is involved in this unnatural act, which also refers to the threat of civil war:

> Sus sus Muets, courez, volez, aigrissez vos courages,
> Aiguisez vos glaives seigneus, vos furiantes rages,
> Or sus occiez, meurdrissez, ce traitre déloial,
> Hautain qui m'a voulu ravir mon sceptre emperial.
> (V.1779-82)

The plays *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane* confront their audience with the failure and the collapse of any simplistic discourse as the male characters, it is revealed, systematically blame the female characters and turn them into the scapegoats for their own weaknesses, inabilities and deficiencies.[80] In that sense it can be said that the playwrights expose the mechanisms that trigger anti-feminine discourse by reproducing it. Ultimately, then, the plays dramatise the danger of men's false or mistaken ideas of women's nature. Richard perfectly exemplifies this danger, by erroneously assuming that Margaret's power is negligible because of her sex ('A woman's general: what should we fear?', *Part 3,* I.2.68).

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penis for the Elizabethans 'pizzle'; Joan is also a puzzle for the male characters, notably Talbott: 'Puzel or pussel, Dolphin or dogfish, /Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels / And make a quagmire of your mingled brains', I.4.106-108.

[80] A similar strategy of blaming the male character for women's transgression of social codes can be found in Marlowe's *Edward II*. As pointed out by Kate Chedgzoy, in *Edward II*, 'Isabella's increasing disorderly behaviour is presented as a factor of her political ambition as well as her emotional distress; but it is also Edward's refusal to maintain an acceptable balance between the homoerotic, heterosexual, and homosocial aspects of his life as king, between his personal desires and his political responsibilities, that drives Isabella to her disorderly union with Mortimer', in Kate Chedgzoy ed. by Cheney, *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, p. 251. See for instance, *Edward II*, II.4.59-62, ed. by Robert Lindsey and Martin Wiggins, New Mermaids, 2nd ed. (London: A&C Black, 1997).

Moreover, anxieties about female power readily translated into witch-hunting.[81] In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, the representation of witches and the discourse on witchcraft are similarly marked by ambivalence and can be identified as another strategy of scapegoating the female characters. But though the witch was considered as threatening to patriarchal order, the representation of witches as social threats is full of contradictions. Even though witchcraft is represented as threatening to social order, it is presented in the plays as what could be called the power of the powerless. In sixteenth-and seventeenth-century France and England, witches were regarded as a threat to 'hegemonic patriarchal structures, as cultural producers and spectacle'[82] and as 'representatives of an oppositional femininity'.[83] They were also seen as transgressing gender roles through their angry speech or assertive behaviour, enacted through their usurping of the male role as Joan and Rose illustrate. More threateningly, they were associated with political treason, as exemplified by Eleanor's attempt at plotting against the king in *Henry VI Part 2,* I.2 using witchcraft to satisfy her 'aspiring humour'.[84] But though the witch was considered as a major threat to social order, the potential power of witches is always in a sense contained, as witchcraft is used only to be undermined in the plays; it is a tool used by socially threatening women when they are powerless. Again, it seems that the discourse on witchcraft conveyed in the plays works as a 'veil' to hide the 'real' threat posed by the empowerment of female characters, powerful women and women in power, in this period. The threat they represent is contained by reincorporating the deviant female figures into the traditional discourse on witchcraft, which is limited to the power of the powerless. Though there is no clear evidence in the text that Joan overcomes Talbot thanks to witchcraft, she is depicted as turning to witchcraft when everything else fails: witchcraft becomes a sign of her despair and powerlessness:[85]

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[81] Willis, p. 178.
[82] In *Henry VI Part 2*, II.4; indeed, the audience 'attends' the spectacle of Eleanor's punishment.
[83] Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 69. See also Thomas Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century England (*London: Weidenfeld, 1971); Stuart Clark, *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001); C. Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[84] *Henry VI, Part 2*, I.2.97. Heresy was often aligned with treason especially in France.
[85] *Henry VI, Part 1*, V.3.

The regent conquers and the Frenchmen fly.
Now help, ye charming spells and periapts,
And ye choice spirits that admonish me,
And give me signs of future accidents.
You speedy helpers, that are substitutes
Under the lordly monarch of the north,
Appear and aid me in this enterprise!
(Part 1, V.3.1-7)

In a society where women exercised so little political power, recourse to witchcraft was believed to be a method of bettering one's condition when all else had failed.[86] Restricted by their biological conditions, the characters of Joan and Rose have to find another tool to achieve their goals, but their witchcraft is presented as ineffective in the world of politics.[87] In addition, the figure of the witch is associated with the figure of the unnatural mother.[88] Pride, ambition and 'daring' seem to be the common denominator of the threatening mothers presented in the plays, Margaret and Rose, but these ambitious female figures are all presented as mothers fighting for their sons' rights, limiting again their agency in the plays. In *La Soltane*, Rose's ambition and political stratagems are deployed to serve not her own political ambition but to ensure her sons' future, and her political plotting and witchcraft are used in the service of her ambition for her sons:

Faut il o cieux faut il, que je voie ranger
Par dessus mes chers fils un esclave étranger ?
Faut-il qu'un Moustapha fils natif de la terre,
L'honneur de mes enfants atterre?
(I. 9-12)

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[86] Willis, p. 6.
[87] *La Soltane* I, 29-31.
[88] The representation of motherhood has to be linked to issues of cannibalism and monstrosity. According to Freud, in the process of identification, the cannibal has a devouring affection for his enemies and only devours people of whom he is fond. See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992). See also Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and P*ower (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Levin points to the growing interest in cases of monstrous births at this time, arguing that interest in the physical deformities was either a response to female monarchy (perceived as 'unnatural and frightening') or revealed beliefs that any progeny from a regnant queen would be monstrous in shape, pp. 100, 119.

Rose's sons seem to be a substitute for the ambitions of their mother, who is denied access to power; she uses her sons to satisfy her own ambitions, and to assure the continuity of her line through her sons, a role that is usually given to men ('Pourrai-je voir de ceus de ma lignée / Par tes subtils aguets la Thrace gouvernée?', I.373-74). Rose transfers to her sons the ambition which she has been obliged to suppress in herself, and she expects from them the satisfaction of her masculinity complex, but this unnatural mother is portrayed as powerless, like the witch. The discourses on witchcraft and 'unnatural mothers' betray a deep anxiety about the changing role of women as economic and political operators and and the plays analysed in this chapter expose its conflicts and contradictions.

1.4. Conclusion

From a comparative perspective, I have re-evaluated the characters of Margaret and Joan and have analysed the ambivalent representation of power and women in the tetralogy of *Henry VI* and *La Soltane.* This chapter has demonstrated that the plays *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane* appear to reproduce an anti-feminine discourse that defines the manly woman or the Amazon as a threat to social order, when they are involved in the public realm and interfere in the exercise of power. But by doing so, they expose the flaws of Renaissance patriarchal society's definitions of gender roles and the incoherence and the ambivalence of such a discourse, using both the male characters and the female deviant characters to do so. Thus, whilst containing the threat represented by the female social and political deviant, the plays expose male characters' weaknesses and inabilities and the mechanisms that trigger anti-feminine discourse and consequently destabilise that discourse. As such the plays' representations of women and power can be regarded as potentially subversive.

However, as Sarah Kofman points out, any subversive strategy and discourse of praise has an ambivalent effect and is trapped in contradictions. Some of these contradictions are apparent in cases where women do not respect the limits assigned to their sex. In order to defeat men on their own territory, Margaret, Joan and Rose apparently need to 'exceed [their] sex' (*Henry VI, Part I*, 1.2.90), to become more than a woman and this status has an ambivalent effect: because these

women are presented as exceptions, they escape the discourse on women, whether pro- or anti- feminine, since they do not belong to the female category. Indeed, when women are presented as exceptions, any discourse of praise becomes suspicious; deviant female characters presented in positive terms are not necessarily subversive, since they may simply 'raise a dissenting voice, not qua women but as recognizable literary types of disorderly behaviour'.[89] Exceptional female characters inevitably appear unrepresentative of women's nature but as Lisa Jardine observes, this technique of presentation 'serves to remind us that it is a matter of considerable patriarchal importance for social stability to celebrate brilliant exceptions to the female rule only reluctantly, and then as exceptions'.[90] The status of exception has two contradictory effects: it can both stabilise and destabilise the discourse on women, whether pro-feminine or anti-feminine. The plays' representations of women as social and political threats point in conflicting directions, simultaneously supporting and undermining their own propositions, both subverting and supporting phallocentrism and the anti-feminine discourse on women.

Besides, in France, the role of drama, notably of the emergent form of tragedy in the assertion of power claims, is put forward by Louis Marin who was convinced that in the first half of the seventeenth century, 'the question of political power became disengaged from any notion of a fundamental right, and that the tragedy henceforth became that place where the theory of the political, its foundational violence, could be shown and the consent of the governed obtained.'[91] The representation of women and power in humanist tragedies is therefore crucial and should be considered carefully in order to understand the question and the definition of political power in the seventeenth century. Even if the power of female regents was limited, it seems that the very gendered assumptions around female regents allowed certain political moments to happen:

> regencies repeatedly produce contestation and transformation. Because those contestations had essentially produced the 'state' as it emerged in

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[89] Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 116. Characters like Margaret or Eleanor can be described as figures of the 'over-reacher', as figures of extremes.

[90] Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters,* p.56.

[91] Louis Marin, quoted in Amy Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France: Stages and Histories*, *1553-1797* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 99.

early modern France, revolutionary delegates insisted that regency had to be contained.[92]

Likewise, the representation of women and power should not be neglected or simplified in *Henry VI, Part 1, 2, 3* which aimed to define the English nation and which combined residual and emergent versions of national and personal identity. In the first tetralogy, the older model is clearly privileged, as 'hereditary entitlement authorises English claims to France, while the newer discourse of the nation is associated with French resistance and a form of subversion that is gendered feminine'.[93] All the women in the tetralogy of *Henry VI* are united by gender and nationality and are positioned as foreigners; therefore the threat that they might represent to the English male protagonists and to the heroic values associated with history as the preserver of masculine fame and glory is somehow contained as these female transgressors do not belong to the English definition of a nation. However, it is undeniable that the vivid theatrical presence of Joan and Margaret makes them some of the most memorable female characters in Shakespeare's histories and that despite their lack of ideological authority, they might provide the basis for a serious challenge to the logocentric, masculine historical record.[94]

As will be seen in the next chapter, the representation of female violence must also be linked to the political threat women can represent. The depiction of female violence can be identified as another strategy to contain the threat women raise to political and patriarchal codes.[95]

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[92] Crawford, pp. 5-6. Female inability in warfare was one of the arguments used in *querelle des femmes* texts to defend Salic law, but it was also the fear that power could go to foreigners through marriage that justified the protection of Salic law. See Simone Bertière, 'Régence et pouvoir féminin', *in Royaume de fémynie*, p. 64.

[93] Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p.58. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Katherine becomes 'the capital demand' in the negotiation for France. In I.2, the male characters debate first the validity of French Salic law, then Canterbury encourages the king to claim the French throne through a woman like other famous kings did, in I.1 90-95. This can potentially undermine the nobility of the character of Henry V, whose claim for the French crown depends partly on a woman. In *Henry V,* ed. by James N Loehlin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[94] Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 59.

[95] As noted by Dominique Godineau, 'lorsque des hommes insistent sur la violence et la férocité féminine, les soulignent, c'est le partage de l'espace politique entre les deux sexes qui est aussi en jeu: présenter ainsi les interventions des femmes est aussi un moyen de les chasser de la construction politique pour les renvoyer a la barbarie, la sauvagerie, l'informe', 'Citoyennes, boufeteux et furies de guillotine', in *De la Violence et des femmes*, ed. by Cécile Dauphin and Arlette Farge (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), pp. 35-53 (p. 50).

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S VIOLENCE AS THREAT

2.1 Introduction

As has been discussed in the first chapter, female characters can question the theological and medical discourses on women which defined them not only as meek and passive but also as physically inferior. As will be now examined, female characters can also show a capacity for violence endangering not only this definition of women's nature, but also the structural features of early modern patriarchal society, at the level of family, religion, beliefs and values, which encouraged male violence and denied women's capacity for violent behaviour. Violence was indeed considered an essential masculine quality and was also one of the main props of patriarchy in the early modern period, and as such was central to the regulation of social relations between men, as well as between men and women.[1]

The history of masculinity/ties has often been analysed in ways that reflect Mark Breitenberg's observation that masculinities can be analysed in terms of an ongoing succession of crises and anxiety.[2] In the 1553-1610 period, France and England were under female rule (or regency); both Elizabeth I and Catherine de

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[1] Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 128.

[2] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The social construction of masculinity has become an extremely hot topic in historical research within the last decade. For general works, see Connell, *Masculinities;* George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Masculinity in early modern England has been the focus of a huge number of recent studies, see for instance Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London: Longman, 1999); *English Masculinities, 1660–1800,* ed. by Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen (London: Addison Wesley, 1999). See also the works of Eve Kosofsky Segdwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Kahn, *Man's Estate;* Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London: Longman, 1999). For France, see notably, *High Anxiety: Masculinity in Crisis in Early Modern France. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies Series*, ed. by Kathleen P. Long (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2002).

Medici learned to become superb strategists and ruthless conspirators, and Queen Elizabeth I demonstrated that a woman could be a war leader. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, these two female political figures questioned the male monopoly on a definition of masculinity associated with characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control which resulted from a combination of theological, literary, cultural and social influences in a patriarchal society. By contrast, James I and Henry III were both accused of effeminacy, partly because of their lack of interest in matters of war. Indeed Henry III had little interest in the traditional Valois pastimes of hunting and physical exercise and preferred to indulge his tastes for the arts and reading. Accusations of homosexuality were based on his dislike of war and hunting being interpreted as effeminate, an image cultivated by political opponents (both Protestants and ultra-Catholics) to turn the opinion of the French people against him.[3] Likewise, James's virtues – his love of peace and his scholarship – were taken as signs of effeminacy and homosexuality.[4] Whilst Queen Elizabeth was praised as being kinglike, James I was criticised as being queen-like and contemporary political satires attacked James's pacifist foreign policy by interweaving images of effeminacy, effeteness and sexual inversion with images of a topsy-turvy political world.[5] Such political criticism was combined with criticism of his effeminate favourites. The issue at stake here is not so much that of James I or Henry III's homosexuality but that they

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[3] This was made worse by his 'inability' to conceive an heir after he married Louise of Lorraine (14 February 1575). See Jacqueline Boucher, *La Cour de Henri III,* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1986); Louis Crompton, 'Henry III and the Mignons', in his *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 328-33.

[4] In the OED, effeminacy is defined as 'that has become like a woman: womanish, unmanly, enervated, feeble; self-indulgent, voluptuous; unbecomingly delicate or over-refined'; for things 'characterized by, or proceeding from, unmanly weakness, softness, or delicacy'. But the terms 'effeminacy' and 'homosexuality' had different meanings in the early modern period. As noted by Alan Bray, in James I's new version of the Bible, two Greek words were associated with and translated as homosexuality: 'one of them was translated as 'effeminate', a word which then lacked the specifically homosexual connotations it was later to acquire', in Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), p. 14. On the definition of homosexuality in the early modern period, see also the works of Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts/Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge Press, 1992); Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[5] See Michael B. Young, *King James and the History of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); David M. Bergeron, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991). As indicated by the contemporary epigram *Rex fuit Elizabeth, nunc est regina Jacobus* (Elizabeth was King, now James is Queen), James I's peaceful and scholarly attitude strikingly contrasted with the behaviour of Elizabeth.

were associated with 'these degenerate effeminate dayes of ours',[6] with effeminate peace and with the feminised figure of the courtier that threatened the entire edifice of masculinity.[7] Some sixteenth-century conduct books aimed to define women's behaviour, but there were also sermons and moral treatises which display a preoccupation with defining masculine behaviour, and offer comments on the perceived state of manhood by positing the figure of the feminised courtier and the manly warrior as counter-models. Despite his embodiment of numerous ideals, the model courtier was also a potentially effeminised figure because of his association with court life and his required subjection to his lord. Court life was consistently portrayed as decadent and effeminizing, and thus as threatening to masculinity. In England, peace itself was regarded as effeminizing; in 1592, Thomas Nash attempted to justify historical drama with an argument which rested entirely on the notion of historical difference, explaining that reconstructions of the 'valiant actes' of the past might provide 'reproof to the degenerate effeminate days' of the present.[8] The notion that England in the 1590s had become feminised seems to be further corroborated by report of a contemporary proverbial saying; in 1599 the Swiss traveller, Thomas Platter, recorded in his journal that there was a proverb about England being 'a woman's paradise'.[9]

The masculinisation or, to be more precise, the gendering of violence depends also on other factors and criteria such as class and age;[10] violence is not only culturally relative but also an unstable category within the context of any particular culture, for an act to be deemed violent depends on where and when it occurs, who is doing it and to whom. Violence and hostility against women by men have often been analysed as expressions of fear in response to women perceived as being too powerful, a fear that is displaced onto anxieties about having one's self-

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[6] Thomas Nash, *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Deuil* (1592), (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), p. 26.

[7] See Pauline Smith, *The Anti-Courtier Trend in 16th-Century French Literature* (Geneva: Droz, 1996).

[8] Nash, Pierce *Penilesse his Supplication to the Deuil*, p. 26.

[9] Thomas Platter's Journal (1599), in *The Journals of Two Travellers in Elizabethan England: Thomas Platter and Horatio Busino,* ed. by Peter Razell (London: Caliban Books, 1995), p. 46.

[10] See Shepard, pp. 1-21 and 21-38. Shepard contributes to the history of masculinity, by linking it to the age factor and the broader operation of gender and shows how men fought mainly with their social equals. It seems also that aristocratic violence and noble dueling was regarded as justified violence. *Meanings of Manhood* provides thoughtful reflections on the changing notions of vengeance and civility, and the literary representation of elite violence and argues that increased civility and brutality were able to coexist, especially at the court of Henri III.

boundaries overwhelmed when faced with the threat of personal dissolution. In *Women, Violence and English Renaissance Literature*, Linda Woodbridge observes that although English Renaissance tragedy is pervaded by violence against women or the threat of violence against women (through mutilation, rape or murder), it is not common to have a woman's death as the 'centerpiece' or the thematic crux of a tragedy.[11] Acts of violence by women on the Renaissance stage called forth a rhetoric of exceptionality and unnaturalness on the part of dramatists and provoked a special horror among audiences, that owed much to these acts of violence being an infringement on a male prerogative. When women were objects of violence, it graphically established their subjugated state and hence potentially ratified male superiority**.** As such, violent female characters have tended to be portrayed and analysed generally as secondary characters or as villains the tragedies.[12] But the genre of revenge tragedy offers some examples of women taking violent action, in the form of revenge, to achieve their goals. In the early modern period both in France and in England, the opposition between the divine Law of the Father and a feminised personal vengeance was a material reality since women were largely excluded from the legal system. Revenge was indeed regarded as a feminised form of violence, defined as transgressive, excessive and irrational by nature.[13] By enacting revenge, an individual appropriates violence and violates the Law, threatening the whole social order. The representation of female revenge can be regarded as unproblematic if it is limited to this feminine definition of revenge as transgressive, excessive and irrational. Revenge can also be positioned as the law's

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[11] *Women, Violence, and English Renaissance Literature: Essays Honouring Paul Jorgensen*, ed. by Linda Woodbridge, Sharon A Beehler, Paul A Jorgensen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003). There are some exceptions such as Cleopatra, the Duchess of Malfi, and a few others, p. xviii. Linda Woodbridge notices the absence of any study on the proportional representation of victims of violence among males and females in Renaissance drama: '[there is] no statistical data to be able to demonstrate that the plays are obsessed mostly by violence on women', p. xviii. See also Leonard Tennenhouse,'Violence done to women on the Renaissance stage', in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, ed. by Nancy Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 77-87. Tennenhouse analyses murder and torture essentially on aristocratic women; for interesting statistics of wives murdering their husbands in France and England see also Olwen H. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*: *A History of Women in Western Europe* (London: Fontana: 1997), pp. 56-57.

[12] Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen, p. XII. However, in '"A Woman dipped in Blood": The violent Femmes of *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Changeling',* Naomi Liebler offers an analysis of the female characters in *The Changeling and The Maid's Tragedy* as 'tragic heroes', pp. 361-79.

[13] See Jennifer Low, '"Women are wordes, Men are deedes": female duelists in the Drama', and Wendy Wall, 'Blood in the kitchen: Violence and Early modern Domestic work', in Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen pp. 271-303 and pp. 329-61.

necessary 'supplement' which guarantees patriarchal order whilst simultaneously threatening to usurp it;[14] so to what extent can revenge be regarded as potentially subversive, or simply as a tool to preserve patriarchal order, and therefore as inherently contained? This chapter will explore whether representations of female revenge can be analysed as threatening to patriarchy and to Renaissance definitions of masculinity or as validating patriarchal order.[15]

I will also discuss whether female characters are allowed to blur a gendered definition of violence by invading the male realm and male codes of violence. Although violence was one of the most powerful patriarchal resources, it was impossible to control, because it was so diffuse and served a range of male identities beyond the patriarchal agenda for order. As a result it was defined only by the shifting boundaries between violence and violation which were easily elided and, like meanings of manhood itself, highly contested.[16] I will demonstrate that the plays analysed in this chapter reproduce the anti-feminine discourse, that positions female violence as transgressive, and revenge as a typical form of feminine violence. But the plays also complicate such discourse on female violence by demonstrating that the unwritten codes governing honour and violence among men can also be respected and valued by women. Violence was a vital tool in men's maintenance of hierarchy and reputation, routinely used to articulate subtle status distinctions between men, but also between men and women. Precisely because the links between violence and manhood were so strong, the boundaries between violence and violation (in the sense of transgression) were readily crossed and could easily become blurred; but to what extent can it be said that the representation of female violence is associated with or equated with violation and what is the effect of such representation?

In order to answer these questions, I will distinguish between two forms or 'degrees' of female violence. These will be referred to as 'active female violence', which designates acts of violence enacted by women against male and potentially female characters, and conversely what could be analysed as 'reflexive' or self-

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[14] Findlay, p. 54, quoting René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.22.
[15] On the issues of dating and authorship of *Titus Andronicus*, see Taylor and Wells (eds.) *The Complete Works,* p. 209 (the play was first registered in 1594).
[16] Shepard, p. 151.

directed violence (i.e. suicide). [17] In both early modern England and France, suicide was unanimously condemned by men and women as it violated religious codes in a Christian context (whether Catholic or Protestant). The plays studied in this chapter stage both reflexive violence, and the less customary active violence, by representing women's capacity for violent behaviour, contrary to Renaissance society's expectations; however, I will argue that the plays complicate such definitions of a supposedly typically feminine masochistic and passive tendency. Whilst English Renaissance plays stage both episodes of violence against and by women, Humanist plays do not represent violence onstage, but they stage a woman's death as the centerpiece of the plot and offer diverse versions of the stories and suicides of famous female figures.

The issue of violence in French historical drama has been the concern of a recent thesis by Joanna Porcu, who analyses what she terms ultra-violence in French drama from 1580 to 1620.[18] In addition, a number of books on French humanist tragedies have recently been published and examine the taste for violent spectacle and the issue of revenge in early modern French drama. However, these analyses focus on the representation of male violence and not on acts of violence by women and concentrate on a later period than the time scale covered by this thesis.[19] In this chapter, I will take into account similarities in political contexts and differences in theatrical practices in order to explain how the representations of women and violence conveyed by each corpus vary but also coincide on various issues.

I will analyse the English plays of my corpus that best exemplify the issue of female active violence, Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy *Titus Andronicus* and

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[17] See Adrian Armstrong, 'L'active et la passive: deux modèles de vertu féminine *dans Le Jugement Poetic de l'honneur femenin de Jean Bouchet* (1538)', in *Female Saints and Sinners: Saintes et Mondaines (France 1450-1650)* ed. by Jennifer Britnell and Ann Moss (Durham: Durham Modern Languages Series, 2002), pp. 179-95; ibid 'Les femmes et la violence dans *Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin* (1538)', in *Jean Bouchet, Traverseur des voies périlleuses (1476-1557): Actes du colloque de Poitiers (30-31 Août 2001)*, ed. by Jennifer Britnell and Nathalie Dauvois (Paris: Champion, 2003), pp. 209-28.

[18] Johana Porcu, 'La représentation de l'ultra-violence dans les relations inter-subjectives de la tragédie Française de 1580 à 1620' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2004), p. 15; Porcu notes 'si la violence est constitutive de la tragédie tel qu'Aristote l'explicitait déjà dans la Poétique, la violence pathétique caractéristique de la tragédie humaniste se mue en ultra-violence spectaculaire entre 1580 et 1620', p.15.

[19] See Christian Biet, *Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanglants en France* (Paris: Lafont, 2007); Eric Mechoulan, *La Vengeance dans la littérature d'Ancien Régime*, (Montréal: Département d'études françaises, Université de Montréal, 2000).

his tetralogy *Henry VI* (with reference to the characters of Tamora, the 'bloody-minded'[20] Queen Margaret and Joan of Arc), in order to assess whether the plays reproduce the traditional discourse on female violence and more specifically on revenge. The chapter will explore how representations of female revenge can be analysed as threatening to patriarchy and to Renaissance definition of masculinity or as validating patriarchal order. I have selected Shakespeare's first revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, to put forward the specificity of Tamora's revenge which does not find any counterpart even in later revenge tragedies, which tend to depict episodes of extreme violence.[21] I use the English plays' representation of female active violence to re-read and put forward the specificity of the representation of reflexive violence in the French plays, which offer a different perspective on the suicide of Portia and Cleopatra. This chapter will thus illuminate the French plays' representation of female violence through comparison with the English plays, thereby offering an original approach to female violence. It will be demonstrated that reflexive violence is subverted by the female characters and becomes a powerful tool to claim power and agency. The comparison will enable me to address the following questions: which form of violence is represented as more threatening to patriarchy? To what extent can it be said that active violence is a more dangerous form of violence than reflexive violence? To what extent can the staging of reflexive violence invite the audience to endorse it, whereas the staging of active violence invites the audience to condemn violent women? In this chapter, I will posit reflexive violence or suicide as a more threatening form of violence than active violence. I will also use English staging practices as a framework to examine the potential effect on an audience of the staging of the French plays.

I will examine the first French historical tragedy *Cléopâtre Captive* (1553, performed at the Court of Henry III, in front of Catherine de Medici) and Garnier's *Porcie* (1568) which was written during the civil wars, as well as *Sophonisba* by

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[20] *Henry VI Part 3*, II.6. 33.

[21] For instance *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610-11) stages various episodes of extreme violence such as the killing of a king by a woman, Evadne, who commits suicide at the end of the play in V.3.170. The duel between Aspatia and Amintor (V.3) makes use of a device frequent in comedy, the heroine's disguise as a young man, to produce a tragic irony of pathos in V.1, which results in Aspatia being killed by Amintor in a duel. The episodes of violence continue with Amintor's suicide: 'Here's to be with thee, love!' (V.3 242) followed by the attempt of Melantius to stab himself (V.3. 276), in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy,* ed. by T.W.Craik (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

Marston (1595), to identify the similarities between the French and English plays in their representation of powerful women and reflexive violence, through the latter's correlation with power.[22] I will explore and question how they both reproduce and subvert a definition of reflexive violence (or suicide) as a form of female violence which was regarded as typical of the tradition of Roman heroic suicide, and thus as not threatening to masculinity or patriarchy, since it participates in the validation of patriarchal values.

I will argue that denying female agency and refusing to portray female aggression can be considered as attempts to contain the threat that female violence raises to early modern definitions of femininity, and also more threateningly to the definition of masculinity, since female violence impacts on the social and cultural standards of the early modern period and exposes the performative nature of violence which was (and is) considered a masculine and manly attribute.

Besides, by staging women and violence, the plays force us to engage with the shock or the disturbing and unusual association of women and violence. Teresa de Lauretis argues that representations of violence cannot be separated from notions of gender, because the meaning that a certain representation of violence assumes is dependent of the gender of the violated object being depicted.[23] But this chapter will analyse how the female character's 'dead body' appears as a condition and pretext for a meaning that lies elsewhere.[24] All the plays focus on moments of civil war or stage a society on the edge of social chaos, pervaded by rivalries and internecine conflicts. But though various forms of female violence are represented, none is presented as the source of civil disobedience or social violence represented in the plays. Female violence is depicted more as a sign, a symptom of social disorder, since it is always a response to male violence, which can take various forms:

> The term violence against women has been used to describe a wide range of acts, including murder, rape and sexual assault, physical assault,

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[22] For a concise analysis of the various stages of the wars of religion, see Philip Benedict, 'The Wars of Religion 1562-1598', in Holt, *Renaissance and Reformation in France*, pp. 150-69.
[23] Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 42.
[24] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 51.

> emotional abuse, battering, stalking, prostitution, genital mutilation, sexual harassment, and pornography.[25]

In this chapter, I will argue that the representation of female violence (both reflexive and active violence) has an ambivalent effect by contending that the plays offer a comment on male violence but also state violence, as well as reflecting on French and English historical contexts. Although violence was not conventionally associated with women, the early modern period was characterised by social violence; historians and literary scholars generally share the view that this was a society where tensions and frustrations were turned outwards more easily and the emergence and development of violence in the dramatic output of the period reflects and/or expresses the culture in which it appears.[26] In the Renaissance as today, violence has a double effect on those who were not its victims. It can at once shock and repel people by its brutality, but it also fascinates many because it so contradicts religious precepts and social norms.

With the country torn by religious civil war, Catherine de Medici set out to show not only the French people but foreign courts that the Valois monarchy was as prestigious and magnificent as it had been during the reigns of Francis I and her husband Henry II. For instance, the *ballet de cour* was a means not only of performing the official history of the reign, but also of diffusing it, and so Catherine de Medici's court festivals were a series of lavish and spectacular entertainments which also served a political purpose.[27] She believed these elaborate entertainments and sumptuous court rituals, which incorporated martial sports and tournaments of many kinds, would occupy her feuding nobles and distract them from fighting against each other to the detriment of the country and royal authority. Likewise

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[25] *Understanding Violence Against Women*, ed. by Nancy A. Crowell and Ann W. Burgess (National Research Council Panel on Research on Violence Against Women; Washington: National Academy Press, 1996), p. 9.

[26] J. A. Sharpe ‘The History of Violence in England: Some Observations’, *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), 206-15 (p. 214). Sharpe raises an interesting question: ‘Did the English think they lived in a violent society? And, indeed, how “violent” is a “violent society”?’, p. 214. On that issue, there is a variety of views, see for instance Lawrence Stone, ‘The History of Violence in England’, *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), 216-24; Susan Dwyer Amussen, ‘Punishment, Discipline and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), 1-34. For a historical contextualisation of violence in early modern France, see Pierre Chaunu, *La Mort à Paris (XVI-XVIIIème siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1984); Robert Muchembled, *Le Temps des Supplices* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992).

[27] Julia Prest, *Theatre Under Louis XIV: Cross-casting and the Performance of Gender in Drama, Ballet and Opera* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2006), p. 11. See also Margaret McGowan, *L’Art du Ballet de cour en France, 1581-1643* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1963).

Elizabeth I's famous court entertainments provided a means for courtiers to interact with the Queen and to come to her attention. These entertainments also allowed Elizabeth to see and be seen as she was herself the spectacle that had to be seen.[28] Therefore, these various spectacles were used as instruments of power, but if the spectacle of violence can be politically dangerous when it is directed against authority, and socially subversive when it is portrayed positively,[29] to what extent can the spectacle of female violence depicted in the plays be regarded as socially and politically subversive? Or, is it merely another 'spectacle' of state and patriarchal power that only aims to represent female violence in order to contain and condemn it?

I will consider the staging perspective by taking into account audience responses to spectacles of female violence, notably through the presence of the boy actor. I will investigate the modalities of representing or offstaging female violence on the early modern stage, highlighting how episodes of violence against women or by women frequently happen offstage in cases where they might be regarded as subversive.

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[28] See James Ronald Mulryne, *Court Festivals of the European Renaissance: Art, Politics and Performance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainment: The Iconography of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. by Jane E. Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah M. Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Roy Strong, *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London: Routledge, 1969); Louis Montrose, '"Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations,* 1:2 (1983), 61-94; Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (London: Methuen, 1986).
[29] Julius R.Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 28.

2.2 The representation of female active violence in Shakespeare's *Henry VI Parts 1, 2, 3* and *Titus Andronicus*

> *Grief softens the mind, and makes it fearful and degenerate;*
> *Think therefore on revenge, and cease to weep.*[30]

> *Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,*
> *Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.*[31]

I will start by examining the plays' representation of female active violence, by taking into account the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the anti- and pro-feminine discourses on female violence of the period. The English plays considered in this chapter confront their audience with the horror of 'monstrous violence' when female violence is enacted against male characters, and therefore violates social frameworks and gender definitions. This monstrous violence is typically illustrated in Renaissance tragedies by the figure of the Amazon or the warrior woman who behaves in a manly and violent manner. Likewise, acts of violence by women always lead to their masculinisation, as exemplified in *Henry VI 1,2,3* by the characters of Joan and Margaret, whose use of masculine violence questions the ideal patriarchal vision of women's nature and femininity and violates gender definitions by demonstrating that they can be bloody and violent.[32] When the violent woman is represented, it is mainly through the figures of the warrior woman or the cross-dressed woman, who were a source of obsessive anxiety over their potential use of violence and weapons as expressed in the political texts and literary discourses of the early modern period ('man in body by attire […] man in nature by aptness to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons, man in using weapons.").[33] The *querelle des femmes* was concerned among other things with women's potential use of violence, a concern made worse in England by the existence of cross-dressed women in the streets of London, but one can wonder

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[30] *Henry VI Part 2*, V. 5. 38-41.
[31] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus,* ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge 1995), II.2.38-39 (Aaron).
[32] The specificity of Shakespeare's representation of female active violence in *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus* resides in the conjunction of bloodthirstiness and acts of violence (as exemplified also in *King Lear* by Lear's daughters Goneril and Regan).
[33] *Hic Mulier or the Man woman* (London, 1620) in *Half Humankind,* ed. by Henderson and McManus, pp. 264-77 (p. 270).

what aspect of Renaissance definition of masculinity could be so deeply unsettled by the idea of women in masculine attire. It is interesting to note that portraits of cross-dressed women emphasise both their appropriation of masculine attire and their hermaphrodictic status, as most portraits show outward traits of both men and women: bobbed hair, doublets unbuttoned to reveal the breasts, broad-brimmed hats, and very often a sword, daggers or pistols.[34] Those portraits reveal that it was the appropriation of two manly attributes, codpiece and weapons, which made cross-dressed women such a threat to patriarchal authority:

> By appropriating codpieces (which were a theatrical or ceremonial rather than everyday accessory), women appropriate a symbol of anatomy and underscore the referential ambiguity that exists when men wear codpieces; in effect they reveal the symbol as merely symbolic rather than as an anatomically secured or naturally given.[35]

In *Henry VI Part 3*, the gradual empowerment and assertiveness of Margaret are accompanied by her gradual masculinisation and violence. In the scene of the murder of York (I.4) Margaret displays sadism, bloodthirstiness and cruelty by delaying his death and torturing him with the napkin drenched in his son's blood:

> Look, York: I stained this napkin with the blood
> That valiant Clifford with his rapier's point
> Made issue from the bosom of the boy.
> (Part 3, I.4.79-81)

She takes pleasure in torturing him and in that sense Margaret's entrance with her hawk on her fist in Act II.1 is quite meaningful, since this demonstrates that she enjoys hunting, a typically masculine activity, and reveals her tastes for violence and killing.[36] It is indeed only when her sadistic pleasure is satisfied that she gives the order to behead York:

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[34] Breitenberg, p. 150.
[35] Breitenberg, p. 151.
[36] For an account of the changing situation in late medieval society and on aristocracy's shift from martial prowess to civility, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Elias notes that 'the pleasure in killing and torturing others was great, and it was a socially permitted pleasure', pp.158-59.

I prithee grieve to make me merry, York.
[...]
Off with the crown and, with the crown, his head:
And whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead.
(Part 3, I.4. 86-108)

But her violence is not limited to psychological torture since she stabs York after Clifford ('And here's to right our gentle-hearted king [*Stabbing him*]', 176) and then orders the beheading of York, which is the ultimate violence and outrage that can be enacted on a corpse.[37]

As exemplified by Margaret's aggression against Eleanor, who responds by threatening Margaret with disfigurement ('Could I come near your beauty with my nails / I'd set my ten commandments in your face', I.3.136-37), the female characters' violence can be aimed against other women in the plays.[38] In *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora encourages the rape and mutilation of Lavinia ('Let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting', II.2.132), and shows that she could potentially act violently when she threatens to kill her: 'Give me the poniard. You shall know, my boys,/ Your mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong', (II.2.120-21). *Titus Andronicus* is Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy and can be described as a revenge tragedy. Through the character of Tamora, the play confronts its audience with women's potential for revenge, a threatening prospect since this was considered a male prerogative. The play tells the story of Titus Andronicus, a Roman general, who returns from ten years of war with only four out of twenty-five sons left. He has captured Tamora, Queen of the Goths, her three sons, and Aaron the Moor. In obedience to Roman rituals he sacrifices her eldest son, which earns him Tamora's hatred and promise of revenge. Tamora is made empress by the new emperor Saturninus and she then urges her sons to rape Titus's daughter, Lavinia. Tamora's sons also murder Bassianus, the emperor's brother and Lavinia's husband, and dump his body into a pit, as Lavinia watches, then drag her offstage to rape her, after which they cut off her hands and tongue so she cannot give their crime away. At the end of the play Titus, having feigned his madness all along, tricks Tamora,

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[37] *Henry VI. Part 3,* I.4.180: 'Off with his head and set it on York gates / So York may overlook the town of York'.
[38] *Henry VI. Part 2*. I.3, Margaret drops her fan and then 'gives the duchess a box on the ear', 132. This is simply the threat of violence as there is no case of actual violence between women in Shakespeare.

captures her sons, kills them, and makes a pie out of them. He feeds this pie to their mother in the final scene, after which he kills both Tamora and Lavinia, his own daughter. Although numerous female characters are injured in some way as a plot device in revenge drama, women never seem to play dominant roles as avengers; their role is usually a secondary one, in which they provide motive and support for the male avenger.[39] The figure of the female avenger who uses active violence is not common in revenge tragedies in general, but Tamora's vengeance is very specific as she initiates and plays an active role in trying to take her revenge. Unlike other plays that stage the female avenger, she is not dependent on other male characters to plan her retribution. Besides, her violence is coded as manly as she refuses to link it with feelings of sorrow, whilst in other plays with female avengers, the revenge is constantly linked to feelings of sorrow and love, which were constructed as feminine.

Titus Andronicus complicates any gendering of revenge as Titus' appropriation of a female character's (Progne's) vengeance reflects societal prohibitions against female anger. Titus can appropriate Progne's position because he is a male rightfully reclaiming the power and privilege of revenge.[40] But in fact he can only re-appropriate his position as avenger, since this role was usurped by Tamora, whose appropriation of the identity of Revenge and taking actual revenge

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[39] By contrast, in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling* revenge is linked to sexuality but is not enacted by the female characters who are victims, but not initiators of it. Even in *The Maid's Tragedy*, Melanthius exhorts his sister into repentance and makes her promise to murder the king as revenge, not so much for her lost honour, but more for his own and Amintor's (IV.1.154-175). As such, Evadne does not initiate the plan of revenge. The regicide is performed by a woman since all the male characters remain passive and unable to do it (III.1) and though Melantius promises to take revenge, he asks her sister to commit the dreadful act (III.2). She carries this out in Act V.1 by stabbing the King many times on stage (V.1.100-12) when he is asleep and after tying his hands. Likewise, in *The Spanish Tragedy* (I.IV) Bel Imperia wishes to take revenge for the death of her first lover, as this prevents her from falling in love with Horatio, whom she uses as a tool for her revenge: 'But how can love find harbour in my breast / Till I revenge the death of my beloved? Yes, second love shall further my revenge', I.IV.64-66. But Bel Imperia cannot play the role of avenger as she is dependant on Hieronimo. Her role remains that of a partner or a helper, waiting for Hieronimo to act ('Oh why art thou so slack in thy revenge?' III.9, 8) and finally joining him in the final plan, but it is Hieronimo who plans the revenge, 'Whatsovever I devise, / Let me entreat you grace my practices', IV. 1.50, in Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy,* ed. by David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[40] Karen Robertson, 'Rape and the appropriation of Progne's revenge in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* or 'Who Cooks the Thyestean Banquet?'*,* in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. by Christine Rose and Elizabeth Robertson (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp.213-37; see also Mary Fawcett, Laughlin 'Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*', *English Literary History*, 50 (1983), 261-77.

on men is a case of a woman inappropriately stepping outside her prescribed role.[41] Thus, it is not only through Titus but also through Tamora that the play questions a gendered definition of revenge and sorrow by showing that for her, sorrow is incompatible with revenge as she demonstrates her ability to display manly vengeance. Tamora's revenge is diametrically opposed to the paternal Word, the Law of the Father. She rejects existing codes of revenge defined as feminine, the primitive maternal world of the Furies and of some infamous female avengers whose unnatural behaviour would have been familiar to many Renaissance playgoers and appropriates man's prerogative on vengeance.[42] Indeed whereas feminine revenge, best exemplified by Medea, is linked to anger, irrational fury and sorrow, Tamora's vengeance is never associated with sorrow or pain in contrast with Titus. After the killing of her son, the play does not mention her plan to exact revenge until the final act where she turns herself into a personification of revenge and in doing so denies the existence of other feelings within her:

> Know, thou sad man, I am not Tamora:
> She is thy enemy and I thy friend.
> I am revenge, sent from th'infernal kingdom
> To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind
> By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes.
> (V.2. 28-32.)

The genre of revenge tragedy taps into deep fears and longings about women's agency and maternal power but Tamora's redefinition of feminine revenge and appropriation of the codes of manly vengeance goes beyond that. Her vengeance exposes the elision of boundaries between violence and violation and the gendering of a feminine and irrational revenge and manly rational vengeance.[43] However, revenge offers only an illusion of agency, as it is 'a strategy of survival

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[41] Rachel Lauthelier 'Pathologie et vengeance dans quelques tragédies de la première moitié du XVIIe siècle', in Mechoulan, *La Vengeance*, pp. 69-81 (pp. 72-73).

[42] Findlay, pp. 52-53. Juno, Medea, Leto and Artemis, Procne and Philomel, Hecuba, Althea would have been familiar to the audience notably through from Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (1567), English translations of Seneca's tragedies (1581) and from emblem books.

[43] See Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Pan books, 1987); Harry Keyishian, *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995); *The Women's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance,* ed. by Simon Sheperd (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

resorted to by the alienated and dispossessed which constitutes a rejection of the providential scheme which divine vengeance conventionally presupposed'.[44] Indeed, Tamora is not allowed to exact her revenge at the end of the play and though revenge becomes a way to subvert patriarchal Law, it only offers an illusion of power; rather than being a means of asserting independent subjectivity, it becomes a way of losing one's self as demonstrated not only by Tamora but also by Titus's final 'madness'.[45]

In transgressing the gendering of violence and the associated social norms, the violent woman becomes a threat to masculine values since the definition of male identity is partly dependent on definitions of femininity. Tragic representations of female violence reflect cultural anxieties about womanhood and femininity but also, more interestingly, about masculinity.[46] Masculinity was (and is) partly defined by violence and the early modern period was characterised by what could be called 'a crisis of masculinity'.[47] In *Titus Andronicus*, a strategy of displacement of male fears onto violence towards female bodies aims to contain the threat that the collapse of an ideal definition of masculinity (notably the ideal of the manly warrior) raises for the definitions of femininity and of gender roles.

Female violence might also be staged as the focus of attention, so that an early modern audience would unite as a community in its condemnation of it and to help maintain the construction of patriarchal values by silencing the violent woman at the end of the play through death or murder. Such a representation would reproduce the anti-feminine discourse which condemned female transgressors, as in Tamora's death in *Titus Andronicus*. However, one might wonder to what extent the silencing of the violent women, who transgressed the patriarchal order, is represented as justified and acceptable, as if their lives or deaths were less valuable than the male characters' lives. The subversive nature of such acts is therefore

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[44] Findlay, p. 55.
[45] Findlay, p. 60.
[46] Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen, p.XIV. Linda Woodbrige notes that 'historians have typically seen this changing face of violence as part of a crisis of the aristocracy, neglecting its implications as a crisis for masculinity', p.XIV.
[47] On the evolution from the ideal of the warrior to the courtier, see Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); on the figure of the returning soldier trying to adjust to a realm of civility, such as Othello or Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, see Woodbridge, *Women and The English Renaissance*, pp. 159-68; Paul Jorgensen *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956). Jorgensen discusses Elizabethan unease with peace, which was associated with effeminacy.

ambiguous and worth comparing with another form of violence, which might seem less threatening to patriarchy, in other words, reflexive violence.

2.3 Female 'reflexive violence' in Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive*, Garnier's *Porcie* and Marston's *Sophonisba*

One can distinguish between degrees of violence, which can also be identified as constructions of acceptable and less acceptable forms of violence by women in early modern literary discourses on women. I will now analyse the problematic representation and construction of female suicide as another form of violence, which will be referred to as reflexive violence.[48] Both the pro- and the anti-feminine discourses of the period state that this form of female violence can be allowed and justified when it is used as a means of restoring, validating or supporting patriarchal order and values. Female suicide was culturally more acceptable as women are positioned as both victims and in that sense they occupy a culturally familar position of object and not subject. Indeed, as exemplified by the figure of Dido or Lucretia, the suicide of exemplary women is legitimised and even praised in *querelle des femmes* texts, as it was part of a male definition of Roman female heroism.[49] In the plays, it seems that female suicide is not condemned when it validates patriarchal values, since it is considered as justified and permissible violence, and not as a subversive and taboo act, though it might violate religious codes in the eyes of an early modern audience. Female suicide was as scandalous as male suicide in a Christian context (whether Catholic or Protestant), but in a pagan cultural context, it becomes more acceptable.

In *Cléopâtre Captive*, *Porcie* and *Sophonisba* the suicides of the female characters (which takes place within the time of the action but not on stage) reproduce this male definition of female heroism, as the different eponymous heroines are faced with a dilemma which raises issues of political freedom and

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[48] See Andrew F. Henry and James F. Short, *Suicide and Homicide: Some Economic, Sociological and Psychological Aspects of Aggression* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1954), p. 9. For a sociological analysis of suicide see the works of Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1970); Jacques Montferier, *Le Suicide* (Paris: Bordas, 1970); Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*: *The Violence against themselves,* vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Lorraine Helms, '"The High Roman Fashion": Sacrifice, Suicide, and the Shakespearean Stage' *PMLA*, 3 (1992), 554-65.

[49] For an analysis of the ambivalence of the discourse on violent female biblical and historical figures, see Armstrong, *Jean Bouchet, Oeuvres Complètes I*, pp. 419-517.

sovereignty. To be more precise, Cléopâtre and Sophonisba, as 'Dido's daughters', represent the threat posed by the foreign ruler to power, lineage, sovereignty and political freedom.[50] Their Roman heroic suicide becomes a way of escaping the loss of power, and of preserving political freedom. The play *Cléopâtre Captive* by Etienne Jodelle is lyric rather than dramatic, throughout the five acts of the play nothing actually happens, the death of Antoine is announced by his ghost in the first act and the play represents the impassioned fears and doubts of Cléopâtre contemplating suicide. Finally in the last act, Cléopâtre's suicide is related, but not staged. Cléopâtre commits suicide because she refuses to be enslaved and exposed to the sight of the Romans as a prize:

> Et Cléopâtre Egyptienne Roine;
> Laquelle, après qu'Antoine son ami,
> Etant déjà vaincu par l'ennemi,
> Se fut tué, deja se sentant captive,
> Et qu'on voulait la porter toute vive
> En un triomphe avecques ses deux femmes
> S'occit.[51]

It should be noted that the only male suicides in Shakespeare's plays occur in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello,* and when female suicides are represented they can be described as 'love suicides' (the suicides of Juliet, Cleopatra or Ophelia). However, in the French plays and in Marston, the suicides of Cléopâtre, Porcie and Sophonisba cannot be limited to love suicides, because these women are powerful women fighting for their political freedom. In this sense, their suicides cannot be regarded as a form of escape, through death, for the weak woman, triggered by love, regret or sacrifice.[52] The plays subvert the traditional discourse by relating suicide to issues of agency and power, and by positioning it as a weapon the female

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[50] Quote from the title of Margaret W. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[51] Étienne Jodelle, *Cléopâtre Captive*, ed. by Francoise Charpentier, Jean-Dominique Beaudin and José Sanchez, (Mugron: J.Feijóo, 1990); prologue, 40-46. The use of syntax and enjambement in this passage is significant, and highlights the violence of the action; see also Daniel Ménager 'La Renaissance et le mythe de Cléopâtre', in *Montaigne Studies,* VIII (1996), 47-63.

[52] Porcu, 'La Représentation de l'ultra-violence', p. 166. Interestingly, *The Spanish Tragedy* stages the threat of male suicide through the character of Hieronimo, but his desire for revenge prevents him from committing suicide (III.13, 17-18). By contrast with French staging practices, suicide can happen onstage in English drama, such as Cleopatra's suicide in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or Isabella in *The Spanish Tragedy*, who commits suicide by stabbing herself.

characters can use to fight back. In *Cléopâtre Captive*, the representation of female reflexive violence positions female suicide as a positive construction, as the expression of agency and free will and as a paradoxical act of creative self-destruction and assertion of power. Indeed, Cléopâtre's suicide is motivated by politics and reflexive violence becomes a way to invert power relationships and to win the battle against the male characters. In the case of powerful women such as Cléopâtre or Sophonisba, who are faced with the threat of political subservience and social humiliation, suicide can become an end or an exit from adverse social conditions in which the individual feels powerless.[53] Like Cléopâtre, Sophonisba and Porcie use their lives as a means to achieve various aims:

> Suicidal behavior in a variety of settings may be used not as an end in itself, but as a means to achieve multiple ends, including self-empowerment in the face of powerlessness, redemption in the face of damnation, and honour in the face of humiliation.[54]

In *Cléopâtre Captive,* Cléopâtre is aware that Octave does not want her to commit suicide, since her death would prevent him from taking her to Rome:

> Vu qu'on à l'oeil sur moi, de peur que la douleur
> Ne fasse par la mort la fin de mon malheur,
> Et afin que mon corps de sa douleur privé
> Soit au Romain triomphe en la fin réservée.
> (IV.1291-94)[55]

Her suicide would be the equivalent of a military defeat for Octave and Cléopâtre uses suicide as a weapon to reverse the power relationship and to win the battle against him ('Non, non, mourons, mourons; *arrachons l*a victoire', I.198-99). The suicide of political leaders about to be defeated is a recurrent phenomenon in history, as it is a way indeed to escape defeat and to partly win the battle.

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[53] Hassan, Riaz 'Global Rise of Suicide Terrorism: An Overview', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 36. 2 (2008), 271-91 (p. 287). Though Riaz's work refers to contemporary terrorism, his analysis of suicide as a political weapon is relevant to my reading of female suicide as a weapon for powerful women to resist political subservience, assert political agency and reverse power relationships.

[54] Riaz, 'Global Rise of Suicide Terrorism', p. 287.

[55] Some of the stylistic features here are worth noting: the repetition in different contexts of 'douleur' and 'la fin', which underlines the way in which Cléopatre's death would reverse Roman victory.

Moreover, the suicides happen offstage in the French plays and are either reported by another female figure and/or commented upon by a feminine chorus in order to arouse feelings of pity and awe in the audience, who can admire the manly stoicism displayed by the female characters, when faced with a threat to their honour and freedom, as illustrated by the following comment on Cléopâtre's death by the chorus:

> Pour avoir, plutôt qu'en Rome
> Se souffrir porter ainsi,
> Aimé mieux s'occire ici,
> Ayant un cœur plus que d'homme.
> (V.1537-40)

Thus, although suicide is triggered by a sense of powerlessness, it becomes a weapon that enables the female characters to reverse power relationships, to take revenge and question male values and masculinity as exemplified by Marston's *Sophonisba*.[56] In Marston's play the heroine knows that she must die to solve Massinissa's dilemma and therefore appears as a necessary sacrifice: she is 'the shame of men'[57] unable to cope with their masculinity, and the last scene opposes two *tableaux* in sharp contrast: the audience is asked to watch the shameful spectacle of Massinissa who 'melts', overwhelmed by the female within ('look, see Massinissa weep!', V.3.95-99), whilst Sophonisba dies like a king and a soldier, preserving her honour and her freedom. Like Cléopâtre and Sophonisba, Porcie displays manly courage, constancy and resolution in committing suicide; but in contrast with Porcie's violent death, Brutus's death (though following Roman tradition) remains problematic; indeed whilst in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus in V.5 runs on Strato's sword, in *Porcie*, he is unable to commit the act himself and asks Straton to kill him:

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[56] John Marston, *Sophonisba or The Wonder of Women,* in *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays: The Tragedy of Sophonisba; The Witch; The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 33-85. For critical studies of Martson's drama, see Georges L.Geckle, *John Marston's Drama: Themes, Images, Sources* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980); *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-visions,* ed. by T.F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Philip J.Finkelpearl, *John Marston of the Middle Temple: An Elizabethan Dramatist in his Social Setting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Albert José Axelrad, *Le Thème de Sophonisbe dans les principales tragédies de la littérature occidentale* (Lille: Bibliothèque universitaire, 1956).

[57] Marston, *Sophonisba*, V.4.60.

Puis il pria Straton de ne vouloir souffrir,
Que César se vantast de l'avoir faict meurtrir,
Ainsi qu'il voulust plutost l'homicider luy mesme:
A quoy il obeît avec un deuil extrème.
(IV.1579-82)

The gendering of suicide based on the violence of the weapons used must also be considered. In *Cléopâtre Captive,* Antoine commits suicide in the Roman fashion: 'Du malheureux remède, et, poussant mon épée / Au travers des boyaux, en mon sang l'ai trempée, / Me donnant guérison par l'outrageuse plaie', (I.75-77). As explained by A. Alvarez in *The Savage God,* each period has its own favourite methods of suicide.[58] Besides, gender differences in the utilisation of suicide methods may depend on beliefs about culturally acceptable gender-specific self-destructive behaviour. The female use of poison is considered as traditional in literary and mythographic accounts, and possibly in historical reality. Studies of suicide show that while men are apt to choose very lethal methods notably through the use of weapons, women are more likely to take poison or try to drown themselves, methods which are less likely to be fatal.[59] However, in contrast with the traditional use of poison by women, Porcie's and Cléopâtre's attempt to stab themselves, and thus to commit a typical manly suicide, since 'the notion of death by stabbing [is] not only a peculiarly Roman death, but also in a symbolically equivalent way, an exclusively masculine death'.[60] Whilst Cléopâtre finally uses a typically female weapon, poison, to die, Porcie's suicide escapes any gendering of weapon use. Her suicide works because all the conventional means, whatever their gendering, have been removed from her, but still she refuses to be deprived of her freedom of action. The extreme violence of Porcie's suicide is conveyed in a long and detailed report by the nurse, who commits suicide by stabbing herself afterwards:

Elle pensa songearde et repensa pour lors

[58] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 136.
[59] But one has also to be practical and the gendering of the weapons and methods of committing suicide is also linked to what women could have access to; therefore it is not so much that it was a typical female weapon and another proof of female cunning and duplicity but perhaps poison was simply more easily accessible for women than weapons.
[60] Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen, p. 320. As reported by Proculée: '[Cléopâtre Voulait trancher le fil de sa vie / Du cimeterre à son côté pendu', II.507-08.

Comment elle pourroit desanimer son corps:
Puis ayant à par soy sa mort déterminée
Languissante s'assied près de la cheminée,
[…]
Prend des charbons ardans, et d'un regard farouche
Guignant deçà delà, les enferme en sa bouche:
Les devale au gosier, puis se venant serrer
Et la bouche et le nez de peur de respirer
S'estouffa de ses mains
(V.1889-99)[61]

Therefore, the French plays and Marston's *Sophonisba* question any gender-based definition of suicide based on the motivations and weapons used; the female characters' use of reflexive violence is triggered by a sense of threat to their honour and they show they can use masculine, lethal and painful forms of suicide. Thus the representation of heroic female suicide undermines a definition of stoicism and courage, when faced with death as a male prerogative and reveals that women can exhibit the virtue of constancy, which was often denied in legal, medical, and theological discourse on women.

2.4 'O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!':[62] Female violence and political subversiveness

After analysing the motivations of the use of violence by women, it is now necessary to consider the motivations and the effects of the representation of female violence, by adressing the following questions: what are the effects of representing female violence? To what extent can the 'spectacle' of female violence be regarded as politically or socially subversive or as only another 'spectacle' of state and patriarchal power, aiming to represent female violence only to contain and condemn it?

I will now demonstrate that the very strategy of representing women as threat in respect of violence (both reflexive and active violence) allows the

[61] Robert Garnier, *Porcie*, ed. by Jean-Claude Ternaux (Paris: Champion, 1999). See Raymond Lebègue, *Les Guerres civiles de Rome et les tragédies de Robert Garnier: actes du colloque de la Renaissance et du classicisme du Maine* (Paris: Nizet, 1975).
[62] *Henry VI, Part 3,* II.5.73 (King Henry).

playwrights to disclose the inherent weaknesses and flaws of male violence and of state violence. In both the French and the English plays, representing reflexive violence and active female violence allows a reflection on the actual social, political, and historical contexts by exposing the threat posed by male violence and state violence against the social fabric and norms.[63] Indeed, the 'esthétique de la violence spectacle',[64] characteristic of the drama of the period aims to respond to the tastes of early modern French and English audiences, but the staging of female violence reflects actual tendencies in early modern French and English society, and the drama of the period offers a theatricalisation of actual social violence.[65] But if violence is a measure of a culture's social stress then violence by women is an important indicator of unrest and any violence towards and by women can be considered as symptoms, rather than or as well as causes, of social dysfunction, even in times of prosperity and relative peace.[66] The staging of violence against women can be seen as a tool for the playwrights to comment on male violence by confronting the audience with what Horvitz refers to as a spectacle of cultural or political trauma, which is represented as 'an officially sanctioned, sadomasochistic system of oppression in which a targeted group, perceived by the dominant culture

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[63] Garnier, *Porcie,* ed. by Jean-Claude Ternaux; he notes in the introduction: 'si les guerres civiles romaines et françaises ne s'expliquent pas par les mêmes causes, en revanche, leurs conséquences sont identiques. L'histoire se répète, les situations sont assimilables les unes aux autres et Rome permet de comprendre la France', p 9. See also F.Lestringant, 'Pour une lecture politique du théâtre de Robert Garnier', in *Parcours et rencontres: mélange de langue, d'histoire et de littérature française offerts à Enea Balmas*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993), pp. 281-89.

[64] Porcu, 'La représentation de l'ultra-violence', p. 59. She refers to the tragedies written in the period 1580-1620 as 'tragédies sanglantes'.

[65] In France, the period saw an increasing number of 'spectacles funestes'; on the adaptation of playwrights to audience's tastes, see Raymond Lebègue, 'Le Théâtre de démesure et d'horreur en Europe Occidentale aux XVIe et XVIIe siècle', in *Etudes sur le Théâtre Français*, 2 vols, (Paris: Nizet, 1977-78), vol I, pp. 361-74. Lebègue also puts forward the influence of mysteries in the use of visual violence in 'La Vie d'un ancien genre dramatique: le mystère' in *Helicon, Revue Internationale des problèmes généraux de littérature, 2* (1940), 214-22. On the representation of death in the Renaissance, see Michel Picard, *La littérature et la mort* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995); Claude Blum, *La Représentation de la Mort dans la littérature française de la Renaissance* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1989); for England, see Theodore Spenser, *Death and Elizabethan Tragedy: A Study of Convention and Opinion in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936); Michael Neil, *Issues of Death: Morality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Elisabeth Bronfen, *Death and Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). In *Society and Culture,* Zemon Davis analyses the forms and goals of violence at that period, especially religious violence. She explains that one might 'view extreme religious violence as an extraordinary event, the product of frenzy, of the frustrated and paranoiac primitive mind of the people [...] A second approach sees such violence as a more usual part of social behavior [which] connects intimately with the fundamental values and self-definition of a community', pp. 185-86.

[66] Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen, p. 382.

as an obstacle to the goals of the existing hegemony, are tortured, imprisoned, or killed' in a spectacle that denounces the dominant culture or group.[67]

Garnier's *Porcie,* written during the civil wars, explicitly offers a comment on the reality of the political instability and on the horror of the social and political violence of his times, as is stated in the 'dedicace' or in the first scene where Mégère refers to the most unnatural forms of violence, from the murders of husbands by wives, to parricide, cannibalism and child eating[68] and confirms Garnier's desire to write 'des vers pleins de sang et d'horreur, / De larmes, de sanglots, de rage et de fureur', (dédicace, 159-60). It is interesting to note that Jodelle and Garnier chose a feminine voice to comment on the action of the plays and to convey their point of view:

> [*Porcie, Les Juifves* and *Cléopâtre Captive* sont] centrées sur une figure de femme, les chœurs sont aussi féminins: femmes d'Alexandrie, femmes de Corinthe. (…) ils emplissent l'espace vide de la scène entre les actes, marquant ainsi les actes; réflexifs, ils représentent la conscience de la pièce, indiquent les identifications, commentent l'action en indiquant le point de vue du dramaturge.[69]

The numerous *tableaux* of violence full of blood, dismemberment and mutilation, are indeed commented upon by the female characters (the feminine chorus, Mégère, Porcie, the nurse) but this world of violence is represented as always created by men in the plays.

Likewise, though the strategies are different, the English plays stage the threat of female violence but demonstrate that no violence can match men's violence. As stated previously, both the English and the French plays considered in this chapter are pervaded by an atmosphere of violence caused by civil wars and internecine conflict unleashed by male characters. Like the French plays, the tetralogy of *Henry VI* reflects on the dangers of internal conflict and stages an episode of history characterised by social violence caused by the male characters,

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[67] Deborah M Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual violence in American Women's Fiction (*Albany: University of New York Press, 2000), p.11.

[68] *Porcie,* I. 59-61, 72, 81. The play creates a *tableau* of extreme violence and an atmosphere of threat, blood and horror through the figure of Mégère, notably in her speech where she calls for further discord and internecine battles between members of the same race ('Je veux voir foudroyer cette race de Mars, / Et pour s'entre-égorger brandir de mesmes dars', I. 23-24, 'S'entre-ouvrir l'estomach d'un poignard outrageux', I. 27).

[69] *Porcie,* introduction, p. XVIII.

the state's representatives, the nobles and even by the king himself; but social violence can also take the form of factional or mobilised violence in a feudal context, where major aristocrats have their own networks of clientage and can mobilise them against each other, leading to escalating violence. Indeed, whilst Henry *VI Part 1* follows a dramatic pattern defined by a series of death or funeral scenes, *Henry VI Part 2* can be described as an epic of cruelty, a 'carnival of violence' and in *Henry VI Part 3* state violence reaches its climax as the play stages martial carnage, 'ritualised anarchy' and various episodes of civil disobedience and social violence.[70]

Moreover, when it comes to degrees of violence, no form of violence can match rape which is the ultimate form of physical and psychogical violence that can be enacted against women:

> Rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood.[71]

In *Titus Andronicus*, the killing of Lavinia by her father in a patriarchal logic of honour is seen as justified and justifiable since 'the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence still renew his [a.e her father] sorrows';[72] as exemplified by the story of Lucretia, female suicide following a rape was regarded as permissible and even necessary, to 'solve' the threat posed by rape to patriarchal honour:

> Dans cette culture de la virilité agressive, le viol blesse l'honneur et saccage le bien des hommes auxquels la victime appartient par 'le sang' ou l'alliance, blessure masculine qu'une vengeance pourra réparer, alors que

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[70] *Henry VI Part 1*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, introduction, pp. 2-3.

[71] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 14. See also Horvitz, *Literary Trauma;* S. Tomaselli and R. Porter, *Rape* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). On rape and early modern literature, see *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Aebischer (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens, Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[72] *Titus Andronicus,* V.3, 40-41. Titus's response is to kill her: 'Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die', V.3. 45-46.

> la femme violée est déshonorée irrémédiablement dans son identité de genre.[73]

Although Lavinia does not commit suicide, Titus invites her to do so many times in the play and kills her in order to restore his lost honour, and thus her death acknowledges this death of identity, at the level of the body (in some sort of readjustment).[74] Moreover, male violence can also take the form of 'emotional abuse'. Both *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry VI Part 3* stage the cruelty of murdering a child in front of their mother. *Titus Andronicus* stages the cruel act of killing a woman's child in front of her rather than to kill her. Tamora's revenge is taken not against Lavinia but against Titus, since during Shakespeare's life, rape was considered a crime against a man's property, not a crime against the woman; thus Tamora is effectively revenging herself against both Titus and Lucius who killed her son in the most savage way:

> Away with him, and make a fire straight,
> And with our swords upon a pile of wood
> Let's hew his limbs till they be clean consumed.
> (I.1.130-32)

Similarly, *Henry VI Part 3* stages an episode of extreme cruelty when Margaret's son is stabbed three times in front of her by King Edward, Gloucester and Clarence; Margaret's desire to be killed and physical collapse (she swoons) express her unbearable pain and the natural feelings of a mother:

> No, no, my heart will burst and if I speak-
> And I will speak that so my heart may burst.
> Butchers and villains, bloody cannibals.
> (V.5.59-63)

Besides, though Tamora asks Aaron to 'christen [the baby] with thy dagger's point', she never commits the monstrous crime of child killing, whereas

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[73] Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, 'Guerre et différence des sexes: les viols systématiques (ex-Yougoslavie, 1991-1995', in Dauphin and Farge*, De la Violence et des femmes*, pp.175-204 (p.183). Though she is referring to different cultures, the common issue remains patriarchy.

[74] Nahoum-Grappe, *De la Violence et des Femmes*, p. 187. My translation, 'une simple remise à niveau entre la mort identitaire due au viol et la mort physique qui n'est plus rien.' In *Titus Andronicus*, the killing of Lavinia can be interpreted both as passive submission to patriarchal order or active revenge.

Titus does so twice; as for Aaron, he becomes a monstrous mother ready to murder anyone who threatens his child's life at the end of the play.[75] Tamora is made to 'eat the flesh that she herself hath bred', but it is Titus who 'play[s] the cook' (V.2.204) with human flesh and one might wonder who is really represented as barbarous and as a cannibal in the play.

But the play also stages an episode of 'violence unseen';[76] IV.4 represents an instance of the exercise of power so undemonstrative and marginal that it has consistently escaped notice, an episode of free and unjustifiable violence against the clown who is simply taken to execution:

TAMORA	Come, Sirrah, you must be hanged
CLOWN	Hanged, by' Lady? Then I have brought up a neck to a fair end.
	Exit (under guard)
	(IV. 4. 46-48)

The play is so bloody and violent that nobody notices or questions this example of state violence. The plays expose the contradictions inherent in a patriarchal logic of war which are denounced by the female violent character, Tamora, whose son is violently killed and even sacrificed because he has fought for his country: 'But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets/ For valiant doings in their country's cause?' (I.1.115-16). Likewise, in *Henry VI,* Joan and Margaret 'the warrior women' comment on the horror of wars: Joan in her apology for peace, where she presents war as a disease and her country as wounded[77] and Margaret who compares England to 'a slaughter-house' (*Part 3*.V.5.76-78).

Therefore, both in the French and in the English plays, it is through the female violent characters that the plays expose the real threat raised by the state's

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[75] See IV.2.72, for Aaron's threat of infanticide; then Aaron murders the nurse and the midwife (147, 169-70) and wishes his son to be as bloody as him, 'bring you up/ To be a warrior and command a camp', 181-82.

[76] Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 165.

[77] *Henry VI Part1,* III.3. 49-51: 'Behold the wounds, the most unnatural wounds / Which thou thyself hast given her woeful breast. / O turn thy edgèd sword another way.'

and men's violence.[78] However, the plays also stage the silencing of the violent women, through violent deaths at the end of the plays and thus reproduce the anti-feminine discourse which condemned female transgressors. Indeed, the silencing of threatening women can potentially invite an audience to endorse the violence enacted against the violent or the violated women. In *Titus Andronicus*, the polluted bodies of Lavinia and of Tamora are erased by enacting extreme violence and violation on their bodies.[79] Tamora is not only denied a funeral rite ([she is] 'throw[n] forth to beasts and birds to prey', V.194-97) but her very life is denied. As explained by Michel Elrich:

> L'outrage au cadavre apparaît comme un contre-rituel. Il est délibérément perpétré pour effacer la mémoire du défunt. Mutilé ou souillé, privé de sépulture, le cadavre est symboliquement tué une deuxième fois. […] L'outrage au cadavre se présente comme le désir de nier l'existence même du vaincu préalablement dénaturé.[80]

This extreme violence is enacted by the male characters on the female polluted bodies in order for the patriarchal society to eliminate what René Girard calls 'the scapegoat', the necessary sacrifice that a society should make, to allow a return to social order and harmony.[81] But even by sacrificing the scapegoat, represented by the violated body of Lavinia, or the polluting characters of Margaret, Joan and Tamora, the endings of the plays do not allow a restoration of order or end the cycle of violence represented in the plays, since the female characters are not

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[78] By contrast with other revenge tragedies where women are either the motive for men's revenge or helpers in the revenge enacted by a male character, in *The Duchess of Malfi,* revenge is enacted against the eponymous heroine by a male character. The Duchess faces death calmly and even recovers some agency by meeting death in her own way (III.2.70-71), in John Webster *The Duchess of Malfi,* ed. by John Russell Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). The extreme violence of her death is to be noted as it is unusual on the Renaissance stage: she is strangled (IV.2.235), shortly followed by the murder of her children. This would have attracted the audience's sympathy faced with the horror of such a barbarous act enacted against a woman. Besides, the murder is preceded by a long scene of psychological torture in VI.1 to precipitate the Duchess into madness but she resists. Her resistance is expressed in the famous line: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still', (IV.2.141). Though Ferdinand fantasizes about killing his sister and threatens her many times, he never acts. Indeed, in the first scene I.1, after forcing her to swear she would not marry again, he gives her their father's poniard, indirectly threatening her life. Even after the revelation of her marriage and his outburst of anger (II.5), he still does not act; instead, it is Bosola who commits the dreadful deed.

[79] Mary Douglas*, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1978), p.113. Mary Douglas's concept of polluted bodies applies also to enacting sexual violence on a body.

[80] Michel Elrich, *La Mutilation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), pp.172-73.

[81] René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), p. 19.

positioned as the original sources of dissent and violence.[82] These acts of erasure mark a dramatic movement towards resolution but the silencing through death of the violent woman does not restore social order. The ambivalent representation of female violence blurs the distinctions between retribution and scapegoating as the plays refuse any clear reading. Likewise, through the representation of reflexive violence, both the English and the French plays stage the failure of patriarchal attempts at reconfiguring social norms over a woman's dead body; they refuse to construct female violence and consequent death as a tool to reconfirm or secure social order over a woman's dead body.[83] The plays expose the failure of the sacrifice of the dangerous violent woman and question the period's gendering of violence notably of feminine revenge and acceptable reflexive violence which is turned into a weapon to claim agency and power. Besides, the plays expose how violence perpetrated by men and the state can be undifferentiated and is never questioned, since it seems to be justified and legitimised. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, stagecraft collaborates with statecraft in producing spectacles of power, but the theatre was a place of transgression and subversion and therefore should not be read only through the eyes of the authorities, notably patriarchal authorities. The playwrights could never assume that violent spectacle was viewed in the way it was intended: many in the audience could come to support rather than condemn female violence, and condemn rather than support violence against women by the male characters.[84] The representation of female violence can thus be seen as politically dangerous and subversive to Renaissance patriarchal society since it could potentially expose the reality of male

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[82] I do not agree with the argument of Linda Woodbridge, who states that 'by the play's end, both Lavinia and Tamora's bodies are ritually expunged, and thus co-opted, for the rule of (a new) law. This law depends, as the republic that rises in relation to Lucrece's dead body does, on an obliteration of female identity within a discourse of pollution and shame', Carolyn Sale 'Representing Lavinia: The Insignificance of Women's Consent in Legal Discourses of Rape and Ravishment in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus'*, in Woodbridge, Beehler, Jorgensen, pp.1-29 (p. 26). Indeed, a return to order in the play is not achieved since the purgation of Tamora's body, the barbarous other, is replaced by the Goths entering Rome and Aaron's baby is still alive at the end of the play. These issues will be analysed in Chapter 4.

[83] In *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), Elizabeth Bronfen remarks, 'whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because a sacrifice of the dangerous woman reestablishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to her', p. 181.

[84] This applies to a male and female audience, since women too were spectators at these theaters of violence, and if the effect was brutalizing, it should have been brutalizing for both genders in England and potentially in France.

and state violence, in a period when punishment was a spectacle and when a spectacle could be a punishment.[85]

2.5 'Where violent sorrow seems a modern ecstasy':[86] Eroticism and the spectacle of female violence

The modalities of the staging of female violence have now to be considered in order to understand how the performance of the plays might impact on the audience. Indeed choices in performance participate in framing and regulating the audience's feelings and the frames in which events are given to us can regulate our feelings and understanding of whose lives count, and whose lives do not. Audiences' reactions are also determined and shaped by ideological plurality and the flexibility of gendered position. The plays analysed in this chapter stage the tensions involved in dramatizing female violence; but because acts of violence by women are either not staged or are reported by a character, one might wonder how far the invisibility and the censoring of violence by women offstage were potentially less subversive than its staging.[87] Male violence can indeed be constructed as justified when the episodes of violence enacted on women are not staged, whereas if the outrage inflicted on the female bodies is staged, then a subversive strategy can be put forward, as the audience can experience feelings of pity and awe, as well as empathy with the female characters:

> open public grieving is bound up with outrage and outrage in the face of injustice or, indeed, of unbearable loss has enormous political potential. It is, after all, one of the reasons why Plato wanted to ban the poets from the Republic. He thought that if the citizens went too often to tragedy they would weep over the losses they saw, and that such open and public

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[85] On punishment as spectacle, see Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion, 1999).

[86] William Shakespeare*, Macbeth,* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E.Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 2555-2619, IV.3 193-94.

[87] In Humanist tragedies, acts of violence are always reported by a character, following the rule of 'multa tolles ex oculis'. But playwrights had to adapt to audience tastes, and violence appears on stage in plays written after 1580; on this issue see Porcu, 'La représentation de l'ultra-violence', pp. 50-57.

> mourning would disrupt the order and hierarchy of the soul, and so disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority as well.[88]

In that sense, one can refer to, and distinguish between the value of aestheticised violence and what could be called graphic violence or explicit violence and their respective impact on the audience in terms of pleasure and pain, fear and horror, disgust and revulsion, or fascination triggered by the spectacle of violence by women and on women. The spectacle of violence always poses an ethical dilemma and can trigger various reactions and stimuli in an audience; but one might wonder how a Renaissance male and female audience would potentially enjoy the oxymoronic spectacle of offstage suicide or offstage rape? Did it solely inspire pity, revulsion or empathy?

Renaissance theatre was a place where the audience could experience opposing emotions, drives and desires. As noted by Cynthia Marshall, in order to understand how violent entertainment emerges from, expresses, or reflects the culture in which it appears, it is necessary not to 'neglect the dimension of how and why viewers or readers (presumably) enjoyed it'.[89] Offstage female reflexive violence and acts of violence on women can be justified and explained by theatrical practices and issues of social decorum in France. Acts of violence, both active and reflexive, are therefore in/visible acts as they are at once represented and hidden on the early modern stage. Besides, rape is an act of violence which could not be effectively portrayed visually, but is an action of which the other characters must see the effects in order for it to have meaning and emotional resonance. But it seems that acts of violence happen offstage when they involve plotting and hidden motivations as in *Titus Andronicus*; revenge tragedies delight in exploring deeds and acts in which motives remain hidden, plots covertly devised, and brutality privately executed and interrogate the metaphorical inner spaces that contain an individual's private motives, desires, and intentions; when events happen offstage, they highlight these questions of intent or inner space, especially when women are involved, since they often violate social boundaries, and challenge traditional gender roles. One can even talk about degrees in acts of violence that can be staged

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[88] Judith Butler, <http://www.grinnell.edu/car/confops/commencement/archive/2008/butler> [accessed May 2009], commencement address.
[89] Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity and Early Modern Texts (*Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 5.

or reported on the English Renaissance stage: taboo acts of violence such as the murdering of a king could not happen onstage as they could always be regarded as politically suspicious;[90] but it seems that acts of violence with no hidden motivations can be staged. For instance, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* stages Cleopatra's suicide, as it can be regarded as permissible; her motivations are not political in this play since she dies for the love of Antony.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England, the role of violence in tragedies was believed to be cathartic and to provide acceptable outlets for anti-social impulses. Today, critics who see depictions of violence in film as superficial and exploitative argue that it leads audience members to become desensitised to brutality, thus increasing their aggression. In that sense the staging of female violence could be regarded as highly subversive, as it might propagate violent tendencies among the audience, and even lead a female audience to develop a taste for violence.[91] Both in France and in England, people delighted in the spectacle of violence, pain, and punishment.[92] The representation of women and violence could create feelings of pain for and sympathy with the female characters who commit suicide to fight against political adversity and disempowerment and allowed the playwrights to comment on the social and political violence of their times. Indeed, the spectacle of violence against women could be a powerful emblem of intersubjective experience; it actuated emphatic bonds between people, as the body-in-pain could become an object of collective fascination and the focal point of a new kind of collective spectatorship,[93] and such intersubjective bonds seem to grow faster and deeper in period of shared crisis.[94]

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[90] By contrast, Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* or *The Spanish Tragedy* and Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* illustrate the effectiveness and the impressiveness of the female avenger; but this depends upon the physical staging space in which violent acts occur, the inner motives and desires of the female characters, and the social positions to which these women belong.

[91] This can be linked to the views of film censors who argue that exposure to graphic violence leads to desensitization and to committing acts of violence in person. The opposing view holds that violence is merely a type of content and distinguishes between screen violence (or violence in the theatre) and real violence.

[92] The tower of London offered a spectacle of violence and power over the body of the prisoner, through his or her pain. It constituted a compelling sign of power: 'punishment operated as both a projection of the majesty of the law, the sovereign's power to monopolize violence, and a quasi-religious ritual in which the community at large ushered the condemned culprit into death and thus a new 'social' role. Played out in public and before the collective gaze, the drama of state-sponsored death was a form of spectacle', in Merback*,* p.18.

[93] Scarry, p. 304. Pain in the penitential spectacle is therefore not 'world destroying', in the sense theorized in Elaine Scarry's excellent essay on the structure of torture, but rather 'world-making'.

[94] Merbeck, p. 20.

The censoring of female suicide might create ambivalent responses: it might prevent the audience from feeling pity and therefore mourning would not be allowed for these characters, making their lives appear less valuable and less 'grievable'.[95] But this containment of suicide can also be a strategy whereby the female characters can be positioned as resisting the objectifying male gaze and in that sense, offstage suicide reflects the female characters'aims. In the case of Sophonisba, 'the wonder of women', it adds to the sublimity of her death, provoking both terror and pain in the audience.[96] The audience response must also be examined in relation to the practice of cross-dressing and whether or not this can be seen to be inherently subversive, if it intends to disrupt gendered power dynamics. Audience reactions to female suffering are always likely to be diverse (collectively) and ambivalent (individually). Cross-dressing performers compounds this diversity and unpredictability. In order to elaborate on the complexities of gendered spectatorship, I will examine evolutions of feminist spectator theory. Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze will now be considered in order to understand the possible erotic stimulus triggered by the spectacle of women and violence on a male and female audience, in relation with Lavinia's rape. Mulvey argues that in a patriarchal society 'pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female'. The rape scene objectifies Lavinia in relation to the controlling male gaze of the audience, and of the other male characters on stage, presenting woman as image (or spectacle) and man as 'bearer of the look'.[97] Men do the looking and Lavinia is there to be looked at.[98] However, this theory is only valid when only members of the audience who are culturally positioned as masculine are presented as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire, for men in the audience; but this theory does not allow members

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[95] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004): 'an "ungrievable" life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. […] a way of dividing lives into those that are worth defending, valuing and grieving when and if they are lost, and those that are not quite lives, not quite "valuable", not quite recognizable or indeed "mournable"', p. XIV.

[96] A Burkian sublime, with its inherent contradictions (pain and pleasure, terror and awe) can be regarded as representative of the changing political and cultural climate of the times.

[97] Laura Mulvey*, Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 27. I acknowledge here the difference between film and theatre viewing, as Mulvey concentrates on mechanical reproduction, which has both a dehumanizing and erotic effect, but her theories are very relevant to my analysis of gender and theatre.

[98] See also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972); John Berger observed that according to usage and conventions '*men act* and *women appear'* […] Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at', pp. 45, 47.

of the audience, who are culturally positioned as feminine to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right. Renaissance theatre complicates such readings of the male gaze, or more precisely cross-dressing adds another level of complication to any simplistic reading of the audience gaze and prevents any homogenous interpretations.[99]

Besides, there is no such thing as a unitary masculine or feminine viewing position and on the Renaissance stage one might wonder if the audience (both male and female) gazed at Lavinia and/or the boy actor or even both. As Jackie Stacey has argued, women do not necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position; similarly Ann Kaplan contends that the gaze could be adopted by both male and female subjects.[100] Therefore the male is not always the controlling subject nor is the female always the passive object, and one can argue that the female spectator does not simply adopt a masculine viewing position but is always involved in a double-identification with both the passive and active subject positions. In view of theatrical ideological plurality, and the flexibility of gendered subject position, it cannot be assumed that any performance had a determinate effect on any type of spectators so what has to be considered is the potential ambivalent effects of the performance of violence by or against women in the plays. It could indeed create contradictory effects. For instance in *Titus Andronicus*, the spectacle of the human banquet at the end of the play can create feelings of disgust, but could also be seen as a spectacle of pain, as the audience watches a mother eating her own flesh.[101] Likewise, the spectacle of the wounds of Lavinia blurs the line between 'them' and 'us', between inner and outer as 'the wounded body of our vision somehow ceases to be that body and becomes, in an uncanny way, our body as well'.[102] The spectacle of Lavinia's wounded body has to be presented in a

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[99] The gaze is a mode of viewing reflecting a gendered code of desire; stereotypical notions of masculinity are strongly oriented towards the active. A key objection underlying many critical responses has been that Mulvey's argument was (or seemed to be) essentialist: that is, it tended to treat both spectatorship and maleness as homogeneous essences-as if there were only one kind of spectator (male) and one kind of masculinity (heterosexual).

[100] Jackie Stacey, *Off-centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), p.245; A. E. Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983).

[101] Scarry, p. 102.

[102] Scarry, p. 3; Scarry explains that 'images of wounds may be the paradigmatic generators of horror, and perhaps also of disgust, because of the way they locate perception at the pulsing boundaries of the body. Once a wound appears before our eyes, it is as if a fault line has opened up across the body's topography, one that threatens to tear open ever wider expanses of the body's hidden interior. [...] Instinctively we fear the dissolution of that literally vital distinction between

manner carefully deliberated to excite the emotions of the audience without inducing disgust or revulsion; indeed imagery that is so out of line with sensibilities, that spectators could not even bear to look at it, makes its violence practically invisible.[103] Lavinia's return to the stage after Bassianus's removal, with 'her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished' (II.3) offers the audience a spectacular object upon which to fix the uneasy desire both incited and frustrated in the previous scene. Lavinia's status as an erotic object can recall contemporaneous illustrations of saints and martyrs that conflated sensuality and suffering; as exemplified by Marcus' use of conventional erotic imagery to describe Lavinia's wounds, as torture in female martyr narratives was very often sexualised:

> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
> Coming and going with thy honey breath.
> (II.4.22-25)

Audience investment is slippery as desires and identifications which make drama compelling to its viewers are not always lodged neatly in a single identification with one character for the duration of a play. The rape scene invites an audience to experience desire and pleasure through a staging of anxiety and allowed the Elizabethan audience to be fascinated by the violence, gender disquiet and perverse eroticism on display. Therefore, depending also on the degree of illusion, the staging of female active violence could have ambivalent and dual effects, and as such a performance of female violence that provides pleasure to a male and a female audience may be analysed as potentially subversive.[104]

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interior and exterior', p. 3. The torture and mutilation and silencing of Lavinia can be compared to the practice of cutting off ears, noses, and lips, but curiously, never blinding a person, in Mozambique; see Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War. Violence, Power and International Profiteering in the 21st century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 'the message isn't subtle: "You will not hear what we don't want you to hear, you will not speak out against us, you will not have sense-but you must see this terror to know it." Of course, this attack against human senses is an attack against sense in the larger, intellectual meaning. People with sense are political actors, and agency depends on sense-fullness', pp. 62-63.

[103] Scarry, p. 113.

[104] Marshall, p. 6.

2.6 Conclusion

The plays studied in this chapter stage two forms of unacceptable violence by women and confront their audiences with female characters who transgress the boundaries of their sex and show their capacity to use forms of violence which were coded as masculine, thus questioning the ideal vision of women, and revealing that patriarchal norms are prescriptive rather than descriptive and are based on generalisation that cannot apply to all women. This chapter has demonstrated that the playwrights' representation of women and violence is deeply ambivalent, by contending that the plays both reproduce and question the gendering of violence though the representation of female active violence and revenge in *Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *Titus Andronicus* and that the patriarchal acceptability of reflexive violence is subverted in *Cléopâtre Captive, Porcie* and *Sophonisba*. I have contended that what could be regarded a more threatening form of violence, active violence, can in fact be analysed as less threatening than reflexive violence; indeed, this chapter has shown that the representation of revenge is ambivalent since it has been analysed both as violation and appropriation of a manly prerogative but also as a weapon for powerless female characters; whereas, reflexive violence–which is traditionally regarded as a disempowering form of violence–is subverted in the French plays and in Marston's *Sophonisba* and becomes a weapon to claim power and agency.

By taking a comparative approach, I have read the French plays through a different lens and have acknowledged the specificity of the representation of Tamora's revenge. Through my analysis of the representation of female violence, I have demonstrated that both the French and Shakespeare's plays comment on male violence, but also state violence, and reflect on French and English historical contexts. The position of the female characters in the plays can be compared to that of the audience, since they are subjects of the gaze but also in a position where they comment and judge the horrors of war. The female characters expose the threat posed by male violence and state violence against the social fabric and norms, and in that sense, they might be regarded as a 'mise en abyme' of the position of the spectator/civilian.

The period covered by the plays was marked by an increasing 'esthétique de la violence spectacle', which aimed to create and respond to the tastes of French and English early modern audience. However, it is interesting to notice the decline

of revenge tragedies in England. The causes of change were undoubtedly multiple- the possible exhaustion of the earlier form, the tightening of censorship, the construction of new theaters, the rise of satire together with the reopening of the private stage, as well as development of new genres (Shakespeare's great tragedies and romances, city-comedies, masques), of rival playwrights to Shakespeare who had to differentiate themselves from the 'previous' generation (Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton notably).

In France, the years from 1553 to 1610 were times of social and political crisis and as such the choice of the genre of tragedy and the 'ultra-violence', which characterised these tragedies are both theatrically and politically coherent. I have contended in this chapter, that the plays and their theatrical performances could potentially create the conditions for heterogeneous audiences to experience a sense of community, and unity in times of division, but what is fascinating is that it is through the female heroine's pain and violence that the political message is conveyed in the French plays. One might hypothesise that the radical change involved in the end of the civil wars in France, is also what led to a change and a radical and quick evolution of the theatre which became in turn commercial and public, not an adjunct to pedagogy, and would lead the way to the commercial stage under Corneille, Molière and Racine. In France, the conjunction of various factors such as the emergence and popularity of a new playwright, Alexandre Hardy, who favoured the genre of the tragi-comedy, the development of the public theatre in France which started at the end of the 1590's, and the advent of actresses, must have affected the nature of female roles written for the stage. As stated earlier, after 1580, violence was staged in France and Hardy's theatre is characterised by an extreme violence, notably sexual violence against women.[105] Since French theatre audiences were tacitly assumed to be male and heterosexual, the spectacle of actresses on stage was more likely to arouse dangerous libidinal passions than that of their male counterparts.[106]

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[105] See Porcu, 'La représentation de l'ultra-violence', pp. 147-57, and 'Désir sexuel, violence, ordre social et transgression dans la tragédie *Scédase* d'A. Hardy', *Revue d'Etudes Culturelles,* 1 (2005), 179-88.

[106] See, on this issue, Jan Clarke, '"In the eye of the beholder?" The actress as beauty in seventeenth-century France', *Seventeenth-century French Studies,* 25 (2003), 111-27 and 'Violence Against Actresses: Evidence from Campardon and Others', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century,* 6 (2007), 161-78; see also Virginia Scott, *Women on the Stage in Early Modern France, 1540-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

As my analysis has demonstrated, one should be ready to accept the double potential of an ambivalent representation of female violence as threat in the plays which both re-enacts and resists the dominant discourse. The representation of women and violence in the Renaissance intervenes in and complicates any simplistic definition of masculinity and femininity and reveals that structures of masculinity are dependent upon the very women who are represented as threatening to it. In any case, by relying on female figures of transgression to define and delineate a masculine sense of identity, the plays expose the precariousness of masculine identity and the performativity of violence in the early modern period. This patriarchal anxiety is largely a discourse articulated and played out between men, a way for men to confirm their identity through a shared language of suffering and distress in the plays, but the female characters in the plays offer a counter-discourse and show that they can express their own suffering and distress too. As will be seen in the next chapter, female violence can also be displayed through words, as the female characters use rhetoric to express their 'grief', sorrow and anger in order to enact more threatening forms of violence on men.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AS RHETORICAL THREAT

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have analysed how textual and performative instability at the core of the representation of female violence is marked by ambivalence, and that this tension is both constitutive and subversive of phallocentrism. I have also demonstrated the potential threatening power of disempowering tools such as reflexive violence to assert agency for the female characters. This chapter focuses on another ambivalent tool, by analysing the representation of female speech, in order to understand how rhetoric can become more threatening than action in the world of the theatre. Indeed both in France and in England, women were expected to be 'chaste, silent and obedient',[1] but the plays studied in this chapter are verbally dominated by women, who are even positioned as the main voice of the plays in the French corpus. Both in prescriptive material directed at women and men, and in representations of fictional female characters, women and illicit speech were emphatically connected and female speech was constructed as a hazard for both women and men.[2] In the context of the debate over women's nature, the representation of female eloquence was marked by ambivalence in both pro- and anti-feminine writings. The ideological imperatives that deemed certain kinds of female speech unacceptable but at the same time defined the superiority of the verbal over the physical meant that women famed for their oratorical prowess were subjected to special scrutiny.[3] Indeed, pro-feminine discourse which asserts the superiority of eloquence over action and violence in achieving a desired outcome can be seen to underpin anti-feminine discourse which

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[1] Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).

[2] On women and rhetoric see the works of Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*; Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Political Rhetoric, Power and Renaissance Women*, ed. by Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany: University of New York Press, 1995); Patricia F. Cholakian, *Women and the Politics of Self-Representation in 17th century France* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000); Ina Habermann, *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); *Rhetorical Women: Roles and Representations*, ed. by Hildy Miller and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

[3] *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England,* ed. by Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 51.

castigated female eloquence and promoted male action. It will therefore be necessary to analyse how the plays position themselves within pro- and anti-feminine discourses by answering the following questions: how do the playwrights seek to negotiate the cultural constraints on female speech in the plays? To what extent are the female characters able to exercise the power of rhetoric? Is rhetoric depicted as a means for the female characters to subvert the male characters' authority or can it be said that it participates in the validation of patriarchy in the plays?

But first, the terms that will be used in this chapter need to be clarified. Rhetoric can be understood, in the first place, as a body of rules, a list of devices that rationalise the act of speaking well or persuasively, and the female characters in question in this chapter show indeed that they are masters in the art of moving others.[4] It was also regarded as a subversive and critical political force as 'it stimulated an interest in debate, and helped to lay the foundations for some forms of challenge to political authority and could reveal the arbitrariness of all structures of meaning'.[5] Rhetoric could be therefore used to question or subvert the dominant ideology.

The term 'eloquence' will also be used in this chapter, in order to take into account the various forms of female speech, and because it provides a vocabulary and a way of thinking that brings into view the persuasiveness of women's speech, and its capacity for critical engagement with received ideas and structures of authority.[6] Moreover, eloquence can encompass many different sorts of speech,

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[4] On Renaissance rhetoric, see the works of Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook of Sixteenth Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 1968); Richard A Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); ibid, *The Motives of Eloquence*: *Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Marc Fumarolli, *L'âge de l'éloquence: rhétorique et res literaria de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Paris: Champion, 1980); Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence in English Renaissance Literature* (New York: St Martin's, 1992); James. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); ibid, *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and the Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); ibid, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middles Ages and Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2005); Heinrich F. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times,* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); as Kennedy effectively demonstrates, rhetoric is a broad, highly complex term and it is not mere verbal flamboyance pretending to eloquence nor simply the facility of finding the best means of persuasion in every case, as defined by Aristotle.
[5] David Norbrook, 'Rhetoric, Ideology and the Elizabethan World Picture', in *Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. by Peter Mack (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 140-65 (p. 141).
[6] Definition from the OED, eloquence is 'the action, practice, or art of expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness, so as to appeal to the reason or move the feelings.'

including gossip and conversation, but also more structured rhetorical forms concerned with the traditional oratorical aims of exhortation and dissuasion, accusation and defence, which are used by the female characters in the plays.

The plays that will be analysed in this chapter depict assertive women, who are empowered by eloquence in a period when rhetoric was regarded potentially as a dangerous tool, and possible weapon, to transgress order and authority. Indeed, they reflect a more general contemporary preoccupation with specious discourse and with the fundamentally devious nature of language, as rhetoric was also believed to have the power to penetrate and do violence to the mind:

> For your rhetoricians permit the orator to lie on occasion, to magnify humble matters (res) with words, and to depreciate important ones, which is truly a kind of magic (praestigii), penetrating insidiously into the mind of the listener. Furthermore such rhetoric does violence to minds by moving the affections, which is a kind of poison (veneficii).[7]

Women's speech was regarded as threatening to social order not only in its subject matter but also in its quantity and context of utterance.[8] The same philosophy that promoted rhetorical training for men, as a necessary prerequisite for a life of public service, also served to justify women's exclusion from such training, on the grounds that they could not hold civic office.[9] Humanists, like Vives, opposed formal training in rhetoric for women, not only on account of its lack of practical utility, but also, and more crucially, because its public nature jeopardised women's reputation for chastity, which was the purpose of their education to safeguard.[10] Women's speech was allowed as long as it was within the limits of their feminine roles and if they projected themselves as wives and mothers driven to act purely from maternal solicitude or wifely devotion in their speeches.[11] The content of their speech had to be limited to household affairs and not to state matters; what was indeed seen as threatening in women's speech was its public aspect, and its potential use as a tool to

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[7] Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p. 158.
[8] Cave, p. 213.
[9] Cave, p. 3.
[10] Cave, p. 128; in The *Education Of A Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual,* Juan Luis Vives' project (as well as that of many humanists) does not validate women's education but exploits it as a means to realise his program: idleness is dangerous and reading prevents it as much as needlework does.
[11] Cave, p. 14.

transgress natural order and hierarchies between sexes. Even Catherine de Medici or Queen Elizabeth I constructed their public speeches by emphasizing their conformity with expected behavioural norms for women of their status so that they did not seem to endanger patriarchal codes.[12]

By contrast, the injunction to silence as a feminine virtue is repeated throughout early modern treatises. Francesco Barbaro in his *De re uxorial* (1416) sternly banishes even noble wives from public speech. In his attitude, Barbaro resembled many of his humanist contemporaries, who encouraged women to study but insisted that those studies be used only in private, familial contexts:

> [Barbaro] invokes the paradox of silent eloquence to exclude women from the rhetorical skill that male humanists celebrated as the basis for their own careers: 'women should believe that they have achieved the glory of eloquence if they honor themselves with the outstanding ornament of silence. Neither the applause of a declamatory play nor the glory and adoration of an assembly is required of them, but all that is desired from them is eloquent, well-considered and dignified silence.[13]

Women's speech was also associated with linguistic excess and abuse and was also related to promiscuity. Castiglione, citing the Old Testament, describes the prostitute as:

> 'full of words, loud, and babbling', in contrast to the good housewife whose useful virtue is linked to her closed doors and few words, popular wisdom aligned silence with chastity in opposition to frank speech and promiscuity.[14]

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[12] As noted in *Perilous Performances*, by Crawford, '[Catherine de Medici's] political vocabulary was often (deliberately) amorphous. She did not use the term "entitlement", for instance, but she referred to "preserving" (conserver) her position and her authority (autorité)', p. 27. Catherine de Medici always framed the maternal and the political together in her letters, speeches and other interventions in the public sphere; see Crawford, pp. 13-24. See also Natalie Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ann. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I Queen and Commonwealth 1558-1585* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Though Elizabeth validated patriarchy in her speeches, notably through a manipulation of gender codes, she never failed to sustain the rhetoric of command, see Findlay, p. 184.

[13] Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-162*0 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 21.

[14] Castiglione, quoted in Jones, pp. 16-17.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sins of the tongue, the varieties and the consequences of dangerous speech both from men and women, attracted acute concern.[15] However, as Patricia Parker's work has established, this period was marked by a 'gendering' of language:

> [there was a] discrepancy between male and female speech forms through their gendered taxonomy of linguistic styles, a classification in which verbal excesses were codified as feminine in relation to a prevailing ideal of 'virile' eloquence that was constructed as pure, orderly, concise, vigorous and above all, spare.[16]

The plays analysed in this chapter stage female characters who transgress the normative model of reserved female speech exuding humility, mildness and deference, which signifies the wife's acceptance of her subjugation as a divinely ordained state, but they also subvert this gendered taxonomy of linguistic styles. In the plays the female characters use various rhetorical strategies and prove that they have assimilated humanists' rules to be a perfect orator, as they are represented as negotiating and subverting the cultural constraints imposed on female speech and behaviours, notably the gendering of language. But to what extent can the questioning of the gendering of language be regarded as subversive? This chapter will explore how the playwrights expose the alterity within the norm, and will consider the instability of speech, by drawing on Judith Butler's concept of performativity, to analyse the extent to which the representation of women as rhetorical threats 'exposes the failure of the norm to effect the universal reach for which it stands, whilst exposing the "promising ambivalence of the norm"'.[17]

My aim will also be to put forward the growing parallels between the French and English plays on this issue. The evolution of the French theatre parallels the early beginning of English theatre as both drew inspiration from Seneca, notably through the role given to rhetoric and his substitution of speech for action.[18] Though

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[15] Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 2.
[16] Patricia A. Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1996), p. 5.
[17] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 91.
[18] Rediscovered by Italian humanists in the mid-sixteenth century, Seneca became the model for the revival of tragedy on the Renaissance stage in both Elizabethan tragedy and in French humanist tragedies and reached its highest expression in seventeenth-century tragedies by Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, who drew even more on Seneca for form and grandeur of style.

the French staging practices remain distinctive, it must be noted that the Jacobean period saw the emergence and growing influence of private theatre and of boy companies. In that sense, Jacobean staging practice present similarities with the French stage, as humanist plays were performed indoors, in the private space of the college, by students.

This chapter is central, as in the world of the theatre words can be regarded as the greatest threat. I analyse the plays from my corpus which represent women who are threatening to social and gender codes, but also who are represented as verbally assertive and transgressive. Through comparison with the English plays, I will offer a different perspective on the French plays' representation of women as rhetorical threat. Indeed, as seen in Chapter Two, the female characters can use so-called disempowering tools and subvert them to assert agency and threaten patriarchal assumptions on women's abilities. Likewise, though the English plays represent the traditional discourse on women as threatening because they are verbally transgressive, as in *Titus Andronicus* and the tetralogy of *Henry VI,* in this chapter I contend that a more latent threat is depicted when women appropriate manly forms of rhetoric, or subvert so-called inoffensive and disempowering forms of speech, as in the French plays. On the issue of women as rhetorical threat the two corpora relate the most, and I will also use the French plays to illuminate the tensions in the representations of the female characters as rhetorical threat in *Richard III* and *Coriolanus*.

I will analyse *La Soltan*e by Gabriel Bounin and *Les Juifves* by Robert Garnier in the French corpus, as they best exemplify the variety and degrees of rhetorical threats that the female characters can represent. Garnier's plays are most openly involved in the political situation of his time, since the plays were written during the civil wars and can be described as being characterised by a rhetoric of conflict.[19] I will compare them to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI 1, 2, 3, Richard III*, and the Roman tragedy *Coriolanus.* I will explore the evolution in the

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[19] As noted by Neil Kenny, 'the system of rhetoric, which was promoted with new vigour by humanists and which permeates the writing [...] can be argued to have tended to foster conflict as much as consensus. Despite Cicero's claim that rhetoric thrives especially in peaceful societies, the oppositions upon which all three branches of rhetoric were based - accusing/defending (judicial), praising/blaming (epideictic), persuading/dissuading (deliberative) - virtually obliged orators and writers to find someone or something to be in conflict with', in Vinestock and Foster, *Writers in Conflict in Sixteenth Century France,* p. 4.

characterization of women's speech throughout the first tetralogy and seek to put forward differences between Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, by including *Coriolanus*.

In this chapter, I will start by examining how in the plays, verbal control is shown to be an action which is dangerous and powerful by analysing the various rhetorical strategies used by the female characters and their impact on the male characters. In *Titus Andronicus, Henry VI 1, 2, 3* and *La Soltane*, the female characters display a rhetoric of seduction and show that rhetoric, the power of moving the affections, is a kind of magic or poison and demonstrate how the mastery of rhetoric can become a subversive force.[20] I will also consider how the female characters in the plays prove their ability to display a manly eloquence when they transgress the strict opposition between feminine linguistic excess and virile eloquence to assert their authority, by including Robert Garnier's *Les Juifves*. I will then analyse in a second section how women are represented as rhetorical threats using the concept of illocutionary force, in order to put forward the various degrees in the use of the spoken word as performative, as a means of making the male characters act and thus inverting not only gender roles but also power relationships in *Coriolanus*. In a final section, I will focus on some forms of speech which were specifically associated with women in tragedies and therefore were considered as allowed or legitimate forms of female speech. I will question the extent to which the use of manly rhetoric is depicted as more threatening than the use of disempowering feminine tools. I will argue that these acceptable forms of speech for women, which seem troublingly self-negating, since they emphasise the weakness of the speaker, are in fact subverted and used as a threatening tool of resistance and as a weapon by the female characters in order to enact psychological and verbal violence on the male characters and the audience. The ambivalent representation of lament and cursing in the tragedies will thus be explored in order to analyse how the use of these disempowering and inoffensive forms of speech are subverted by the female characters in all the plays under study in this chapter.

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[20] Norbrook, 'Rhetoric, Ideology and the Elizabethan World Picture', p. 158.

3.2 'There is no marvel in a woman learning to speak, but there would be in teaching her to hold her tongue':[21] Rhetorical seduction vs manly rhetoric in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI 1,2,3*, and Garnier's *Les Juifves*

The medieval discourse which defined the mouth as 'a site of evil, an entrance to hell',[22] just as speech could be a form of sin, still found particular resonance in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[23] Besides, the assertive woman was perceived as representing a threat to the manly realm of rhetoric and to social order, as stated for example by George Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1598), which conceives of rhetoric as an ideologically motivated discourse, an instrument of civil order, 'its function being not only to regulate instances of verbal and social indecorum but also, and by extension, to maintain the natural hierarchical ordering of the household and commonwealth which language should reflect'.[24] Thus, female speech was specifically associated not only with evil but also with transgression and social disorder; the plays reproduce this anti-feminine discourse by depicting female characters who challenge patriarchal order and values with their transgressive speeches that are deployed through various rhetorical strategies.

Firstly, the female characters show that they are experts in using a rhetoric of seduction to convince and manipulate the male characters and achieve their goals. Indeed the word 'seducere' can mean to 'lead aside or away', 'to entice someone astray from right behaviour, to persuade someone to do something inadvisable'.[25] In *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora shows her mastery in using words as traps to enchant men and deploys the power of her tongue to penetrate men's minds:

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[21] Quote of Queen Elizabeth I to the French Ambassador after he had praised her linguistic skills. Heather Thomas, 'Elizabeth R', <http://www.elizabethi.org/uk/quotes/>, 1998-2009 [accessed June 2010].
[22] Bardsley, p. 27.
[23] See Lynda E. Boose, 'Scolding Bridles and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 179-213; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
[24] Richards and Thorne, p. 5.
[25] *OED.*

I will enchant the old Andronicus
With words more sweet, and yet more dangerous,
Than baits to fish...
[...]
If Tamora entreat him, then he will:
For I can smooth and fill his aged ear
With golden promises, that, were his heart
Almost impregnable, his old ears deaf,
Yet should both ear and heart obey my tongue.
(IV.4.88-98)

Tamora demonstrates that she can 'temper with her art' (IV.4.108) the male characters. *Titus Andronicus* reproduces the biblical discourse which positions women as transgressors and temptresses who can exploit a rhetoric of ambiguity, indirection and confusion to achieve their goals.[26] For instance in I.1, Tamora's speech presents a complex mix of true and dissembled emotions. She pretends to stand by Titus, but her real motivations are revealed in her asides: in this scene, she controls and manipulates all the male characters from Titus to the Emperor in her dual speech, sounding fair whilst actually planning her revenge in very violent terms:

(aside to SATURNINUS)
My lord, be rul'd by me, be won at last
[…]
Yield at entreats-and then let me alone:
I'll find a day to massacre them all,
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father, and his traitorous sons,
To whom I sued for my dear son's life;
And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain.
(aloud)
Come, come, sweet emperor; come, Andronicus;
Take up this good old man, and cheer the heart
That dies in tempest of thy angry frown.
(I.1.447-63)

Tamora is described as being able to wear a mask, showing a fair face to Titus while planning his fall. Through this tension between fair speech and her foul

[26] The link between beauty, eloquence and eloquent seduction varies between genres; in Shakespeare's tragedies the eloquent women tend to be portrayed as *femme fatale* and silence tends to be associated with female heroines. But the comedies associate beauty and witty speech, whilst women from lower classes are allowed to use bawdy language and swearing.

intentions, the play dramatises the potential power of rhetoric, which can be used for evil purposes, and how Tamora can display the art of moving and manipulating others, through a rhetoric of seduction, which enables her to establish, enforce and assert her own authority via language.

Transgressive speech was also associated with linguistic excess which could lead to excessive behaviour, as exemplified by Margaret's speeches in the three parts of *Henry VI*. The sequence stages the increasing verbal domination of Margaret, and as such, reflects a construction of women's speech as potentially disruptive, and women as speakers who cannot limit the quantity of their speech. In *Henry VI Part 1*, Margaret's verbal interventions are first constructed as attempts to usurp male authority and therefore to violate social order, but in *Parts 2 and 3*, her voice gradually replaces the authority of her husband and king. In *Henry VI Part 2*, Margaret's increasing verbal transgression parallels her growing empowerment and is illustrated by both the content and the context of her speeches as she takes increasing control of the political and the verbal sphere. In Act I.3, her intervention in place of her husband and king is severely condemned by Gloucester as not appropriate for women:

MARGARET	Because the king, forsooth, will have it so
GLOUCESTER	Madam, the king is old enough himself To give his censure: these are no women's matters. (I.3.110-12)

Margaret goes a step further in III.2, when she forgets all sense of social decorum to support Suffolk:

WARWICK	Madam, be still, with reverence may I say; For every word you speak in his behalf Is slander to your royal dignity. (III.2. 207-09)

Another example of this linguistic excess is displayed by Joan in *Henry VI Part 1.* In Act III.3, Joan's military plan to defeat England is deployed in her speech to convince Burgundy, and not in the field of war. She aims to submerge Burgundy under her verbal flow, in a speech based on what can be called a rhetoric of excess,

characterised by the use of accumulation, the piling up of nouns and the use of numerous periphrases:[27]

> Look on thy country, look on fertile France,
> And see the cities and the towns defac'd
> By wasting ruin of the cruel foe.
> As looks the mother on her lowly babe
> When death doth close his tender dying eyes,
> See, see the pining malady of France;
> Behold the wounds, the most unnatural wounds,
> Which thou thyself hast giv'n her woeful breast.
> O! turn thy edged sword another way;
> Strike those that hurt, and hurt not those that help.
> One drop of blood drawn from thy country's bosom,
> Should grieve thee more than streams of foreign gore:
> Return thee therefore, with a flood of tears,
> And wash away thy country's stained spots.
> […]
> Besides, all French and France exclaims on thee,
> Doubting thy birth and lawful progeny.
> Who join'st thou with but with a lordly nation
> That will not trust thee but for profit's sake?
> When Talbot hath set footing once in France,
> And fashion'd thee that instrument of ill,
> Who then but English Henry will be lord,
> And thou be thrust out like a fugitive?
> Call we to mind, and mark but this for proof,
> Was not the Duke of Orleans thy foe,
> And was he not in England prisoner?
> But when they heard he was thine enemy,
> They set him free, without his ransom paid,
> In spite of Burgundy and all his friends.
> See then, thou fight'st against thy countrymen!
> And join'st with them will be thy slaughtermen.
> Come, come, return; return thou wand'ring lord;
> Charles and the rest will take thee in their arms.
> (III.3.44-77)

The rich imagery based on the lexical field of disease, the repetition of various verbs of sight (look, see, behold) enables her to create an hypotyposis, a living *tableau* of the horrors caused by war to 'fertile France'. In her description she uses amplification and repetition to create an emphatic tone and an almost incantatory rhythm. Joan uses words instead of a fight to convince Burgundy, who is

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[27] Cave, p.15, quoting Agricola, Book III.5.

indeed 'vanquished' and 'bewitch'd with her words' (58). In her speech Joan shows how she can 'enchant [men] with words […] by fair persuasions mixed with sugared words' (III.3.17-18). But her speech is also a perfect example of the grand style of oratory, which aims to stir emotions and which classic figure is 'congeries ('a heaping up'), a barrage of similar or related sentences'.[28] Indeed, though linguistic excess was associated with female transgressive speech, it was much more ambivalent than that; one of the devices that characterises feminine linguistic excess in the plays is *amplificatio*, but for the classical theorists, *amplificatio* had been a device used in judicial and demonstrative rhetoric, to give weight and substance to an argument, or to praise a person or an act.[29] Joan's speech is a well-structured argumentative speech meant to convince Burgundy, as demonstrated by the use of various logical arguments, linking words, rhetorical questions, the insertion of a maxim ('Strike those that hurt, and hurt not those that help'), before concluding her speech.

The female characters are represented as powerful orators, and experts in the art of rhetoric, 'the power to guide and influence the souls',[30] which is nothing other than leading the male characters' opinion, in a period when there was a general agreement that rhetoric was a science (or art or *techne*) of persuasion, an art or a science of doing rather than knowing and a means of power over others. In the tetralogy of *Henry VI*, Margaret shows that she has assimilated Agricola's definition of the best argument which is to be ordered in four parts: 'exordium (an inviting beginning), narration (the statement of the argument), confirmation (assembled points of persuasion), and peroration (conclusion)'.[31] In her plotting against Gloucester in *Part 2*, III.2, Margaret's speech is a carefully constructed political speech, that can be divided into these four parts; her speech starts with a series of rhetorical questions in which she invites Henry to consider the changes in Gloucester's behaviour, raising doubts but never attacking frontally (1 to 6); then in a second movement, she notices the changes in Gloucester's behaviour, opposing his

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[28] B.A. Krostenko, 'Text and Context in the Roman Forum: The Case of Cicero's *First Catilinarian'*, in *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical criticism*, ed. by Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 38-58 (p. 45).
[29] Cave, p. 8.
[30] *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. by John Rainolds and Lawrence D. Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 7.
[31] Jost and Olmsted, p. 86.

past and present attitudes to persuade the King by using various arguments (6 to 14); then she plays the role of political advisor and takes a rational stance, stressing the threat of anarchy that such a behaviour might raise (18 to 35) and finally her peroration or conclusion consists in stepping back, by playing the part of a weak woman, asking for the other male characters' support (36 to 41):

> Can you not see? Or will ye not observe
> The strangeness of his alter'd countenance?
> With what a majesty he bears himself,
> How insolent of late he is become,
> How proud, how peremptory, and unlike himself? /
> We know the time since he was mild and affable,
> And if we did but glance a far-off look,
> Immediately he was upon his knee,
> That all the court admir'd him for submission:
> But meet him now, and, be it in the morn,
> When everyone will give the time of day,
> He knits his brow and shows an angry eye,
> And passeth by with stiff unbowed knee,
> Disdaining duty that to us belongs. /
> Small curs are not regarded when they grin,
> But great men tremble when the lion roars;
> And Humphrey is no little man in England.
> First note that he is near you in descent,
> And should you fall, he is the next will mount.
> Me seemeth then it is no policy,
> Respecting what a rancorous mind he bears,
> And his advantage following your decease,
> That he should come about your royal person
> Or be admitted to your highness' council.
> By flattery hath he won the commons' hearts,
> And when he please to make commotion,
> 'Tis to be fear'd they all will follow him.
> Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;
> Suffer them now and they'll o'ergrow the garden,
> And choke the herbs for want of husbandry. /
> The reverent care I bear unto my lord
> Made me collect these dangers in the duke.
> If it be fond, call it a woman's fear;
> Which fear if better reasons can supplant,
> I will subscribe and say I wrong'd the duke.
> My Lord of Suffolk, Buckingham, and York,
> Reprove my allegation if you can
> Or else conclude my words effectual.
> (III.1.4-41)

Likewise, in the French play *La Soltane*, Rose deploys a typically feminine rhetoric of seduction, characterised by excess and a hyperbolic and emphatic style, but she also proves that she has appropriated the principles of Aristotelian rhetoric. According to Aristotle, in order to convince an audience:

> You must: (1) make the audience well-disposed towards yourself and ill-disposed towards your opponent; (2) magnify or minimize the leading facts; (3) excite the required state of emotion in your hearers; and (4) refresh their memories.[32]

In Act I, in order to convince Rustan to help her in her plan to defeat Mustapha, Rose's speech is carefully constructed: in her *exordium* (which aims to bring the mind of the listener into a proper condition to receive the rest of the speech; its task is to make the listener attentive, docile and well-disposed[33]), Rose uses accumulation, repetition ('voudrois tu Rustan') and a series of rhetorical questions and apostrophe to Rustan to create an incantatory rhythm. She makes him well-disposed towards herself and ill-disposed towards her opponent, Mustapha, refreshing his memory by reminding him of past betrayals by Mustapha in the *narratio* (an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred):

> Las voudrois tu Rustan, Rustan que tant j'honore
> Sur mes plus chers aymés, mais voudrois tu encore
> Qu'un sot audacieus jeunement parvenu,
> Un sot vulgaire né de son père inconnu
> Au regret de mes fils ta plus chère alliance
> Demourast gouverneur de toute la Bysance ?
> Eh voudroi tu Rustan que ce trop inhumain,
> Vint brave assugettir sous le fais de sa main,
> Tout le peuple Asien et la rondeur de Thrace ?
> Deja voudroi tu Rustan, qu'acretant son audace
> Vint obsurcir les faits et gestes triumphans
> Par son orgueil hautain de mes plus chers enfans ?
> Et pense un peu Rustan et r'apelle en toi-même
> La rancueur et l'émoi et la haine si blême,
> […]
> Donc souvien toy Rustan de la haine chienine

[32] *Aristotle, the Basic Works of Aristotle,* ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 22.
[33] McKeon, p. 22.

> Que contre toy recuit dans sa fainte poitrine
> Au prouffit de Soltan dont tu voulus oser
> Des sangaces mutins les soudes rabaisser ?
> (I.291-310)

She tries to make him sympathise with her, in order to make him see the situation from her female and motherly point of view. Likewise, in her speech to convince the Sultan in act III, she excites the required state of emotion in him, pretending that she does not dare to speak ('A Soltan tant je sens mes esprits varier, / Que ma langue ne peut un seul mot delier', III.915-16), so that he becomes the one who asks her to speak, in the name of their love. Thanks to her very strategic and well-structured speech, she reverses the situation as she only seems to be obeying the sultan's will ('puis-que'), forced to do so ('contrainte', 'forcant effort'):

> Puis qu'il te vient a gré, et de Roial pouvoir
> O roi, présentement il te plait de scavoir
> Quel est l'ocombrier que brasser l'on s'avance
> Contre toi o Soltan, et toute ta puissance,
> Tu le scauras:
> […]
> Puis-que m'as conjuré par nostre amitié sainte,
> Roi de le compter, or moi comme contrainte,
> Par le forcant effort de l'amoureus lien,
> Et par l'effort du dard du fils Idalien
> Tu le scauras.
> (III.923-65)

Rose's speech also demonstrates that she has assimilated Cicero's recommendation which states that a particular style becomes appropriate to a topic in view of some objective, and that a good orator needs to adapt his style to achieve a particular goal.[34] She is aware that her speech and her accusation might be regarded as too daring, that she has crossed the line assigned to and imposed on her sex; therefore, in the *refutatio* she apologises for being too daring beforehand arousing pity and sympathy for her case and proves that she calculates every word in her speech.[35] She 'excites ill will against her opponent' and deliberately postpones her confession in order to build up suspense and enhance the Sultan's fear, delaying her

[34] Jost and Omsted, p. 2 (in *De Inventione*).
[35] The refutation is divided into three parts, a summing-up, the exciting of ill will against the opponent, and the arousing of pity and sympathy for the speaker or his case.

attack until she thinks that it can be triggered; only then, can she give the final blow in a dramatic ending (962-86) accusing the sultan's son, Mustapha, of treason.

As has been seen in the previous chapters, both the French and the English plays of my corpus reflect a conflation between claims for power and agency, transgressive or assertive behaviour, and excessive speech.[36] By associating female speech with transgression and excess the plays seem to reproduce anti-feminine discourses, but they also play with the ambivalent potential of rhetoric, by questioning the gendering of language. Indeed, they play with the two meanings of seduction, as women can use rhetoric to 'lead astray, as from duty, rectitude', but they also seduce the male characters in the sense of 'winning over' and persuading through the use of manly tools of rhetoric. As in Rose's speech, the female characters in *Titus Andronicus* and the tetralogy of *Henry VI* prove that they can master a feminine rhetoric of seduction, but also a manly and orderly rhetoric, thus blurring the lines of the period's gendering of language. They can manipulate the three oratorical styles 'the grand, which stirs the emotions; the middle, which persuades through pleasure; and the plain, which proves the point'.[37] Garnier's *Les Juifves* goes a step further as the female characters use forms of rethoric defined as exclusively masculine.[38] *Les Juifves* is the moving story of the barbarous vengeance of Nabuchodonosor on the Jewish king Sédécie and his children, following his rebellion. The Jewish women lamenting the fate of their children, notably Sédécie's mother and the female chorus, take a principal part in this tragedy. The play is verbally dominated by the confrontations between Nabuchodnosor and Amital, but also between him and his wife, the Queen. The female characters in the play demonstrate that they are speakers prepared for the three types of orations.[39] In the central scene of confrontation with Nabuchodnosor, Amital displays a forensic type of oration, as in law courts. She uses reactive arguments to plead her cause in an oxymoronic logic to state her case and ask for Sedecie's freedom and as in a trial, she

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[36] See also Allison Heisch, 'Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power', *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1975), 31-55.

[37] Krostenvo, 'Text and Context' in Jost and Olmsted, p. 39.

[38] Robert Garnier, *Les Juifves*, ed. by Richard Griffiths (London: Grant & Cutler, 1986).

[39] According to Cicero the five processes prepare the speaker for the three types of orations named by Aristotle: 'deliberative, as in political assemblies; and epideictic or demonstrative, as on other occasions in which praise or blame is involved', in Murphy, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages,* p. 1.

counters Nabuchodnosor's attacks and accusation in a verbal battle, using pathos, begging and flattering at the same time:

NABUCHODNOSOR	Quel pardon voulez-vous?
AMITAL	Délivrez Sédécie
NABUCHODNOSOR	Ce méchant, de qui l'âme est au mal endurcie!
AMITAL	Il est assez puny de ses crimes passez.
NABUCHODNOSOR	Sa faute ne sçauroit estre punie assez.
AMITAL	Un grand crime demande une clémence grande. [….] s' il n'estoit point d'offense, Un Roy n'auroit moyen de monstrer sa clémence. (III.1005-12)

The Queen uses stichomythia to counter the arguments of Nabuchodnosor and to convince him to forgive Amital:

NABUCHODNOSOR	Aux rois qui peuvent tout, toute chose est licite
LA ROYNE	Un prince qui peut tout ne doit pas tout vouloir
NABUCHODNOSOR	La volonté d'un Prince est conforme au pouvoir
LA ROYNE	Conformez-vous à Dieu, dont la force est suprême. (III, 924-26)

Like a lawyer, who realises what his opponent's main weakness is, Amital knows that the king's weakness is vanity and she raises a series of rhetorical questions in order to convince him that by refusing to free Sedecie, his future fame will be tainted:

> Voulez-vous qu'à jamais la belle renommée
> De vos victoires soit de meurtres diffamée ?
> La voulez-vous souiller ? La voulez-vous ternir ?
> Vous rendre abominable aux races à venir ?
> (III.1071-74)

Faced with such powerful orators, the male characters have no other choice than to 'obey' and yield to the power of women's tongue. Indeed in the plays, the female characters use language to invert power relationships, assert their own authority and expose the frailty of the boundaries of the gendering of language.

3.3 Eloquence is action? Women's speech as illocutionary acts in *Coriolanus*

In the plays, female speech is depicted not only as a means to invert power relationships but also as a threat to masculinity when it invades the masculine sphere and endangers the male characters. The female characters threaten to 'fill' (Titus Andronicus, IV.4.95) and penetrate the male characters with the power of their tongue, which substitutes for the power of the phallus. Indeed, the male characters' verbal sphere is threatened with verbal contamination by the feminine, as exemplified in *La Soltane*:

> Dolente masquez vous d'une ploureuse face,
> D'un parler gemissant qui promptement le face,
> Trop plus que vous dolent, vous voyant d'un bon œil
> En signe de recueil.
> […]
> Armons nous, armons nous donc en sorte
> Contre tous ses effors que lui tenions escorte:
> Pour le devaliser, et veincre honteusement
> Soint nos cœurs emmurez d'un roc de diamant.
> (II.665-68; 681-84)

Rustan recommends deceitfulness and role playing, and plans an unmanly attack against Mustapha as he acknowledges it, ('to defeat shamefully'). The relationship between men and speech in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries was significantly more complicated than that between words and women. Indeed, 'in an age when masculinity might best be described [...] as "fragile", a man who was disruptive or excessive in speech risked his gender identity in a way that a woman did not',[40] and because illicit speech was so emphatically coded as feminine failing,

[40] Bardsley, p. 90.

men who spoke too much or in inappropriate contexts risked the charge of effeminacy. Besides, in the sixteenth-and seventeenth centuries, men had to negotiate the complex gendering of speech norms, just as excessive speech was effeminizing, so too was excessive silence as demonstrated in *Coriolanus* by the character of Martius, who is unable to adapt his speeches to the circumstances in II.3:

CORIOLANUS	What must I say? 'I pray, sir,'—Plague upon't! I cannot bring My tongue to such a pace. […]
MENENIUS	You'll mar all I'll leave you. Pray you, speak to 'em, I pray you, In wholesome manner. (II.3.47-59) [41]

Martius does not only use inappropriate words but he also uses them in inappropriate contexts and fails to follow the advice of Volumnia, who recommends role-playing, dissimulation and mildness to win people's voices in III.2.Volumnia tries to convince Martius to show 'policy' in his speech, by using an ambiguous, contradictory and obscure rhetoric. As noted by R. B. Parker:

> the obscurity of the sentence ['You are too absolute,/ Though therein you can never be too noble, / But when extremities speak'] arises from the logical contradiction Volumnia has landed herself in: she wishes to confirm her teaching that it is noble of Coriolanus to be uncompromising but to insist that it is not so in the present circumstances.[42]

Volumnia knows indeed not only how but when to play the fox and proves that 'action is eloquence', as she mimes the action and her instructions with acting cues:

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[41] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. by R.B. Parker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); see Carol M. Sicherman, '*Coriolanus*: The Failure of Words', *ELH,* 39, (1972), 189-207*;* Jarrett Walker, 'Voiceless Bodies and Bodiless Voices: The Drama of Human Perception in *Coriolanus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43 (1992), 170-85.

[42] In *Coriolanus*, ed. by Parker, footnote pp. 268-69; Volumnia's arguments to convince Martius are not logical but opportunistic and the irregular lines and run-on-lines reflect the rapid shifts of thoughts as she improvises.

> I prithee now, my son,
> (She takes his bonnet)
> Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand;
> And thus far having stretch'd it,—here be with them,
> Thy knee bussing the stones,—for in such business
> Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant
> More learned than the ears,—waving thy head,
> Which often, thus, correcting thy stout heart,
> Now humble as the ripest mulberry
> That will not hold the handling: or say to them,
> Thou art their soldier, and being bred in broils
> Hast not the soft way which, thou dost confess,
> Were fit for thee to use as they to claim,
> In asking their good loves.
> (III.2.74-88)

But eloquence is also action in the plays. Power struggles are carried out within language and Volumnia's speeches display what can be called illocutionary logic. The female characters' utterances can indeed produce effects on the feelings, attitudes, and subsequent behaviour of the male characters and as such are examples of perlocutionary acts, performed by means of saying something, such as persuading someone to do something, convincing one's interlocutor or moving him to anger.[43] As explained by Elam's analysis of John R. Searle's taxonomy, there are five illocutionary acts, but this chapter focuses on three of them:

> the directives, attempts to get the listener to do something, whether it be to perform a deed, to give the speaker something, or simply to provide information (thus commands, requests, challenges, advice, questions, etc) […] the commissives, committing the speaker to a future course of action (thus promises, vows, contracts, undertakings etc.). Declarations, those acts which, if performed happily, actually bring about the state of affairs proposed […] Such acts were included in Austin's original 'performatives'.[44]

In *Coriolanus*, still in this same scene, Volumnia's speeches are examples of directive and commissive illocutionary acts. Volumnia challenges Martius in her speeches that become perlocutionary acts: she persuades him to show policy in his

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[43] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 158. Elam explains that '*illocutionary* acts are the acts performed *in* saying something such as asking a question, ordering someone to do something, promising, asserting the truth of a proposition etc (it is the "illocution" which constitutes the speech act proper)', p. 158.
[44] Elam, p. 158.

speech to the people and the perlocutionary effect is to make him act the way she wants him to. She moves from abstract argument to personal examples and convinces Martius by resorting to various rhetorical strategies: begging, ('I prithee now, perform a part', III.2.109) followed by a threat, notably the threat of suicide, by referring to his 'dangerous stoutness', implying that Martius might kill her, and this threat anticipates her more serious threat of suicide later in the play:[45]

VOLUMNIA At thy choice then:
To beg of thee it is my more dishonour
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin; let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list,
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,
But owe thy pride thyself.
CORIOLANUS Pray, be content:
Mother, I am going to the market-place.
(III.2.125-33)

Moreover, eloquence is action for Volumnia, as she considers that her praises are endowed with a creative and even procreative power. It is her praises that gave birth to Martius' identity as a soldier ('My praises made thee first a soldier'[46]); and in order to be rewarded with her praises again, Volumnia demands from Martius that he plays another role and creates another sense of self. This depends solely on his ability to perform a part, by saying his lines and the right words, thus blurring the distinction between being and acting:

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[45] V. 3. 274.
[46] III.2.110. See Janet Adelman, 'Escaping the Matrix: the Construction of Masculinity in *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus',* in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Origin in Shakespeare's plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 130-65. The desperation behind Coriolanus' claim to self-sufficiency is revealed by his horror of praise, even the praise of his general: the dependence of his masculinity on warfare in fact makes praise particularly threatening to him on the battlefield. See also, Valida Dragovitch*, Roma Materna: Rome et le personnage de la mère dans les tragédies Romaines de Shakespeare* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989), especially pp. 213-98. Some feminist critics have condemned Volumnia for being an 'emasculating Virago', notably Coppélia Kahn in *Man's Estate,* or have emphasized the way that Volumnia has internalized the patriarchal culture of Rome (see IV.2.18-20, for instance); on this question see Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1981); Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Lisa Lowe, '"Say I play the man I am": Gender and Politics in *Coriolanus*', *Kenyon Review*, 8 (1986), 86-95.

VOLUMNIA	I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said My praises made thee first a soldier, so, To have my praise for this, perform a part Thou hast not done before
CORIOLANUS	Well, I must do ’t: Away, my disposition, and possess me Some harlot’s spirit! (III.2.109-14)

Her praises are examples of performative utterances, acts of importance to the drama, since their successful performance usually changes the course of events.[47] Thus, Volumnia seems to prove that she is master in turning words into action; however in act V, her speech demonstrates that language can never be totally controlled, as it is always devious and deviant and has unpredictable effect.[48] The play stages the threat enacted by the deviousness of language through an example of unintentional perlocutionary effect, when Volumnia threatens Martius to commit suicide, triggering the tragic surrender of her son. As Judith Butler points out the threat is a speech act which is already in part, out of its own control, and thus ‘it is always to some extent unknowing what it performs, that it always says something that it does not intend, and that it is not the emblem of mastery or control that it sometimes purports to be’.[49] The voluble Volumnia reiterates her threat to commit suicide later in the scene but this time, it is paradoxically expressed through the threat to remain silent:[50]

VOLUMNIA	This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;

[47] Likewise Margaret’s increasing empowerment follows her increasing verbal domination of the plays and reaches its climax when she ‘divorces herself’ from the King: ‘I here divorce myself, / Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,’ which is another example of performative utterance, *Part 3,* I.1. 249-50.

[48] Cave, p. XVIII: ‘language is both deviant (deviating from its “origin” in reality) and devious (concealing its duplicity, undermining the assurance with which it is commonly used)’. As noted by Russ McDonald, Shakespeare’s Jacobean plays reflect a growing awareness of the danger of equivocal language and slippery rhetorical figures. The mature dramatist is always alert to the doubleness of rhetoric, and he keeps his audience aware of its pleasures and its potential dangers’, in *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 46.

[49] Butler, *Excitable speech*, p. 12.

[50] Her first threat is more explicit and perhaps less powerful: ‘For myself, son, I purpose not to wait on Fortune till / These wars determine: if I cannot persuade thee / Rather to show a noble grace to both parts/ Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner / March to assault thy country than to tread / Trust to ’t, thou shalt not-on thy mother’s womb, / That brought thee to this world’, V.3.19-26.

His wife is in Corioli, and his child
Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch:
I am hush'd until our city be a-fire,
And then I'll speak a little.
(He holds her by the hand, silent)

CORIOLANUS (*weeping*) O, mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold! the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother! mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But, for your son, believe it, O! believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
(V.3.179-90)

This scene of tragic acceptance demonstrates that the degree of strength of the illocutionary point depends on the position of authority, or the power of the speaker.[51] Volumnia invokes her position of authority as a mother over Martius, as she is perfectly aware of his emotional dependence. The context of utterance is also one of the determinants of the illocutionary act performed by an utterance.[52] In this final scene, Volumnia transgresses the prohibitions against women's participation in the political and public arena and her speeches become authorised discourse by reconstituting the public sphere as the private sphere, which becomes a potential site of subversive resignification. Volumnia demonstrates that without being authorised to speak, women can still speak with authority.[53]

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[51] John R. Searle and Daniel Vanderken, *Foundations of Illocutionary logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.11. See also Christina Luckyj, 'Volumnia's Silence', *Studies in English Literature* 31 (1991), 327-41.

[52] Searle and Vanderken, p. 27.

[53] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 157. Butler explains that 'by claiming that performative utterances are only effective when they are spoken by those who are (already) in a position of social power to exercise words as deeds, Bourdieu inadvertently forecloses the possibility of an agency that emerges from the margins of power', p. 156. See also Keir Elam 'Language in the Theater', *Sub-Stance* (1977), 139-62; Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

3.4 'Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?':[54] Enacting verbal and psychological violence in Garnier's *Les Juifves*, Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Bounin's *La Soltane*

But the tragedies analysed in this chapter also present an ambivalent representation of what was defined as traditional and disempowering feminine forms of speech. This last section will now consider the ambivalent representation of feminine forms of speech, lament and cursing, in *Les Juifves*, *Richard III* and *La Soltane*. I will demonstrate that those feminised modes of utterance become powerfully affective forces to move others to respond passionately in the plays, but also demonstrate how women can wound with words and enact psychological violence on the male characters, and on the audience.[55]

Lament was defined as a gendered genre, also as a sign of feminine weakness and powerlessness,[56] and is depicted as the last resort for the powerless chorus in *Les Juifves*:

LE CHŒUR DES JUIFVES	Il nous faut les plorer, car las! A nos malheurs Pour tout allègement ne restent que les pleurs.
AMITAL	Pleurons donques pleurons sur ces moiteuses rives, Puis que nous n'avons plus que nos larmes, captives: Ne cessons de pleurer, ne cessons, ne cessons De nous baigner le sein des pleurs que nous versons. (II.457-63)

But in the plays, this representation of female lament is also subverted as there is a strong element of fear involved in lament, a fear based on the association of lament not only with the dead, but with pollution, possession, madness and

[54] *Richard III,* ed. by John Jowett, I.3, 200.
[55] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p. 159.
[56] Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.25-26; see also Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to 'King Lear'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Christian M. Billing, 'Lament and Revenge in the Hekabe of Euripides', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 23 (2007), 49-57.

violence.[57] Amital expresses masochistic pleasure in lamenting and, though it is sorrowful and painful, the queen refuses to stop lamenting over the fall of her son:

AMITAL	Las! Je transis d'horreur, je forcene, j'affole, Ce triste souvenir m'arreste la parole
LA ROYNE	Ne vous adeulez point, reprenez vos esprits, Et relaissez plustost ce discours entrepris
AMITAL	Je le continuray, combien qu'il me déplaise (II.719-23)

The female characters' laments express the psychological violence they undergo but at the same time, by confronting the male characters with a spectacle of self-mutilation and violence, by weeping, tearing their hair and clothes, they also express the capacity of the lamenter to externalise pain and transform it into anger and reciprocal violence:

> Allons, dolent troupeau, possible nos prières
> Et les cris redoublez de tant de prisonnières
> Attendriront son cœur […]
> Soupirez, sanglotez, déployez toutes armes,
> Guerroyez vos cheveux, n'épargnez vostre teint,
> Que vostre sein d'albastre en vostre sang soit teint.
> (III.975-82)

In *Les Juifves*, through women's violent manifestations of grief, the subversive and threatening nature of female lament is represented, as it is a form of expression so powerful that it can solicit and/or substitute for acts of supreme violence. Lament is depicted as a threatening force in *Les Juifves* since it is a way to express anger as well as suffering and provides the female characters with an effective vehicle for protest. In the play, lament is at once emotional, deeply thoughtful and structured. The pathos and passion on which lament is predicated are redirected by the female characters, who invest this form of speech with the power to

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[57] Holst-Warhaft, p. 27. The female lamenter threatens to turn the patriarchal society upside down by her authority over the rituals of death.When hearing women's laments, the king's increasing anxiety is conveyed through a series of questions: 'Mais qu'est-ce que j'entens? Qui sont ces voix plaintives ?/ D'où part cette tristesse ? Ha sont ces tourbes Juifves,/ Elles viennent vers moy, c'est en vain', *Les Juifves*, III, 971-73.

exert psychological violence.[58] In Act II, Amital's retelling of the story of the massacre enacted on Jewish women becomes a way to enact psychological violence on the other characters on stage but also potentially on the audience.[59]

Moreover, lament is also used as a rhetorical strategy to convince in *Les Juives*; the retelling of the details of the massacre by Amital and the use of stichomythia aim to raise feelings of empathy from the Queen, who sympathises with her pain ('Le Coeur me bat au sein d'ouir tant de malheur', II.801). Though Amital states that retelling the story is too painful, she continues, since her lamenting speech not only aims to evoke pity but is also an argumentative speech which works towards a goal that is revealed in the last two lines:

LA ROYNE	Et que vous puis-je faire?
AMITAL	Employez-vous pour nous.
LA ROYNE	C'est un fascheux affaire.
AMITAL	Nous refuserez-vous?
LE CHOEUR	Nous délaisserez vous?
	(II.809-13)

The queen is indeed convinced by Amital's speech as she endeavours to convince her husband in act III; lament is thus depicted as a persuasive tool, as a dangerous force and a powerful perlocutionary mode of utterance that is rhetorically sophisticated and capable of instigating effects on its intended audience.

Likewise cursing and insulting are other forms of feminine utterance which are characterised by ambivalence.[60] They are depicted as the last resort of the powerless in *Coriolanus*, and are used in the plays by both Volumnia and Martius; but whilst Volumnia uses them as a substitute for violent action, for Martius in Act

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[58] Also in *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora demands from her sons to revenge her honour: 'And, had you not by wondrous fortune come, /This vengeance on me had they executed. / Revenge it, as you love your mother's life, / Or be ye not henceforth call'd my children', II.2. 91-115.

[59] Also in *Porcie* and *Cléopâtre Captive*, see chapter II. Besides, the female lamenter might appear as a threat to male military order, as she focuses on mourning the dead and loss rather than praising them. Holst-Warhaft notes, 'once any state has a need of a standing army, it must condemn the negative, bitter pain of traditional lament; otherwise how will it recruit volunteers and keep their loyalty?', p. 5. Indeed, as exemplified by Marc Antony's praising of Julius Caesar (*Julius Caesar*, III.2), masculine elegy validates a male military order, whilst the female lamenter threatens it by mourning the dead and can make it difficult for authorities to recruit an obedient army. Though lament was regarded as a female genre, examples of male patriotic lament can be found; for instance in *Les Tragiques* by D'Aubigné, see Colette Winn, 'Early Modern Women and the Poetics of *Lamentatio*: Mourning, Revenge and Art', *Medievalia,* 22 (1999), 127-55.

[60] See Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Cultur*e (London: Routledge, 1990).

III.3, the outburst of verbal violence and cursing becomes the signs of his powerlessness faced with the crowd:

> You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
> As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
> As the dead carcases of unburied men
> That do corrupt my air, I banish you;
> And here remain with your uncertainty!
> Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
> Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
> Fan you into despair! Have the power still
> To banish your defenders; till at length
> Your ignorance,—which finds not, till it feels,—
> Making but reservation of yourselves,—
> Still your own foes,—deliver you as most
> Abated captives to some nation
> That won you without blows!
> (III.3.121-34)

Cursing is indeed not a rhetorical mode of utterance limited to women since male characters are contaminated by it, when they feel powerless, as exemplified by Suffolk who is contaminated by Margaret's constant use of cursing in *Henry VI Part 2*:

MARGARET	Fie, coward woman and softhearted wretch! Hast thou not spirit to curse thine enemy
SUFFOLK	A plague upon them! Wherefore should I curse them? Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan, I would invent as bitter-searching terms, As curst, as harsh and horrible to hear, Deliver'd strongly through my fixed teeth, With full as many signs of deadly hate, As lean-fac'd Envy in her loathsome cave. [...] Poison be their drink! Gall, worse than gall, the daintiest that they taste! Their sweetest shade a grove of cypress trees! Their chiefest prospect murdering basilisks! Their softest touch as smart as lizard's stings! Their music frightful as the serpent's hiss, And boding screech-owls make the concert

full!
All the foul terrors in dark-seated hell.
(III.2.307-28)

Faced with such an outburst of verbal violence, Margaret fears for Suffolk, as cursing can be so powerful that it might turn against oneself and hurt the speaker:

> Enough, sweet Suffolk; thou torment'st thyself;
> And these dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
> Or like an over-charged gun, recoil,
> And turn the force of them upon thyself.
> (III.2.329-32)

Besides, it is interesting to note that whilst the military world of the sequence of *Henry VI* is dominated by female figures, in *Richard III* women seem to be limited to the verbal sphere of mourning and cursing; however, in the play cursing is depicted as the last weapon of the disempowered Queen Margaret, who uses it as a tool to enact verbal and psychological violence, and more threateningly to enact revenge. Indeed Margaret's curses are turned into prophecies since they are fulfilled at the end of the play:[61]

> Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?
> Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!
> Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!
> Though not by war, by surfeit die your king,
> As ours by murder, to make him a king!
> Edward, thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
> For Edward, my son, which was Prince of Wales,
> Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
> Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
> Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!
> Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's loss,
> And see another, as I see thee now,
> Deck'd in thy rights, as thou art stall'd in mine!
> Long die thy happy days before thy death;
> And, after many lengthen'd hours of grief,
> Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen!
> (I.3, 192-206)

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[61] *Richard III,* IV. 4, 74-76 'O! thou didst prophesy the time would come / That I should wish for thee to help me curse / That bottled spider, that foul bunchback'd toad.'

Margaret even contaminates all the other female characters as cursing and insulting become the distinctive rhetorical mode of the female characters in *Richard III*.[62] The insistence on her verbal violence seems to be a remnant of her former physical violence, and cursing becomes a tool to appease her pain and anger as it has both a therapeutic and destructive potential:

QUEEN ELIZABETH	O thou, well skill'd in curses, stay awhile, And teach me how to curse mine enemies
QUEEN MARGARET	Forbear to sleep the night, and fast the day; Compare dead happiness with living woe; Think that thy babes were fairer than they were, And he that slew them fouler than he is: Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse: Revolving this will teach thee how to curse
QUEEN ELIZABETH	My words are dull; O! quicken them with thine!
QUEEN MARGARET	Thy woes will make them sharp, and pierce like mine. (IV.4.110-19)

Thus, lamenting and cursing become a way to express verbal violence and anger for the female characters but they are also modes of utterance which characterise the figure of the *furor*, best represented by the character of Rose in *La Soltane*.[63] Louise Frappier defines the furor as a madness, which is not undergone, rather it is desired by the person experiencing it, who longs for it, calls for it and intensifies it. The state of *furor* is preceded by a state of *dolor*, in which the hero's suffering and misery question his human identity. The passage from *dolor* to *furor* is made through a dramatisation of speech which aims to enhance the pain of the speaker to the point where it is unbearable.[64] Rose's state of *furor* is indeed preceded by a state of *dolor* and her violent sorrow is expressed in her constant use of lament

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[62] On verbal violence and insults, see Dominique Lagorgette, 'Termes d'adresse, acte perlocutoire et insulte: la violence verbale dans quelques textes des XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles', *Senifiance*, 36 (1994), 317-32; ibid, *Les Insultes: approches sémantiques et pragmatiques* (Paris: Larousse, 2004).

[63] Anger is the only emotion where men are generally thought to exceed women in the depth of their response, but their anger is usually considered a justifiable response to a particular stimulus, whereas women's anger is seen as more diffuse and irrational. See Brian Vickers, In *Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 80.

[64] My translation. Louise Frappier 'La topique de la fureur dans la tragédie française du XVIe siècle' *Études françaises*, 36 (2000), 29-47 (pp. 31-32).

and cursing. In her first speech, Rose builds up her anger through a series of rhetorical questions and calls for physical violence to match her psychological turmoil. Rose states that she feels out of herself, (‘je me sens / Dejetée hors de moy et véve de mes sens’, II.624) and calls for physical violence to match her psychological turmoil, (‘las plus-tost un foudroiant orage / Viennent mon corps, mes os, violemment briser’, I.76-77). She is physically distorted by anger and her *furor* is also expressed through her frightful screams (‘ces plains et ces cris si hideus, / Ces hurlements et ces sors stygieus’, I.189-90). Hearing her, Rustan’s anxiety and amazement are conveyed by a series of questions; he cannot recognise her and cannot understand her fury:

> Quel clamour est cecy?
> Quel emoi, quel courrous, et quelle ire félonne
> A tant vous agacer ainsi vous epoinconne ?
> Quell’tristesse, quel deuil et épineux souci
> A vous entre-facher vous eguillone ainsi ?
> Dont vient Rose dont vient ceste brillante face,
> Ce sourcil hérissé, et ceste tresse éparse
> Ainsi négligemment au tour de votre chef ?
> (I. 219-25)

Moreover, Rose deliberately puts herself in a state of *furor* as a rhetorical strategy to convince the Sultan. She uses her anger and her ability to play the *furor* as a stratagem to manipulate him:

> J'avol'rai vers Soltan épointé de fureur,
> Là de mon seul regard je lui ferai horreur,
> Là tant je l'epeur'rai moi fine caute et fainte,
> Me voyant, que le coeur lui tremblotera de crainte.
> Là je n'aurai maintien, visage ne couleur
> Qui ne s'aille changeant, par l'horrible frayeur
> Qui mira forcenant: mes si blondes tressettes
> Forcènement d'effroi s'ellevr'ont toutes droites,
> De rage horriblement mon coeur ira enflant,
> Et de mes yeus iss'ra un feu étincellant
> Qui m'ira enflamant: comme en l'isle de Crète
> Quand le plus qu'insensé et furieux Cureté
> De furie agité veut dévot faire veus
> A la mère des Dieus.
> Voire et quand furieuse, en la ville sacrée
> De Delphe, à Apollin la prêtresse Erythrée

Saincte veut ministrer, pour dire à l'advenir,
Par destin aux humains ce qui doit advenir,
Soudain devient horrible, effroyable, et hideuse
Plus morne et allaidi' qu'une ombre ténébreuse.
Ainsi s'ra il de moi, car premier qu'affronter
Le Soltan cest émoi pour au long lui conter,
D'un sang d'ire bouillant tous mes os et mes vaines,
Me jettant hors de moy comblement seront pleines:
Mes yeux de grand fraieur par tout iront dardans
En signe de fureur de grans éclers ardans.
(II.731-56)

As Frappier explains, the word *furor* refers to a state of anger and madness which triggers a violent linguistic outburst, but also a creative delirium which endows language with magical abilities:

> Cette éloquence de la parole furieuse rappelle le mythe, très présent à la Renaissance, d'un pouvoir magique inhérent au langage, de la parole transformée en force par les vertus de la persuasion […] Il nous semble qu'on peut y voir la marque d'un pouvoir poétique et créateur, d'autant plus que la parole magique est par définition pouvoir du mot sur la nature [...] Fureur et éloquence sont ainsi étroitement liées.[65]

Rose confronts the audience with the double bind of eloquence and embodies the unsettling and threatening side of language which can be used either for creative or destructive ends.[66] In the play, the violent action of language has an almost magical power to wound and destroy, and the victims of this language are not only those through whom it is uttered but also those against whom it is directed, that is, the audience. The female 'artistic rhetor' explores emotions within a situation, allowing audiences to use their emotions as one criterion with which to assess a

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[65] The Furor of Volumnia is also expressed in her loud voice '*Vol*. O! you're well met. The hoarded plague o' the gods / Requite your love! *Men.* Peace, peace! be not so loud.' Her state of *furor* raises an interesting question by Sicinius 'Are you mankind?', IV.2.9-18. M.C. Bradbrook suggests that Volumnia's role was probably played by a man rather than a boy *in Shakespeare: The Poet in his world* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 214.

[66] Frappier, 'La topique de la fureur', pp. 44-47. She notes: 'La fureur apparaît ainsi comme le paradigme de l'éloquence, une éloquence représentée de manière duelle: redoutable lorsqu'elle fait appel au pouvoir destructeur du mot, créatrice lorsqu'elle évoque la puissance prophétique d'une parole d'origine divine. Les guerres de religion sont ainsi l'occasion de développer toute une topique de la 'fureur civile', particulièrement sensible dans l'oeuvre de Robert Garnier. Le furieux représente ainsi une spectaculaire métaphore de la France aux prises avec les guerres civiles. […] La topique de la fureur tragique sert ainsi admirablement la mise en scène textuelle des troubles politiques et religieux de cette seconde moitié du XVIème siècle.'

speech. In this way the audience assumes the active role of judge rather than passively submitting to emotional manipulation.[67] By endowing female characters with threatening eloquence, the playwrights stage taboo women, who are both tempting and terrifying, for a female and a male audience, as they confront spectators with the potential threat of verbal contagion.[68] Besides, the post-pubescent voice of the boy actor playing the role of Rose could have enhanced the threatening aspect of the staging of the *furor*. Indeed according to Elam, in his table of the emotions associated with paralinguistic features, 'to express feelings of anger, the voice has to be loud, the pitch high, the timbre blaring, the rate fast, the inflection irregular up and down, the rhythm irregular and the enunciation clipped'.[69] But again, the very staging practices might have contained the threat of female speech, because of the very absence of the female body and female roles being played by boy actors. Depending on the degree of illusion, or the audience's ability to suspend their disbelief, the threat raised by the female characters' appropriation of male rhetoric can be considered as already contained on the French and English stage. However, as Gina Bloom has recently analysed, auditory practice can become a site of gender differentiation.[70] Faced with the threat of such assertive and threatening women, the male and female audience can react by developing what Bloom calls constructive deafness, or intentional deafness, notably the female audience, against the threat of verbal contagion. But one can hypothesise that the suspension of disbelief can destabilise and impact on the female audience by creating feelings of empathy, possible identification with the sorrow and anger of the female characters, or even pleasure in watching assertive female characters.

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[67] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre,* p. 170.
[68] Butler, *Excitable Speech,* p. 115.
[69] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre,* pp. 80-81.
[70] Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion*: *Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 116.

3.5 Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, *La Soltane*, *Titus Andronicus*, and the tetralogy of *Henry VI* question the period's gendering of language, by reproducing the anti-feminine discourses that defined women's speech as threatening, excessive and manipulative. However, they also subvert this conventional discourse, by endowing women with manly rhetoric. The comparative analysis has revealed the increasing parallels on the issue of rhetoric between the French and English plays. It has enabled me to read the English plays from a different perspective and demonstrate firstly, that in both corpora, manly rhetoric can be appropriated by the female characters and secondly, that women are represented as most threatening when they use the mask of disempowering forms of speech and subvert them. The French and English plays are closer in their treatment of women as rhetorical threat than in respect to themes addressed in the first two chapters. I have also demonstrated that in *Les Juifves*, *Richard III*, and *Coriolanus*, language is shown to be an instrument of power and even the very embodiment of power.[71] By appropriating the manly sphere of rhetoric, the female characters find another threatening tool to claim agency and authority in the plays. The uniqueness of the character of Rose, the *furor*, has to be acknowledged and her verbal violence can be seen to dramatise or echo the violence of the French civil wars.

All the plays examined in this chapter resist and question the traditional early modern dichotomy between speech and action by positioning female speech as a potential insurrectionary act. They seem to echo the question of Le Doeuff who wonders 'is power, the power to act or to speak?'[72] and demonstrate that 'speech does not merely reflect a relation of social domination; speech enacts domination'.[73] The female characters prove that they are aware of what speech can do and how it can be used by speakers in social situations to achieve certain effects. Language is expanded into an act of creativity, self-assertion and power.

It is interesting to note that whilst in *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III,* the threatening female characters deploy a rhetoric of excess and seduction to

[71] Jeanette R. Malkin, *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Shepard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.100, quoting Bernard Henri Lévy, Barbarism with a Human face, (New York: Harper, 1979), pp. 32-34 ('speech is simply power, the very forms of power, entirely shaped by power even in its most modest rhetorical expression.').
[72] Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. XV.
[73] Butler, *Excitable Speech,* p. 18 (in Mari Matsuda's formulation).

violate patriarchal order, in the Jacobean play *Coriolanus*, language is used by Volumnia to validate the Roman values and order. This chapter has not tackled the issue of the difference between the representation of women in Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean plays and the so-called misogyny of the tragedies written under James I. However, it might be said that the character of Volumnia in *Coriolanus* reflects the ambivalent feelings raised by the reign of Elizabeth. Indeed in the years after Elizabeth's death, the popular stage manifested an acute and complex investment in the imaginary reworking and resolution of her reign. As Cristopher Haigh has noted, an idealised portrait of Elizabeth as a shrewd ruler and capable strategist emerged gradually over the first decade of James' reign, often in the form of a 'coded commentary on the defects of that reign'.[74] The character of Volumnia might work as such too, since she is represented as a powerful woman, a political strategist who preserves and validates Rome's patriarchal order. Besides, in Shakespeare's Jacobean plays, the traditionally feminine rhetoric of seduction seems not to be limited to female characters, but characterises the speeches of villains such as Iago. The rhetoric of excess which was associated with the feminine during the period is also what characterises the Shakespearean hero. Margaret, Joan and Tamora are all 'over-staters' and their linguistic excess is characteristic of the Shakespearean tragic hero's individual accent.[75]

A final point must be made, as the female characters demonstrate that it is not only 'the sound and the fury' that might be regarded as threatening. Silence is also portrayed as a powerful tool of resistance for the female characters.[76] The paradox of 'silent eloquence', which saw silence as a desirable feminine quality, has been noted earlier in this chapter, but *Titus Andronicus* offers an ambivalent representation of it, since it is associated with passivity and victimization and yet it is also depicted as a term of defiance to rebel against patriarchal power. Indeed, in Act I.1, Lavinia's silence might be interpreted as a sign of resistance and refusal to comply with her

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[74] Haigh quoted in Steven Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny: Hamlet and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I', in *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, ed. by Kate Chegdzoy (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 161-84.
[75] Mack Maynard, 'The Jacobean Shakespeare: Some observations on the constructions of the Tragedies', in *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1945-2000*, ed. by Russ McDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 125-49 (p. 126).
[76] One of the most distinctive markers of the tragic heroine's speech in tragedy is a failure to speak at all.

father's order.[77] She does not say anything throughout the scene, but this very silence could be interpreted as a conscious and active verbal choice that she makes, in order to show that she refuses to obey her father's desire to marry her to Saturnius; and in that sense 'the passion that compels Titus to kill his own son could also be interpreted as misdirected rage at Lavinia, who had remained silent when she could have asserted a defensive voice in her abduction'.[78] Faced with the threat of women's speech and eloquence which empower them, men have no other weapon than to silence them, and this is literalised in Lavinia's mutilation and rape. She is silenced physically, dehumanised, and turned into an object deprived of her capacity to communicate. Lavinia is indeed deprived of the most valuable Renaissance feminine qualities: her chastity and through the cutting of her hands of her domestic qualities (II.3.40-46), but she is also deprived of her eloquence ('the engine of her thoughts', III.1.83).

By silencing women or raping them, men attempt to contain female sexuality and the power of 'the sulphurous pit'.[79] As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the plays explore the association between female speech and female sex, which both needed to be contained in the Renaissance.[80] The plays stage Renaissance patriarchal society's fear of women's sexual power, which is associated with their verbal power. At the end of *Titus Andronicus*, retelling the story is a means for the male characters to recover their masculinity, moving from the passive position of hearing to the active position of unveiling the story, in an attempt to re-appropriate language which was used and abused by Tamora but also by Aaron. Tragedy frequently involves a discursive dynamic in which outsiders, particularly women and slaves, are represented as skilful at manipulating and even subverting the dominant discourse of

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[77] Butler, *Excitable speech,* p. 137. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, as in *Titus Andronicus*, resistance to patriarchal demands is expressed in the choice of suitor. The patriarchal males of this proud royal family refuse to let Bel-Imperia choose her own suitor. Their plan is to have her marry Balthazar and thereby become the means of uniting Spain and Portugal in one dynasty. Bel Imperia takes Horatio as her lover, in part at least as a way of staving off the demands of her family for her to marry Balthazar. The new love affair is her defiant answer to her father's and brother's anger at having given herself to a man of lower social rank.

[78] See Pascale Aebischer '"Yet I'll Speak": Silencing the Female Voice in *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*', in *Shakespeare et la voix*, ed. by Patricia Dorval (Paris: Société Française Shakespeare, 1999), pp. 27-46.

[79] William Shakespeare*, King Lear*, IV.5, 122, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 2479-555.

[80] Newman, p. 11; she cites a common sixteenth-century comparison between a woman's mouth and a woman's genitals: an open mouth and immodest speech are tantamount to open genitals and immodest acts.

husbands and masters. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the various figures of the different, notably of the female other and the exotic other, are represented as threatening because of their verbal power which is always associated with their sexual power. My analysis of the representation of women's violence and women as social and rhetorical threat, points to one common feature: the imbrication of the issue of gender, sexuality and race, which will be the concern of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 4: WOMAN AS SEXUAL AND RACIAL THREAT

4.1 Introduction

Because they constantly threaten to disrupt the patriarchal society in which they live, through their transgressive behaviour, the female characters analysed in the previous chapters are all in some sense outside this society, and strangers. Any analysis of women's representation and position has to be tackled in social and political terms and take into account the class and race they belong to since race, gender and class are articulated categories that come into existence in and through relation to each other.[1] In this chapter I will put forward figurations of various forms of otherness in order to analyse the representation of women as sexual and racial threat in four plays of my corpus, in which issues of gender, sexuality and race are interrelated: *La Carthaginoise*, by Antoine de Montchrestien, *Sophonisba* by John Marston, *Titus Andronicus* by William Shakespeare and *Les Portugais Infortunés*, by Nicolas Chrétien des Croix.[2]

The terms 'other' and 'woman' form a familiar pairing for feminists and the two words are virtually synonymous, the pairing redundant: all women are in some sense 'other'.[3] In Renaissance patriarchal society woman's very physicality, femininity and beauty were regarded as threatening others that could endanger masculinity, and this belief is reproduced in Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise* and Marston's *Sophonisba*. I will analyse the differences in their respective account of the story of Sophonisba, which will be illuminated by the specificities of *querelle des femmes* discourses in the two countries. Whilst English Renaissance drama abounds with representations of sexually threatening women, sexuality is absent in the French plays of the period, as they tend to focus on love and marriage. The

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[1] Ann Mc Clintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 5.
[2] Antoine De Montchrestien, *Sophonisbe, la Carthaginoise ou la liberté*, in *Les Tragédies de Montchrestien*, ed. by Louis Petit de Julleville, rev. edn. (Paris: E. Plon, 1891), pp. 115-56. Nicolas Chrétien des Croix, *Les Portugais Infortunés*, in *Théâtre de la Cruauté et récits sanglants en France (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*, ed. by Christian Biet (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2006), pp. 711-805.
[3] Helena Mitchie, *Sororophobia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3.

concern of this chapter is not however strictly the issue of sexuality, but the imbrications of sexuality and race in Montchrestien and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, but also of class in Marston.

Moreover, this chapter offers a unique analysis of race and of the emergence of a racial discourse in Humanist plays. Indeed, there are no critical studies of the issue of race in the French theatre of the period despite the presence of many exotic others in the plays, and increasing academic interest in non-European themes.[4] I have used English material as a critical framework and have utilised critical race theories to explore and shed light upon the representation of the racial other in the French plays *La Carthaginoise* and *Les Portugais Infortunés*. I have also used these plays as a tool to understand the concept of race in France, since again there is little critical material available on this issue.

As will be shown, the plays' ambivalent representation of the heroine's beauty also exemplifies how Renaissance tropes of beauty 'not only served aesthetic purposes but supported an ideology that still continues to serve the interest of white supremacy'.[5] As will be demonstrated, the plays reflect the centrality of whiteness in Renaissance notions of beauty developed in tandem with early modern conquest and exploitation, which were a crucial aspect of English contact with black people.[6] I will examine how the two versions of the story of Sophonisba adopt a strategy of 'silencing' or 'whitening' of the historical black female characters, to contain the threat she represents; the black woman is indeed doubly 'other' and therefore doubly threatening because of her sex and her race.

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[4] On the definition of the 'other' in France in the 17th-century, see Poli Sergio 'Pour arriver à l'autre: les voyages dans les dictionnaires du XVIIe siècle', and Christian Biet, 'L'autre, le droit et la fiction' in *L' Autre au XVIIe siècle: Actes du 4e colloque du Centre International de Rencontres sur le XVIIe siècle,* ed. by Ralph Heyndels and Barbara Woshinsky (Tubingen: Narr, 1999), pp. 17-31 and 69-95.

[5] Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Gender and Race in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 6.

[6] 1444 marks the beginning of the Portuguese importation of African slaves to Europe; 1517 is the starting-point of the transportation of African slaves to the Caribbean; in 1555 the first blacks arrive in England. On the presence of a 'black' population in England see Bernard Harris, 'A Portrait of a Moor' in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. by Catherine M.S Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), pp. 23-37; James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555 -1860* (London: Orbard and Chambers, 1971), especially pp. 7-31 and 32-48; ibid, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society 1555-1945* (London: Penguin Press, 1973), notably pp. 1-31. The presence of a black population in England dates back from the Roman period; in the second half of the fifteenth century, explorers like John Hawkins, John Lok, or Martin Frobisher kidnapped Africans and brought them back with them in England where they were first considered 'as a miscellaneous assemblage of exotic personally possessed decorative fetishes and human curiosities', in Habib Imtiaz, *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), pp. 1-2.

As noted by Ania Loomba, using the term race might be anachronistic since it certainly had a different meaning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and today.[7] In early modern race studies, two recurrent and related issues have preoccupied literary historians. First, an assumed pre-and post-Enlightenment divide is predicated on the notion that so-called 'scientific' definitions of race and the dominance of skin colour are fundamentally at odds with earlier manifestations of cultural difference and xenophobia. Second, that colour is not the necessary or only racial marker in the early modern period, but a fluid, multiple-category approach to racial identity has emerged. Lynda Boose questions the boundaries of Renaissance racial discourse and explains that Renaissance discourse is hard to categorise: 'that [Black Africans] had darker skins was clearly recognised: but exactly what significance was attached to that fact?'.[8] Likewise, Lara Bovilsky rejects the prescriptions of periodisation, arguing that 'early modern racial logics have much in common with modern and contemporary ones'.[9] Indeed, race was then (as it is now) a social construct, and early modern markers of racial difference encompass distinctions of nationality, religion, geographic and climatic origin, humours, skin color, body type, cultural variation and many of these categories impact on one another.[10] As noted by Lara Bovilsky, 'the racism of any historical period or place will reflect the beliefs about race',[11] but beliefs about race also reflect the racism of any period. It is interesting to note that beliefs about race and racial difference were very confused in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; for example, the term 'Moors' at first referred to Arab Muslims, although not all Muslims were dark-

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[7] Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 4-6. See also Lynda Boose, '"The Getting of a Lawful Race': Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black woman', in *Women, Race, and Writing of the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 35-54. Boose explains the malleability of the term 'race' in early modern England, in contexts that include not only Africans and Native Americans but also Irish people. On the definition of race in France see Jouanna Arlette, 'Le mythe de la Race', in *Ordre Social,* pp. 48 and 53. See also Ayanna Thompson, *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[8] Boose,'The Getting of a Lawful Race', p. 36.

[9] Bovilsky, p. 3.

[10] Bovilsky, p. 9. See also Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Floyd-Wilson argues that early modern ethnology posited a relation between climate and bodily humours to explain and map regionally characteristic body type and psychologies; she notes 'racial experience of the Renaissance, not yet marked by the history of race-based slavery, or logics of modern scientific thoughts was different from ours', p. 13.

[11] Bovilsky, p. 8.

skinned (travelogues and literary texts abound with references to white Moors). Over time, however, Moors came overwhelmingly to be associated with blackness, as is evident from the term 'blackamoors'. Renaissance racial vocabulary presents interpretive difficulties, because names and categories of racial groups were unstable and this confusion has been the subject of a continuous debate among Renaissance scholars. For instance, Anthony Barthelemy notes the varied use of the word 'Moor' to describe both light- and dark-skinned Africans, Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as Asians, Arabs, Native Americans, and Jews.[12] The same confusion is to be found in French terminology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

> contrairement à la rareté de l'Afrique et des Africains, le Dictionnaire [dictionnaire universel d'Antoine Furetière] foisonne de Turcs, d'Arabes et de musulmans (…) A l'exception de Turc, (..) l'Arabe et le musulman sont traités quasiment de la même manière que Maure.[13]

Religious and cultural prejudice against both blackness and Islam, each of which was seen to be the handiwork of the Devil, intensified the connection between them. This was accompanied by the religious view that blackness was the result of the curse of Ham as exemplified in *Les Portugais Infortunés*:

PANTALEON Mais savez-vous d'où vient votre noire couleur ?
Est-ce point du soleil la brûlante chaleur,
Qui desséchant la peau, la rend comme

[12] Anthony Barthelemy, quoted in Margo Hendricks, 'Surveying Race in Shakespeare', in Hendricks and Parker, pp. 1-23 (p. 20).

[13] Sonia Gadhoum, 'Présence de l'Afrique réelle et mythique dans le *Dictionnaire universel* d'Antoine Furetière', in *L'Afrique au XVIIème siècle: Mythes et réalités. Actes du VIIe colloque du Centre International de Rencontres sur le* XVIIe siècle, Tunis 14-16 mars 2002, ed. by Alia Baccar Bournaz (Tübingen: Narr 2003), pp. 23-31 (p. 28). But it must be noted that le *Dictionnaire universel* d'Antoine Furetière was published in 1690. See also Dominique de Courcelles, *Littérature et exotisme XVIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: École des chartes, 1997). A number of plays overtly thematize Christian resistance to 'turning Turk', including Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turke* (1609–1612); John Fletcher, Nathan Field, and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta* (1616–1619); and Massinger's *The Renegado* (1623–1624). In each of these plays, Islamic conversion is figured as the direct result of sexual intercourse between a Christian man and a Muslim woman. Conversely, Christian resistance is exemplified through the chastity of the Christian woman, a figure whose virtue remains constant though she is constantly pursued by lustful Turks. Michele Longino in *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) explains that the French will examine and discover themselves in, through, and against the foil of the Other - the local oriental Other - the Ottoman.

brûlée,
Ou bien l'aridité de la terre hâlée,
Ou bien que la semence, et le sang par trop cuit
Cause que votre chair si noirement reluit
[…]

ANDRE
Quand les fils de Noé peuplèrent l'univers
Le partageant entre eux, en trois lots tous divers,
Sem, comme aîné, choisit la terre Orientale
Cham celle-là du Sud, Japhet l'Occidentale.
Voila comme de nous vous apprendrez comment
Pour être descendus de Cham directement
Vous portez cette marque en votre chair empreinte.
(Act I, 507-12; 519-25)

After Kim Hall delineated an expanded field of study, researchers recognised, discovered, and made use of further historical and textual materials with increasing command over their meaning and interconnections, exploring, for instance, how race affected early English attempts at colonialism, or how beliefs about the humours affected English understandings of racialised bodies and much turned on the question of what 'black' means in its various Renaissance usages, and how this problematic definition shaped attitudes to outsiders as well as to European culture itself.[14] This chapter will engage with what is now termed 'whiteness studies',[15] the examination of the ways in which English men and women in the early modern period came to think of themselves as constituting a white norm, in

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[14] For a study of literary representations of black people in the English Renaissance, see *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. by Ania Loomba and Orkin Martin (London: Routledge, 1998); Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1991); Kate Chedgzoy 'Blackness Yields to Beauty: Desirability and Difference in Early Modern Culture' in *Renaissance Configurations. Voices, Bodies, Spaces,* ed. by Gordon McMullan (London: Macmillan, 2001), pp.108-28; Emily Bartels, 'Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionnings of Race', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41.4 (1990), 433-54; Michael Neil '"Mulattos", "Blacks" and "Indian Moors": *Othello* and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49.4 (1998), 364-69.

[15] Whiteness studies is an interdisciplinary arena of academic inquiry focused on the cultural, historical and sociological aspects of people identified as white, and the social construction of whiteness as an ideology tied to social status. Pioneers in the field include Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991); Nell Irvin Painter *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010).

opposition to people of darker pigmentation and how for Europeans, 'the opposite of *black* was *us*',[16] in order to answer the following questions: how do the plays represent the colonial encounter's restructuring of ideologies of racial, cultural, class and sexual difference? Do the plays endorse dominant attitudes to 'race' or question them? To what extent can it be said that the plays militate against dominant ideologies or contain elements that cannot be reconciled with them?

I will tackle these issues by analysing how *Titus Andronicus*, the first Shakespearean play to stage (explicitly) a black exotic other, and the first French exotic play, *Les Portugais Infortunés*, both endorse, question and destabilise dominant attitudes to race. The plays offer variable and often contradictory dramatic representations of the exotic other, by evoking contemporary ideas about the bestiality or incivility of Africans, emphasizing differences particularly through tropes of exaggeration and distortion and representing one of the strategic stereotypical definitions of the black other as cruel, violent, inhuman, and foul. I will engage in this chapter with Bhabba's theory of the 'fetishisation of race' and his definition of the stereotype as a 'complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive'.[17] I will consider how all the plays participate in 'the fetishisation of race', and will focus more particularly on *Titus Andronicus* to question the construction of what Habib Imtiaz calls the 'sexualisation of race',[18] by representing the clash between the male exotic other and the white woman, confronting Renaissance white patriarchy with the threat of the exotic other's sexuality and, through it, to the ultimate threat of blood degeneracy, of racial and cultural contamination (miscegenation[19]) through the female, in a period which saw the early beginnings of what was later to be labelled colonialism. In order to analyse these issues, I will address the following questions: is the spectre of sexual and racial pollution represented by the black or exotic male

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[16] Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 25.
[17] Homi K. Bhabba, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 70. See also Mc Clintock, 'the stereotype is fetishistic because it simultaneously recognizes and disavows the other's difference', p. 194.
[18] Habib Imtiaz, *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p.175.
[19] OED: 'the mixing or interbreeding of (people of) different races or ethnic groups, *esp.* the interbreeding or sexual union of whites and non-whites; a theory which advocates this as being advantageous to society; marriage or cohabitation by members of different ethnic groups'. Quite interestingly this term appeared in the USA during the American civil war, in 1863: 'miscegenation: the theory of the blending of the races applied to the American White Man and Negro.'

other in the plays, or is it female sexuality which is represented as a threat to white patriarchal society or is it both? In the presence of the male exotic other is the sexual threat always attributed to and blamed on him? Who is the 'real' other and the real threat in *Titus Andronicus* and *Les Portugais Infortunés*?

Discussions of race and racism are incomplete without discussions of gender and misogyny (and vice versa), given how interrelated these issues are. By staging inter-racial desire, *Titus Andronicus* reproduces what can be called a 'racialization of sexuality' through the 'blackening' of the white woman who asserts her sexuality and her foul desires, through the characters of Tamora but also Lavinia who defies her paternal authority and asserts her female sexuality. But to what extent are female sexuality and the transgression of patriarchal authority represented as more threatening than racial features in the play? Female sexuality was the 'great other' and the greatest mystery in the Renaissance, a 'dark continent' as Freud qualifies it, suggesting thus an interesting analogy between female sexuality and Africa since they both defy rational understanding and signify a lack.[20] According to Helen Carr:

> in the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women, (...) they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable.[21]

This analogy between race and gender is exemplified by Renaissance cartography, which claimed to be objective and scientific but which would be later tied to 'colonial' enterprise.[22] This chapter will therefore seek to analyse the extent to which the plays reflect how patriarchal oppression and colonial domination are conceptually and historically connected to one another.

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[20] As Luce Irigaray's famous title underscores, in phallogocentric discourse, 'this sex' (i.e women) is not 'one'. Women, in other words, do not comprise a sex in their own right, but are the negative inverse of the male, the 'hole', the gap, the lack defined by Freud as the essence of femininity. McClintock in *Imperial Leather* notes that 'all too often colonial represented the colonized landscape as feminine, unknowable and unrepresentable. So too in Lacanian theory the feminine is an unrepresentable absence effected by a phallic desire that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion', p. 193.

[21] Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism,* p. 135, quoting Helen Carr (1985). Africans are endowed with such qualities because they are, much like women, what men do not want to be.

[22] See the map by Pierre Desceliers (1550). On the question of the gendering and racialising of mapping in history, see Mc Clintock, pp. 21-29.

It must be noted that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European ventures to Africa were not the first encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans, but writings of this period do mark a new way of thinking about and creating these two categories of people as binary opposites. In seventeenth-century France, the domain of the exotic significantly captured the French imagination and this fascination would represent a crucial phase in the development of a collective French identity. Indeed:

> it set the operative terms for a colonial mentality, which, in turn, provided key grounding for the articulation of a national consciousness. Essential to the shaping of a sense of 'Frenchness' was the signaling of what it was not, the construction of the necessary 'other' against which it could define itself. [...] cultural lines of demarcation and attitudinal markers were being formalized as well, especially in places like the theatre.[23]

The theatre in seventeenth-century France functioned as a locus of entertainment and site of artistic expression, but it also forged bonds of common culture.[24] In the theatre, political and cultural messages were conveyed and exchanged, and the theatregoer discovered a sense of official national purpose as 'la mission civilisatrice'[25] through the emergence of what will be referred to as an early 'orientalist' discourse, that I will explore in analysing the specific case of the first French exotic play, *Les Portugais Infortunés*. In his ground-breaking book *Orientalism*, Edward Said has shown how knowledge about the Orient as it was produced and circulated in Europe was an ideological accompaniment of colonial power, and examined how key literary texts consolidated certain ways of seeing and thinking, which in turn contributed to the functioning of colonial power. Said has shown that a strict opposition between Europeans and Orientals is crucial to European self-conception.[26] But, *Les Portugais Infortunés* demonstrates that the colonisers and the colonised cannot represent neat binaries but are active in constructing each other.[27] Since all texts when analysed can potentially reveal their

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[23] Longino, p.1; it must be noted here that Longino focuses on a later period from 1635 to 1673. I will use the term 'orientalist' whilst acknowledging that the term might sound anachronistic.
[24] Longino, p. 2.
[25] Longino, p. 3.
[26] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003).
[27] Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, p. 55. See also Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) pp. 1-23.

own instability, and their contradictions, I will argue that *Les Portugais Infortunés* presents both an orientalist and a counter-orientalist discourse by both reproducing and deconstructing the stereotypical representations of Africa and Africans; indeed, stereotyping can be analysed as ambivalent since it involves a reduction of images and ideas to a simple and manageable form and functions to perpetuate an 'artificial' sense of difference between 'self' and 'other',[28] through an 'ambivalent flux of unconscious fantasy and desire, which points to the anxiety and instability of the dominant discourse but also to the possibility of resistance through notably this ambivalence of the colonial stereotype.'[29]

I will therefore analyse in this chapter how the plays are to be understood as motors/agents and not simply as products or symptoms of their times in situating the dramatic texts within the 'colonial battlefield'.[30] Indeed, the plays do not simply reflect dominant ideologies, but encode the tensions, complexities and nuances within colonial cultures and are an important means of appropriating, inverting and challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies.

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[28] Sander L.Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 18.
[29] Jan Campbell, *Arguing with the Phallus: Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial Theory* (London: Zed Books, 2000), p. 196.
[30] As explained by Edward Said, Orientalism pivots on a demonstration of the link between knowledge and power, for the discourse of Orientalism constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of 'knowing' them.

4.2 Women's beauty as a threat to masculinity in Marston's *Sophonisba* and Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise*

Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,
And in my temper softened valor's steel![31]

This chapter will begin by examining how women's beauty, which triggers men's love/lust for them, is represented as a threat to the male characters' masculinity in two plays which are heavily concerned with these issues, John Marston's *Sophonisba* and Antoine de Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise*.[32] The story of Sophonisba is about the rivalry of two warriors, Massinissa and Syphax, for the love/body of Sophonisbe/a, a Carthaginian noblewoman who lived during the Second Punic War. Both playwrights used the same sources but there are differences between the two plays that should be noted: whilst Marston's play focuses on the pair Sophonisba/ Syphax and his irrational lust for her, Montchrestien concentrates on the love of Massinisse for Sophonisbe. In the Renaissance, men's devotion to women raised anxiety, as stated by Robert Burton in *An Anatomy of Melancholy* 'love is full of fear, anxiety, doubt, care, peevishness, suspicion, it turns a man into a woman'.[33] Love is indeed depicted as effeminizing in Montchrestien's play, as Sophonisbe uses her beauty to make Massinisse effeminate and to achieve her goals:

> [...] il faut que je m'appreste
> De vaincre sa rigueur: L'esprit felon de Mars
> Qui des champs Thraciens vient d'avec ses soldats
> Amolli par les yeux de la belle Ciprine,[34]
> Eteint entre ses bras l'ardeur de sa poitrine.
> (I, p.125)

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[31] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed.by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine E. Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 865-1525, III.1, 118-120.
[32] See Richard Griffiths, *The Dramatic Technique of Antoine de Montchrestien: Rhetoric and Style in French Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
[33] Orgel, *Impersonations,* p. 26.
[34] Amollir, ramollir: rendre mol, maniable; rendre mol, effeminé. 'La volupté amollit le courage' <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv4/showps.exe?p=combi.htm;java=no> [accessed September 2010].

The verb ‘amollir’ is here significant since it means ‘to soften’ but also ‘to render effeminate’. Sophonisbe is represented as another Eve, a figure both of seduction and of temptation for Massinisse (‘Suis-je un second Tantale auquel soit deffendu / De taster au doux fruit’, III, p.137). She has the power to bring about change and to influence him: ‘Quoi voudriez-vous cesser d’influer dedans moi / Le désir et l’honneur? Le respect et la foi?’(II, p. 132).[35] In the play, the power relations are inverted: though Sophonisbe is the captive, it is Massinisse who obeys and submits to her will, using common Renaissance Petrarchan imagery of love as warfare and slavery to acknowledge the reversal of military roles. He becomes subjected to her power, as she is now the ‘tyran, [qui] donte aisément tout courage rebel’ (III, p.137) and, unable to fight, he must yield to her power:

> Elle s’avance à moi, m’embrasse les genoux,
> Et se montre en ses pleurs si pitoyable et belle,
> Qu’elle donte aisément tout courage rebelle.
> Par un trait de son œil, doux tyran de mon cœur,
> Amour vient m’assaillir et se rend le vainqueur:
> Et que pouvais-je faire à son pouvoir extrême,
> Qui combattait alors moi-même par moi-même ?
> Ne pouvant résister, je me suis donc rendu.
> (III, p.137)

In the play, love is described as a penetration of the self through the eyes, and compared to a wound (‘sa playe’, III, p.136), but it is also depicted as a rape of the mind, whose effects are dangerous as it threatens to turn men into women: not only does it penetrate the whole self, through an open part of the body (‘Que ce venin bruslant dont le poison se glisse / Par le canal des yeux jusque au fond du coeur’, III, p.135), but it threatens their masculinity and their manly solid state. As stated by Lelie, Massinissa is defeated, not only by a woman, but by her tears:

> Qui l’eut jamais pensé ? Massinisse est surpris
> A l’appat enchanteur de la molle Cipris ?
> Son courage indontable aux virile alarmes,

[35] Influer: faire impression sur une chose, exercer sur elle une action qui tend à la modifier. Il se dit principalement des choses qui agissent par une vertu secrète, non apparente ou peu sensible. <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv4/showps.exe?p=combi.htm;java=no>, [accessed September 2010].

Est vaincu d'une femme ou plutot de ses larmes ?
A travers son pavois le coup d'un faible Archer,
La flèche d'un enfant a bien su le toucher.
(III, p. 134)

Lelie's speech emphasises not so much Sophonisbe's manipulation of Massinisse, but Massinisse's weakness and loss of masculinity when faced with the heroine's beauty and his love for her. Massinisse is first turned into a child, half a man, deprived of his 'eyes' and of his ability to 'see' ('Sinon que comme enfant il soit sans jugement / Ou bien que comme aveugle', III, p.135), then he is reduced to an animal tamed by the heroine, and becomes her slave in Lelie's speech ('vassal', III, p.137). Finally the great soldier is dehumanised, deprived of human reason but also deprived of sexual potency as children are sexually immature and blindness was commonly associated with impotence. Thus the threat of the female is enacted by the female character but also by the female within, the feminine part in Massinisse which threatens to overcome him and to 'metamorphose'[36] him. Syphax warns Scipio against Massinisse's weakness when faced with the heroine's 'trompeur appas' (IV, p.144) and is reintegrated into the male community of warfare by Scipio, through a scene of male bonding:

Otez-lui ces gros fers, desliez ce cordeau,
Qui d'une force estreinte enfonce dans la peau;
Combien qu'il n'ait commis une faute petite,
Qu'on me le traite en Roy, sa grandeur le mérite.
(IV, p.144)

[36] The educated French Renaissance audience would have been familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. See Ann Moss, *Ovid in Renaissance France* (London: University of London, 1982).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines the term 'homosocial' as:

> the structure of men's relations with other men [that was] tightly, often casually bound up with other more visible changes and that included the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero and homosexuality [...] in an intimate and shifting relation to 'class', and that cannot be understood outside its relation to women and the gender system as a whole.[37]

In the homo-social world of war,[38] the presence of the female is seen as a threat to homo-social bonding which is the basis of military order and is exorcised in an outburst of misogynistic speech. Lelie's outburst is triggered by Mégère, and the threat she represents through her physical presence and her speech, where she calls for other female Furies ('tristes soeurs', III, p.133) to join her to unleash chaos, suffering, violence, and unnatural behaviour. Lelie's speech seems to be a response to Mégère's threatening speech, and an attempt to contain the female who invades the stage. In order to fight the threat posed by Sophonisbe, all the male characters join together in an episode of homo-social bonding to blame her, and through her, the female sex which is described as the cause of all human evils: 'O sexe detestable! Embuche de douleur! / Toujours tu nous produis quelque nouveau malheur […] Tout ennui, tout discord, tout meurtre vient par toi', (IV, p.145). Scipio reminds Massinisse of their intimate male friendship, praising him and his past glory, then insists on similarities of character between them as warriors but more importantly as men ('Aussi tôt tu le sais si je t'aimais sur tous / Le lit et le manger fut commun entre nous / La semblance de mœurs unit en telle sorte', IV, p. 145); by contrast, he emphasises the sexual identity (and therefore difference) of Sophonisbe 'cette accorte femelle'.[39] In the all-male world of war, the female has to be excluded

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[37] Sedgwick, pp. 1-2. See also Carlo Freccero, "'Cannibalism, Homophobia, Women: Montaigne's 'Des Cannibales' and 'De l'Amitié'" in Hendricks and Parker, pp. 73-84. Carlo Freccero focuses on the missing 'voice' of the New World woman who complicated 'normative heterosexual arrangements' and the tradition of male friendship from which women were excluded. Freccero charts the complex relations between cannibalism, homophobia, male friendship as a communion between men and homosociality as a 'sociocultural endogamy' that disguises itself as exogamy while simultaneously excluding the participation of women.

[38] Sedgwick, p. 41.

[39] Act IV, 146-147, 'Laisse donc cet amour, livre nous Sophonisse / Cette accorte femelle, ô mon cher Massinisse, / Qui tend plus à ses yeux de trompeurs hameçons.' The meaning of accorte is quite telling: 'en parlant d'une personne de sexe féminin: avisé, habile; prostituée: Femme aux mœurs libres, qui se livre à la débauche pour des motifs d'intérêt; souvent en manière d'injure, femme

– women being only ‘the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men’[40] – and to conclude and validate the homo-social bond, the plan to kill Sophonisbe has to come from Massinisse, ‘Nous diron que sa mort proceda d’elle-même’, (Act IV, p.147). The play demonstrates how men, feeling threatened by the female character and their dependence on the feminine, use women as ‘the abject’ to explain the collapse of their masculinity and warrior authority. In the play, the male characters fear their loss of masculine identity and unconsciously project this lack onto the body of the woman.[41] Sophonisbe becomes ‘the abject’ that the male characters seek to expunge in order to become social but the play also exposes the failure of such strategies of fetishisation. Fetishes can indeed be analysed as the displacement, onto an object (or person), of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level. They mark a crisis in social meaning, as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution and this contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, Sophonisbe.[42]

Sophonisba by John Marston focuses on the pair Sophonisba-Syphax, and on the warrior’s uncontrollable sexual desire for the heroine which leads to several attempts to rape her. In Marston’s play, as in Montchrestien’s, Massinissa and Syphax are depicted as soldiers whose masculinity is endangered by their love/lust for Sophonisba. Massinissa’s love for Sophonisba threatens his masculine warrior identity, as he acknowledges: ‘forgive that I forget / I am a soldier’ (III.1.67-68), and in the last scene the audience is asked to watch the shameful spectacle of such a great warrior crying:

> View Massinissa do a loathèd act,
> Most sinking from that state his heart did keep.
> Look, Laelius, look, see Massinissa weep!
> (V.3.57-60)

However, in order to contrast the hero and Syphax, Massinissa is desexualised in Marston’s play and poses as a patriot, who abandons the nuptial for the battlefield, abjuring sexual pleasures which he genders as female, ‘appetite,

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entretenue, vénale’, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv4/showps.exe?p=combi.htm;java=no> [accessed September 2010].

[40] Segdwick, p. 29.

[41] McClintock, p. 71 and Campbell, Arguing with the Phallus, p. 109.

[42] McClintock, p. 184.

kisses, love' (I.1,197-98). Like love, men's lust for women was seen as effeminising in early modern England since it distracts men from economic and military pursuit. Syphax's irrational and unnatural passion for Sophonisba threatens his warrior identity and represents the extremes of men's dependence on their bodily instincts and sexual urges that puts them in a position of weakness, irrationality and effeminacy, as illustrated by Sophonisba's questioning of Syphax's masculinity when he threatens her with rape, 'We think our lover is but little man, / Who is so full a woman' (III.1.33-34). Sexual violence becomes a sign of his insufficient masculinity or an attempt to compensate for it. But in threatening Sophonisba with necrophilic rape, ('Know, being dead, I'll use / With highest lust of sense thy senseless flesh', IV.1.58-59), Syphax crosses the boundaries not only of gender but also of humanity; as such he is punished by Eritcho, a witch, who stands for monstrous female sexuality. Marston adds the figure of Eritcho, a witch who represents the extreme of distorted sexual appetite and who tricks Syphax by taking the shape of Sophonisba. In IV.1, faced with the threat of Eritcho, Syphax tries to contain her power by positioning her within a traditional female role, calling her 'mother of all high' (IV.1.139), but later, as he is the one who is 'raped', Syphax's response is to offer Eritcho his sword since she has deprived him of his masculinity, his manly attributes, and wasted his 'pride', dissolving his masculinity by stealing his sperm ('Thy proud heat well wasted / Hath made our limbs grow young', V.1.19). Marston' s play echoes the vision of men's rape by the female expressed in King James' book *Daemonologie,* where 'we get not a vision of a man penetrating a woman, Satan penetrating a witch, but a vision of the witch, the woman in the act of penetrating'.[43] The rape leads indeed to an inversion of gender roles, as Syphax offers his sword to her[44] and is then invaded and contaminated by the female, becoming what he denounces in women's nature.[45] As analysed in the previous chapter, his contamination by the feminine is confirmed when he blames Sophonisba for his forced revolt, using a feminine tool, blaming, as a weapon, and sees himself as the victim of Sophonisba's beauty. In his speech, she is described as

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[43] Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing,* pp. 115-17. King James I took a special interest in the subject. In 1597 he published a book that he had written on the subject of witchcraft, *Daemonologie.* In this work, James put forward the traditional arguments in favour of a belief in witchcraft.

[44] V.1.19-20

[45] V.3. 66-86.

a witch, able to seduce and make men rebel against their will, using her beauty and body to do so:

> T'was she made Syphax false,
> She that loves Carthage with such violence,
> And hath such moving graces to allure,
> [...]
> Then was I captived when her wanton arms,
> Threw moving clasps about my neck.
> (V.2.73-81)

Thus, in the two plays, male characters are seen as constantly fighting to maintain masculine behaviour, especially rationality in the face of effeminising passion and love and Renaissance society's belief in the one-sex-model must have enhanced this anxiety about effeminacy in men. The plays dramatise how masculinity was regarded as fragile and constantly under threat.

Moreover, the boy actor's body, like the woman's, was seen as potentially used and abused sexually by men. The boy actor was indeed believed to be treated like a sexual object by the acting companies, who were often accused by anti-theatricalists of 'playing the sodomites'; theatre itself was believed to effeminise not only the transvestite boy-actor but also men in the audience. Their vision of the theatre was almost magical as they believed that 'watching' leads to 'doing'. The spectator would repeat what he saw the boy actor 'doing', by satisfying the sexual desires which have been aroused by the boy actor beneath the costume, leading the male audience to play the sodomites outside the playhouse. Likewise Rainolds, who attacked transvestism, declared that:

> for the apparell of wemen…is a great provocation of men to lust and leacherie; because a woman's garment being put on a man doeth vehemently touch and moue him with the remembrance and imagination of a woman; and the imagination of a thing desirable doth stir up the desire.[46]

Indeed, the unattainable was the body beneath, the boy actor's, who could potentially create homoerotic impulses.[47] In the specific case of the performance of

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[46] John Rainolds, *Th' overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599) quoted in Orgel, *Impersonations*, p. 44.
[47] On this issue see Chapter 2 and Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, pp. 13-33.

John Marston's play, the contrast between boy and adult companies could also have an impact on the homoerotic impulses created on stage, especially in a sensual context. Indeed, the confrontation of a boy and an adult actor on stage could have two effects: it could either reinforce the 'femininity' of the boy actor by the contrast created in terms of voice and physical appearances or/and answer the fears of Puritans concerning sexual abuses of apprentices and pederastic relationships in acting companies.[48]

4.3 The representation of 'blackness' in Marston's *Sophonisba* and Montchrestien's *La Carthaginoise*

Is it the dark foyle that best sets a diamond forth?[49]

As stated earlier, women's beauty was regarded as potentially threatening to masculinity and to men's identity as warriors, but Sophonisba as a beautiful Carthaginian woman represents a double threat to a white patriarchy since she is doubly 'other' because of her sex and her 'race'. I will examine more specifically the modalities of representation of 'the black woman' in John Marston's play, by analysing the extent to which the play reproduces traditional Renaissance representations of blackness, in order to argue that the black female other becomes a convenient locus for those dark forces that threaten European society from within, i.e. the culture's pre-existing fears both about the female sex, gender and class domination, that can be projected onto the outsider. Besides, I will explore how the two plays engage in strategies of mis-representing the female exotic other, through the racialization of norms of beauty within the newly whitened social body, and the consequent removal of the dark-skinned woman from representation, notably

[48] See notably Celia Daileader, *Eroticism* on the *Renaissance Stage*: *Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[49] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness.*

through a strategy of ‘whitening’ and ‘romanisation’ of historical ‘black’ characters.[50]

In Montchrestien’s play, the first speech of Sophonisbe sets the plays in Africa by referring to ‘les Numides’ and to ‘le Lion libien’ in her dream.[51] Many subsequent references reinforce this location, and the Roman Scipio explicitly refers to the dark skin of the Carthaginians:

> Tu te fis partisan de Carthage la haute
> Et contre nous armant tes peuples basanés,
> Tu nous as contre toi dans l’Afrique amenés.
> (IV, p. 143-addressing Siphax)

Massinissa, historically a prince of the Massylian tribe, initially allied to Carthage, was probably black, yet he is presented as an entirely Roman figure in attitude and manner in both plays.[52] Indeed, neither Marston nor Montchrestien distinguishes between the historical cultures of Carthage and Rome and the plays display a strategy of ‘romanisation’ of the African characters, starting with a whitening of the historical black characters. Quite interestingly, Sophonisba is not described physically in Marston’s play, and in Montchrestien’s play, the physical description of the heroine is inconsistent; indeed she is first described by Lelie, the Roman ‘woman-hater’, in a traditional Petrarchan blazon:

> Ces chaines de cheveux qui feraient honte à l’or,
> Ces sourcils ebenins, ce large front d’ivoire,
> Ces yeux dont les rayons semblent si doux à boire,
> Cette bouche où fleurit le bouton vermeillet,
> Ce teint de nege vive où s’éclate l’œillet.
> (Act III, p.137)

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[50] See Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), on the disappearance of dark-skinned women in early modern texts, which often turn African women white, especially pp. 1-21 and 21-45.

[51] I, p. 121.

[52] The various versions of the story of Sophonisba, by Petrarch (1338), Thomas Nabbes (1635), Nathaniel Lee (1676), and Joseph Addison (1713), reveal that this African princess most often appears with blue eyes and blonde hair.

But she is later described as 'black' in act IV by Siphax, 'Son corps seroit plutôt à force d'eau blanchi, Que son cœur obstiné à vous aimer fléchi.'[53] This contradictory description of Sophonisbe offers an ambivalent potential that could be tilted in either dimension in performance, but also reveals how beauty standards of the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries discouraged authors from setting up women of colour as objects of lyric praise. Indeed in traditional Petrarchan descriptions, women's beauty is defined by whiteness of skin, and blondness of hair, celebrating a form of beauty which is by essence racialised.[54] Kim Hall's *Things of Darkness* has brilliantly demonstrated how colour consciousness of the Petrarchan style which characterises sonneteers' employment of a vocabulary of fairness and darkness is also part of a project in aesthetic mastery of gender and racial difference. She has put forward the racial and social meanings of the term 'black' which very often stand in opposition to 'fair' and how the word held particular moral resonances for women; correspondingly to be of dark complexion was to be 'foul' and hence unlovely.[55] In the sixteenth century, the tropes of beauty shifted the meaning given to black and blackness as white became associated not only with moral virtue and beauty, but also with racial purity, while its reversal, its threatening opposite, became blackness and translated the emergence of colonial prejudice based on colour differentiation.[56] Kim Hall has noted that 'fairness and whiteness

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[53] IV, p. 144. Ania Loomba remarks that 'if blackness can be washed white, that means whiteness is also vulnerable to pollution. The recurrent images of black people, Moors and heathens and other outsiders converting to Christianity try to keep at bay another set of anxieties, those generated by the possibility of Christians "turning Turk" […] and Europeans "going native", in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 99.

[54] See Robert Greene, 'Petrarchism Among the Discourses of Imperialism', in *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*, ed. by Karen Ordhal Kupperman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 130-33 and Nancy Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme', in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 95-110 (p. 96).

[55] However, the seventeenth century saw also the emergence of 'the ugly beauty tradition' in which poets 'stage and allegorize a contemporary drama: the attempt to incorporate the Other-whether it be defined as a subordinate gender; an atypical race; a subversive political, religious, or aesthetic position [...]–into a cultural norm', in Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counter discourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 200. Kim Hall also notes that 'just as poets begin to depict Petrarchism as an empty and devalued currency, they turn to the language of blackness, which becomes an unexplored and endlessly fertile space for poetic invention', *Things of Darkness*, p.116. See also Ian Smith, 'Barbarian Errors: Performing Race in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 49.2 (1998), 168-86 (p. 170). Ian Smith remarks that Elizabethan obsessions with skin colour and its origins, whether quasigenetic, heliotropic, or divine, make clear the English concern with a semiotics of blackness that is everywhere translated into cultural difference.

[56] The first monarch to expel the 'blackamoors' by decree was Elizabeth I, who styled herself, significantly as 'the Virgin Queen', and whose iconic self-blanching greatly encouraged what Kim Hall calls 'the cult of fairness' in English women.

became racialised in connection with ideologies of nationhood and physical beauty'.[57] This is the reason why when looking to discover African heroines in Renaissance texts, we find an insistent whitening of women historically understood to have originated from within the continent of Africa.[58] The unspecified skin colour or, more frequently, the Petrarchan whiteness of the African woman seems to function as a rhetorical assertion of the opposite of the racial difference whose existence was being forcefully experienced by Europeans in an age of exploration and colonization. Besides, 'white' was not only a racialised but also a gendered term; whiteness was associated with the feminine and was therefore a negative and pejorative concept when linked to men, since it denotes a lack of masculinity or of courage.[59] It was also a socially connoted term as whiteness of the skin was central to the beauty canons of women from the aristocracy:

> Since fairness of the skin was greatly admired, it is readily understandable that the condition of the skin was a source of anxiety to all ladies; they must emulate their queen, who was a type of blonde, and whose pale, fair skin set the standard of beauty. It was the country maids who were nut-brown, and the sun-tanned beauty was quite out of place.[60]

Therefore, Sophonisba as a beautiful Carthaginian noblewoman cannot be black for aesthetic but also for social reasons. Sophonisba has to be 'whitened' to correspond to the beauty canons of the Renaissance and to contain the potential racial threat that she might represent as a black woman but more importantly as a noble female exotic other.

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[57] Kim Hall, '"These Bastard Signs of fair": Literary Whiteness in Shakespeare's Sonnets', in Loomba and Martin, *Post-Colonial Shakespeares,* pp. 64-84 (p. 69). Discussing interlinked early modern rhetorics of gender and race, Hall notes that 'white' is attached to values-purity, virginity, and innocence- represented by (or notably absent in) women. See also C.R. Boxer, 'The Cult of Mary and the Practice of Misogyny', in *Mary and Misogyny* (Duckworth: London, 1975), pp. 97-113. Boxer analyses how the Spanish and Portuguese discoverers, pioneers and conquistadors took the cult of Mary and virginity overseas with them, but the missionaries had great difficulty in getting their Amerindian male converts to marry women who were still virgins, since having sexual relations before marriage was a common practice and only concubines were believed to make good wives.

[58] Taylor, *Buying Whiteness,* p. 25. Because using the term 'racism' would be anachronistic, Taylor suggests the term 'colorphobia' to refer to the Elizabethan obsession with whiteness.

[59] As exemplified by the scared servant called 'lily-livered boy' by Macbeth, in *Macbeth*, V.3, 16 and in King Lear when Goneril insults her husband 'Milk-livered man', IV.2, 49.

[60] Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman: A Panorama of English Womanhood, 1540 to 1640* (London: Cleaver-Hume Press, 1952), p. 182.

By contrast, the black woman is allowed a presence when class issues are not involved. John Marston's *Sophonisba* explicitly stages two 'black' characters, Vangue and Zanthia.[61] Many critics have already analysed the negative representation of the black woman (when she is present) on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage and have pointed out that when visible at all, black womanhood tends simply to further a misogynistic discourse.[62] Indeed in *Sophonisba*, the stereotypes connected with blackness are associated with the character of Zanthia who is represented as foul, deceitful and sexually promiscuous. She betrays Sophonisba without any motives and Syphax hints at future sexual intercourse with her:

SYPHAX	We will be good to Zanthia, Go, cheer thy lady, and be private to us.
ZANTHIA	As to my life
SYPHAX	I'll *use* this Zanthia, And trust her as our doves drink dangerous Nile, Only for thirst, then fly the crocodile. (III.1.200-04)

In this scene, Zanthia is objectified and used as a commodity by Syphax to achieve his ends, and she is also positioned as a potential sexual object.[63] She is described as easily manipulated and deceived; Syphax treats her like a 'good' child who will be rewarded, thus reproducing the patronizing voice of the coloniser. Besides, the two black characters assist and attend the attempted rape, but as exemplified by Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, the black character can be complicit with the rape but never be an agent of it:[64]

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[61] Vangue is described as 'Dear Ethiopian negro', 'gentle negro', I.1.60 and 69.

[62] Celia Daileader, *Racism, Misogyny and the Othello Myth: Inter-racial Couple from Shakespeare to Spike Lee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.15. On the representation of the black woman, see Ania Loomba 'The Color of Patriarchy: Critical Difference, Cultural Difference and Renaissance Drama', in *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender,* ed. by Kate Chedgzoy (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 235-55; Kim Hall '"I rather would wish to be a Black-Moor": Beauty, Race, and Rank in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*', in Hendricks and Parker, pp. 178-94.

[63] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 38. See also Mc Clintock, p. 33, on the objectification of race, through her analysis of Victorian forms of advertising as 'commodity racism' which 'converted the narrative of imperial progress into mass-produced *consumer spectacle*.'

[64] Virginia Mason-Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 65.

> Look, I'll tack thy head
> To the low earth, whilst strength of two black knaves
> Thy limbs all wide shall strain.
> (III.1.9-11)

Vangue and Zanthia only serve to mark rape with racial pollution. In the frustrated rape plot, the rapist is not explicitly black but the blackness of the servants functions metonymically, as blackness itself stands in for the rape that cannot be staged. Indeed, a major role given to blackness and to black people is their functionality as black servant figures in the period were frequently used as literally props for their 'fair mistress'. Kim Hall notes that 'the evocation of blackness serves to racialise whiteness and make it visible'; [65] in other words black was used as a 'foil' to white.[66] In this sense, in Marston's play Zanthia would function as a racial, moral and complexional foil to Sophonisba, as a 'prop' to reinforce the fairness and whiteness of the noble Carthaginian woman. The first scene seems to corroborate this argument: in the play's opening *tableau*, Zanthia is visually employed as an accessory, connoting the considerable magnificence of Sophonisba's state, and Zanthia's black skin is what makes Sophonisba's figurative moral and sexual 'whiteness' and purity visible:[67]

> Enter at one doore the Prologue, two Pages with torches, Asdruball and Jugurth, two Pages with lights, Massanissa leading Sophonisba, Zanthia bearing Sophonisbas traine, Arcathia and Nicea, Hano and Bytheas.

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[65] Hall, *Things of Darkness,* p. 22. Hall illustrates the centrality of discourses and images of blackness to English culture and their importance in shoring up authorial ambitions, codes of aristocracy, and gender hierarchy, and their ability to provide omnipresent material reminders, in the forms of miniatures, portraits, or earrings, of optimistic English mercantile and colonialist ambitions.

[66] This dynamic is reproduced in the art of cameos, very popular in the Elizabethan period, in which the aesthetic, moral and racial contrast between white and black can be visualized. See on this topic, Karen C.C. Dalton, 'Art for the Sake of Dynasty: The Black Emperor in the Drake Jewel and Elizabethan Imperial Imagery', in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. by Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 178-215; Valerie Traub, 'Mapping the Global Body', in Erickson and Hulse, pp. 44-98; Kim F. Hall, '"Object into Object?" Some thoughts on the presence of black women in Early Modern Culture', in Erickson and Hulse, pp. 346-80. The Great Armada portrait also illustrates how by using a dark background, Elizabeth appears as 'the source of light', emphasizing thus the intrinsic superiority of the colour white.

[67] Bovilsky, p. 49. The polarity of dark and light is most often worked out in representations of black men and white women. The association of feminine virtue with whiteness accounts for the lack of black female characters in the plays of the period.

The language of 'black' and 'white' imposes division on a continuum and indeed binarises it. However, as Kim Hall points out, women are only 'black' or fair in competition with, or in relation to, each other. She suspects that 'black characters–male and female–in early modern English drama tell us more about the 'fair' women with whom they associate than they tell us about the real or imagined qualities of "Moors", "blackamoors", "Negroes or "Ethiopes"'.[68]

However, Marston's representation of 'blackness' is not clear-cut**.** As stated earlier, the first scene of the play stages the pair Zanthia-Sophonisba and the second scene parallels this first scene, in staging another pair, Syphax-Vangue, who clearly work as doubles as Vangue's physical blackness makes visible and echoes Syphax's moral blackness and vice versa. Besides in act I.2, the first verbal exchange between Sophonisba and Zanthia introduces a debate around female sexuality and the social constraints imposed by patriarchy on female desire, initiated by Sophonisba. This conversation is preceded by a parallel scene where Syphax expresses his passion and lust for Sophonisba (I.1) therefore establishing a link between Sophonisba's speech and call for free sexuality and Syphax's lust. Sophonisba indeed questions the double standard of sexuality and denounces the hypocrisy of customs and ceremony that expects women to pretend and to play the role of chastity:

SOPHONISBA	I wonder, Zanthia, why the custom is To use such ceremony, such strict shape, About us women. Forsooth the bride must steal Before her lord to bed; and the delays Long expectations, all against known wishes. I hate these figures in locution, These about-phrases forced by ceremony. We must still seem to fly what we most seek And hide ourselves from that we fain would find. […]
ZANTHIA	'Las, fair princess, those that are strongly formed And truly shaped may naked walk, but we, We things called women, only made for show, And pleasure, created to bear children

[68] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, p. 16.

And play at shuttlecock, we imperfect mixtures,
Without respective ceremony used,
And evert complement, alas, what are we?
(I.2. 6-24)

This debate tarnishes Sophonisba's fairness as the contrast blurs between the 'fair princess' and her foul/black maid. Besides, Sophonisba ends the conversation not because it is inappropriate for her sex but because she realises that the topic is inappropriate for her class, stating that Zanthia has crossed the boundaries of her class:

SOPHONISBA	You are familiar Zanthia. Zanthia, my shoe. (*Zanthia removes and examines Sophonisba's shoes*)
ZANTHIA	Tis wonder, madam, you tread not awry.
SOPHONISBA	Your reason, Zanthia
ZANTHIA	You go very high.
SOPHONISBA	Hark! Music, music! (I.2.30-33)

Indeed, in the construction of the black woman's sexuality, Zanthia works to deflect anxieties about female desire and her sexual promiscuity is allowed not so much because of her race but because of her class. The play demonstrates that class issues always prevail by placing class above race. In IV.1, against any psychological coherence, Sophonisba ceases to trust her because she is a servant:

O fear a servant's tongue
Like such as only for their gain do serve.
Within the vast capacity of place
I know no vileness so most truly base.
[...]
Traitors and these are one. Such slaves once trust,
Whet swords to make thine own blood lick the dust.
(III.1.110-17)

Likewise, IV.1 questions the psychological coherence in the characterization of Sophonisba; after realizing that enforced sex would not be a source of

contentment, the two ‘high’ heroes ally against Zanthia to silence and erase her from the stage:

SOPHONISBA	Dread Syphax, speak! As thou art worthy, is not Zanthia false?
SYPHAX	To thee, she is.
SOPHONISBA	As thou art then thyself, Let her not be.
SYPHAX	She is not! *(The guard seizeth Zanthia)*
ZANTHIA	Thus most speed When two foes are grown friends, partakers bleed. (IV.1.83-87)

This also illuminates Syphax’s extreme violent reaction when he discovers the bed trick and Vangue’s body (‘Ha! Can any woman turn to such a devil? / Or-or-Vangue, Vangue![69]). Indeed it is not only triggered by the shock of Vangue’s body and the threat of racial and homosexual intercourse but his rage is enhanced by Vangue’s social transgression:

VANGUE	O Jove, how pleasant it is but to sleep In a king’s bed!
SYPHAX	Sleep there thy lasting sleep, Improvident, base, o’er-thirsty slave (III.2.195-97)

This section has analysed the interrelation of discourses on gender and race in Montchrestien’s play, and also of class in Marston’s. It has demonstrated that a parallel pattern emerges of scapegoating the other, be it a woman in a homo-social world or a female ‘exotic’ other from the lower class in a noble world. I have also analysed in this section the significance of whiteness for gender, racial and class identity.

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[69] III.2, 186-87. Daileader in *Racism,* notes that the devil was always described as black, ‘though the rhetoric of demonism would be incorporated into racial discourse as it developed, the black devil figure pre-existed the large-scale contact with and enslavement of African peoples that generated racism as hegemonic, pseudo-scientific discourse’, p. 1.

As has been demonstrated, the threat of the 'black other' is contained in the plays since they do not stage the confrontation of the exotic other and the white 'European' world, but use a strategy of 'romanisation' and 'whitening' of the black characters. The sensuality of Sophonisba's African lovers is likewise contained in the two versions of the story, since they yield to Roman self-discipline, and the plays insist on the formation of bonds between men to maintain empire. The playwrights do not attempt to depict an 'exotic' setting, since the black hero and heroines are given Roman qualities and the plays insist on the similarities of 'moeurs' between the Roman Scipio and Massinisse, which is a typical strategy of the construction of the 'other' in the coloniser's discourse.

This first section has provided a context for questioning the emergence of an orientalist and/or counter-orientalist discourse in the early modern period. My inquiry will now proceed, and explore the emergence of a discourse that could be called 'orientalist', and which requires the maintenance of rigid boundaries in order to differentiate between the Occident and the Orient. But as will be shown, the plays *Titus Andronicus* and *Les Portugais Infortunés*, as specific test cases, reveal a strategy of differentiation from and rejection of the 'exotic other', whilst acknowledging the interdependency of the definitions of the 'other' and the 'self'.

4.4 The sexualisation of race and the racialisation of sexuality in *Titus Andronicus*

The various ways of positioning and erasing the black woman in the two versions of the story of Sophonisba indicate the intricate overlaps between colonial and sexual domination. Renaissance maps illustrate the ambivalent feelings of fascination and repulsion for the 'exotic others', notably through the conflation of notions of 'strangers' and 'strange' in the representation of Africa, the land of the Moors but also of the Amazons, the cannibals, the hermaphrodites,[70] and other monsters 'with their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouthes in the middle of their breasts'.[71] Likewise, in the engraved allegorical representation of the four continents by Cesare

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[70] G.K Hunter, 'Elizabethan and Foreigners', in Alexander and Wells, *Shakespeare and Race,* pp. 37-64 (p. 56).
[71] Hunter*,* p. 40. Quote by Sir Walter Raleigh.

Ripa, Europe is the land of abundance ('cornucopia'), of kings and the pope, whose crowns and papal tiara lie at her feet. Africa, by contrast, is represented by a sensual woman who wears an elephant headdress and is accompanied by a lion, the scorpion of the desert sands and Cleopatra's asps; this example shows how Africa is always represented as feminine and strange. As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminised borders and boundaries. In the Renaissance, the new artwork and the new geography together promised the 'new' land to European men as if it were a woman, not to mention the women of the new land who were regarded as literally 'up for grabs'. By contrast, in the colonial situation, according to Fanon, the 'real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the blackman'.[72] Africans were believed to be characterised by laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality. Therefore, for the white man (and woman) the black man is marked by his colour and his supposedly limitless sexuality. Indeed Renaissance travel writings and plays repeatly connect deviant sexuality with racial and cultural outsiders and faraway places, which had become what Ann Mc Clintock describes as 'porno-tropics for the European imagination, a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears. Thus non-Europeans are repeatedly constructed as libidinally excessive, and sexually uncontrolled.'[73]

The Renaissance association between myths of monstrous black sexuality and monstrous female desire is reflected in the strategy of sexualisation of race displayed in *Titus Andronicus* through the characters of Aaron but also Tamora, since in the colonial economy of cultural difference, the sexuality of the exotic other is a token of his/her race.[74] Indeed *Titus Andronicus* reproduces the stereotypes associated with Moors, by depicting Aaron as barbarous, cruel and violent; his inhumanity is reflected notably in his absence of remorse and refusal to repent at the end of the play:

LUCIUS Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?

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[72] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), p. 161, quoted in McClintock, p. 191.
[73] McClintock, p. 22.
[74] Imtiaz, p. 175.

AARON	Ay, that I had done a thousand more. I am no baby, I, that with base prayers I should repent the evils I have done. (V.3.184-85)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, heresy and sexual irregularities were linked and regarded as mutually constitutive but Aaron also questions the 'traditional' representation of blackness as he inverts the traditional idea that white is the 'natural' colour, making it a crude artificial covering, where black is authentic and incapable of bearing false face:

> What, what, ye sanguine, shallow-hearted boys,
> Ye white-limed walls, ye alehouse painted signs!
> Coal black is better than another hue
> In that it scorns to bear another hue;
> For all the water in the ocean
> Can never turn the swan's black legs to white,
> Although she leave them hourly in the flood.
> (IV.2. 99-106)

Black becomes a manly hue in Aaron's speech, as opposed to the effeminate whiteness of Tamora's sons:

CHIRON	I blush to think upon this ignomy.
AARON	Why, there's the privilege of your beauty bears. Fie, treacherous hue, that will betray with blushing The close enacts and counsel of thy heart. (IV.2.117-20)

Besides, the play questions the association of Moors and excessive sexuality; it is Tamora who woos Aaron in the woods but he rejects her, positioning Tamora as the classical Goddess of sexual desire and himself as Saturn: 'Madam, though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is dominator over mine' (II.2.30-31). Mary Floyd-Wilson has examined the prior geohumoral beliefs – according to which Africans were presumed to be quick-witted, pious and noble – and how they were in

fact incompatible with the racist stereotypes that accompanied the slave-trade.[75] As she notices, Greeks and Romans made no claims that Africans were overly sexualised; if anything, they were seen as verging on impotence, whereas it was the northerners, including the English, who were seen as licentious. This potentially illuminates the character of Aaron in this scene as the Moor is less interested in sex than the northerner Tamora. The character of Tamora is hyper-sexualised and announces subsequent Shakespearean inter-racial heroines, Cleopatra and Desdemona.

The survey of Moorish characters in Renaissance drama amply shows how closely every such character is erotically linked with a non-Moor or to be precise a female 'non-Moor'. Celia Daileader argues that what she calls 'Othellophile narratives' are less concerned with the praise or blame of their black male protagonists than with the sexual surveillance and punishment of the white women who love them. Indeed, when one body is female and white and the other black and male, the ideological stakes are high.[76] As stated earlier in this chapter, the absence, suppression or invisibility of the black woman in drama works as a cultural construct and is first and foremost about women and white women explicitly, as the 'subjects' of representation. In that sense, *Titus Andronicus* would not be so much a play about Aaron the Moor and the sexualised representation of Africans, but would be concerned with the representation of the white women, and their sexuality. Daileader's thesis is that many sexually explicit representations of the exotic other/black body 'are coloured by loathing of the flesh, designed to chastise, purge, annihilate, or contain the erotic body of women',[77] and she traces a Shakespearean racialist rhetoric that pairs a black man and a white woman in such a way as to render the former a vehicle for misogynistic figurations of a woman's sexual sullying.[78] The dependence on and vulnerability to women's sexuality explains why many Elizabethan and Jacobean plays are so obsessed with it, reflecting Renaissance patriarchy's fear of the 'ungraspable' nature of female sexuality.[79] The centrality of

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[75] Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity,* 'Part I Climatic culture: The Transmissions and Transmutations of Ethnographic Knowledge', pp. 23-67.
[76] Daileader*, Racism*, p. 10.
[77] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 9.
[78] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 15.
[79] This obsession with female sexuality is represented in many Renaissance plays and reaches its climax in *The Duchess of Malfi*; the Duchess, or to be more precise, her sexuality and sexual desires, are at the centre of all the male characters' attention. The play can be analysed as a severe critique of

women's role in maintaining the patriarchal system explains why the issue of adultery is constantly explored in the drama of that time and also male characters' obsession with female sexuality. In the Renaissance many plays attempted to 'anatomise' female sexuality, to echo Lear's word.[80] The womb that represented the 'hidden female sexual interior' was an obsession for Shakespeare's contemporaries as exemplified by the contemporary science of the body which attempted to understand the process of procreation, thanks to the dissection of wombs. Female sexuality was frequently portrayed as monstrous and excessive and as seen previously, the one-sex model contributed to men's anxiety about women's sexuality and desires (if women's sex was so identical to the male one, what about the similarities in sexuality?). Besides, a discovery by Renaldus Columbus in 1559, namely the clitoris, increased the tension and anxiety of a society which relied on the external penis to guarantee men's dominance and superiority over women. Columbus declared that 'if you touch that part of the uterus while women are eager for sex and very excited as if in a frenzy [...] you will find it rendered a little harder and oblong', like a penis.[81]

The very fact that female desire could not be staged can be considered as highly significant. In a society where men believed that female sexual desires and pleasure could not be assessed and controlled, being prevented from seeing it corroborates this idea of a hidden female sexuality. Besides, the absence of the female body on stage may have been, as Stephen Orgel explains, a way to contain female sexuality which was seen as far more dangerous for men than any kind of 'homosexual' desires aroused by the boy actor.[82] Thus erasing the female body from the stage, while being obsessed with it in the text of the plays, could have two potentially paradoxical effects: it was a way to purge men of their anxieties raised

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patriarchy and of the male characters, who all attempt to control and possess the Duchess. They are all driven by money or by private and shameful motives; even Antonio is introduced for the first time as driven by ambition, and the first dialogue between the Duchess and him is about her will. The Duchess's two brothers are driven by money and Ferdinand's incestuous desire is covered up by this motive. The duchess herself is aroused by a person she cannot acknowledge publicly, but she is given pathetic lines to comment on the unfairness of her situation, and of her brothers' will to turn her into an object that they can control and possess: "Why should I only I, / Of all the other princes of the world, / Be cased up, like a holy relic? I have youth, / And a little beauty", III.2, 137-39.

[80] Daileader, *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage*, p. 11.

[81] Quoted in Laqueur, p. 113.

[82] Orgel, *Impersonations,* pp. 28-29.

by female unruly sexuality, but at the same time it contributed to increasing the male audience's fears.

Control over women's sexuality is necessary to the patriarchal system, which is dependent on women to confirm men's masculinity and paternity and for the maintenance of the line through procreation. It is the failure of such control that is dramatised in *Titus Andronicus*, the only one of Shakespeare's plays that includes miscegenation in its plot.[83] The fear of women's sexual autonomy regularly shades into fear of miscegenation and vice-versa, and for a white patriarchy, 'the changeability of women is [...] both a threat and a promise. Their ability to adopt alien cultures is crucial to their value as currency that secures patriarchal alliances, just as it threatens the security of cultural borders.'[84]

Titus Andronicus includes a 'miscegenated bastard' in the plot, which would have offended the Elizabethan audience as much as its dismemberments, cannibalism and sexual violence. Sexual intercourse between members of different groups was the kind of crossover that generated the greatest anxiety and a crossing of boundaries more profound than conversion.[85] This fear of contagion justified a politics of exclusion:

> panic about blood continuity, ambiguity and metissage expressed intense anxieties about the fallibility of white male and imperial potency. [...] Body boundaries were felt to be dangerously permeable and demanding continual purification, so that sexuality, in particular women's sexuality, was cordoned off as the central transmitter of racial and hence cultural contagion.[86]

Because black Aaron and white Tamora are meant to make visible the play's interest in extremism and cultural contagion, it is crucial that they produce a child to enhance the fear of cultural and racial pollution as it suggests the instability of 'race' as a category and more threateningly that of 'whiteness'. The blackamoor baby produced by Aaron and Tamora would have been unsettling in that the birth demonstrated the dominance of dark pigmentation, confirming the geohumoral

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[83] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 8.
[84] See Ania Loomba, '"Delicious Traffick": Racial and Religious difference on the early Modern Stage', in Alexander and Wells*,* pp. 203-25 (p. 218).
[85] Loomba, 'Delicious Traffick', p. 213. Sperm was understood as man's purest blood, and sexual activity as an exchange of blood.
[86] Mc Clintock, p. 47.

theory which defined the white/British as impressionable, inconstant, and vulnerable to outside influences and hence as feminised in structural terms. Indeed, according to these prior beliefs, often enough it was the English, Northern body that appeared vulnerable or inferior.[87]

Self-fashioning, then, included the process of overcoming the incivility and extremes of the northern disposition. The mixed race of the child they produce compromises Roman racial purity, but he is not the only mixed-race baby in town. More threateningly, the child of the play's other mixed-race couple, black Muliteus and his white wife, is born pure white.

> Not far one Muly lives, my countryman:
> His wife but yesternight was brought to bed;
> His child is like to her, fair as you are.
> Go pack with him and give the mother gold,
> And tell them both the circumstance of all,
> And how by this their child shall be advanced
> And be received for the emperor's heir,
> And subsituted in the place of mine,
> To calm this tempest whirling in the court;
> And let the emperor dandle him for his own.
> (IV.2. 154-63)

Aaron's strategy is twofold: to use the white Moor child to infiltrate the imperial household while his own child is to be raised in the wilderness, beyond Roman surveillance, preparing for later invasion ('bring you up / To be a warrior and command a camp', IV.2.181-82). The threat of Moors in the play is not simply the evil of one villain as there is the potential for a growing network of 'others', working together in possibly subversive ways, marrying white wives, having children who may pass for white. At the end of the play, Aaron has preserved his baby's life and, though he will not live to bring his boy up as a soldier and potential invader, the engendering and birth of Aaron and Tamora's baby raises the possibility that populations with non-Roman 'hues' will invade and inhabit Roman geographic and cultural space. As the play ends, Aaron's son remains alive somewhere, but perhaps even more threateningly, the son of Muliteus remains alive as well, wearing the 'mask of whiteness', and surviving to encode Elizabethan anxiety about foreign

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[87] See Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race,* pp. 23-67.

influence that threatens society from within.[88] Therefore *Titus Andronicus* confronts its Elizabethan audience with its worst nightmare, not only the threat of miscegenation but also the assertion of unrestrained female sexuality through the character of Tamora, the 'barbarous' Goth. Indeed if Aaron is coded as black, Tamora is represented as hyperwhite and is therefore extremely racialised; [89] Saturnius has singled her out and married her notably for her 'hue' and she is desired because she serves as a signifier of one group's ability, the Romans, to disempower another, the Goths. Her value depends primarily on the political juxtaposition of the Romans and the Goths, and outside of that reference she has little value. At the beginning of the play, by surrendering Lavinia to Saturninus and handing over Tamora as well, as 'tribute' (I.1.251), Titus is treating these two women similarly; both serve as markers of his own prowess and authority and as signifiers of racial power. Within the misogynistic frame of the nation-empire, rape comes to mean something when its perpetrator comes from outside, as 'rape' is what the other 'race' wants to do to women.[90] Lavinia's rape can be analysed as an expression of racial power and hierarchy within the 'colonial' fight, a means for Tamora's sons to reassert their lost power over the Romans. Classical masculinist ideology views rape as a property crime and women as fragile vessels whose commercial and moral 'worth' depends on their undamaged 'white' condition, but rape is 'so black a deed', it literally blackens the victim's blood.[91] Indeed, 'black' is also used to signify both female darkness and female promiscuity and the play reproduces a strategy of racialisation of sexuality, through the characters of both Tamora and Lavinia, in the similar racialisation/'blackening' of these unruly women.[92] Lavinia's defiance of her father's expectations, and assertion of her female sexuality, through her choice of husband, lead directly to her rape and her

[88] See Francesca T. Royster, 'White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51 (2000), 432-55. Francesca Royster argues that Tamora, racially marked as a Goth, is not just white in relation to Aaron, but 'hyper-white', representing the opposite pole of a graduated complexional-climatological model according to which Romans were the 'golden mean', hence, all the attention to her 'hue'. When Aaron calls Tamora's sons 'white-limed walls' and 'alehouse painted signs' (V.2.100), he indicts their mother by association.

[89] I.1, 265-67: Saturnius 'A goodly lady, trust me, of the hue / That I would choose, were I to choose anew.'

[90] Daileader, *Racism,* p.22.

[91]See William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E.Howard and Katherine E.Maus, in *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 1997), pp.635-1915, lines 1742-43.

[92] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 37.

consequent blackening in the play. In that sense Lavinia, like Tamora, appears to be a sexual threat since she transgresses her father's command; from the standpoint of masculinist-racist hegemony it is her defiance of paternal authority that leads to her rape and blackening.[93] Therefore Lavinia's tarnished whiteness echoes Tamora's moral and sexual blackness, as the play blackens the woman who is conspicuously white/fair.[94] The white woman who asserts her sexuality, be it a fair Roman defying paternal authority or a white woman who engages in interracial sex, demonstrates that she is not really 'white'.

Thus, though the distinction between civilisation and barbarism rests on the production of an irreconcilable difference between 'black' and 'white', 'self' and 'other', the play blurs such distinctions and dismantles a black/white binary.[95] Not only the Goths and the Moors but also the Romans are represented as barbaric and uncivilised. Tamora and her sons embody the possibility of a savage self, which Aaron throws into high relief, raising the question of who is *really* the other in *Titus Andronicus*.

Aaron, Tamora and Lavinia complicate simple dichotomies between black and white; the racial other is not limited to questions of skin colour since the racial threat goes beyond such binaries, and the mask of whiteness is represented as the most threatening. In her chapter on *Othello,* Floyd-Wilson makes one of her most ambitious claims that the play represents the clash between a dominant classical and medieval geohumoral view and an emergent racial discourse about Africans. According to the theory of 'geohumoralism', Africa and England had a great deal in

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[93] Sexuality can be regarded as a form of violence in *Titus Andronicus* and in *The Duchess of Malfi*, where female sexual transgression can be analysed as violence against social norms, the state and white patriarchy. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the incestuous and frustrated sexual desire of Ferdinand for the Duchess is displaced into vengeance, which becomes its symbolic substitute. Revenge can indeed be seen as both a substitute for sexuality and a defence against it: it is both threat and rescue. The connection between violence and sexuality is also apparent in works like the *Heptaméron*, where relationships between men and women are characterized as inherently conflictual. See Patricia F. Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in Marguerite de Navarre's 'Heptaméron* (Carbondal: Southern Illinois Press, 1991).

[94] Daileader, *Racism,* p. 108. In her chapter 'Holes at the Poles: Gothic Horror and the Racial Subject', Daileader remarks that Tamora was Gothic in the racial sense but also in the 18th century usage. She notes, 'the OED cites a 1695 usage of "Gothic" as "barbarous; rude, uncouth or savage". If we couple this sense of 'Gothic' with Francesca Royster's reading of Tamora as marked by an excessive, racial whiteness, we have ourselves a female vampire who pre-dates Stoker's by some three hundred years', pp. 75-111 (p. 108).

[95] Daileader, *Racism* provides readings of *Titus Andronicus, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra, The White Devil, The Knight of Malta,* and *All's Lost by Lust* to argue that not all Renaissance narratives of interracial relationships were the same and that many of these texts suppress narratives of black women seduced or raped by white men, pp. 14-50.

common: they were both primitive and barbaric, but in inverted ways.[96] *Titus Andronicus* accomplishes the same thing by deconstructing any simplistic and clear-cut racialist discourse and encourages its audience to view the Goths as alien, by putting Aaron in the interesting position of directing our judgments about who is alien. Is it really Aaron? This black outsider who can mimic Roman rhetoric and knows his Virgil and his Ovid better than the young Goths do, and whose love for his child contrasts heavily with the barbarous Roman hero?

4.5 The 'Orientalism' of *Les Portugais Infortunés*

Edward Said argued that the representation of the 'Orient' in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its 'others', a dichotomy that was central to the creation of European culture as well as to the maintenance and extension of European hegemony over other lands. This requires the maintenance of rigid boundaries in order to differentiate between the Occident and the Orient. But as has been demonstrated, *Titus Andronicus* offers an ambivalent representation of the exotic other reproducing stereotypes and blurring the distinctions between 'self' and 'other', 'whiteness' and 'blackness', Europeans and Africans, therefore reproducing an 'orientalist' discourse whilst deconstructing it at the same time. Whereas Edward Said focused on more conscious constructions of colonial discourse and power, Homi Bhabba has shown through a variety of readings how colonial power is always suffused by ambivalent desire and it is this unconscious ambivalence that not only resides at the heart of colonial desire and power but also threatens to collapse and destabilise it from the inside. I will consider Bhabba's theory according to which colonial discourse operates in terms of conscious mechanisms of knowledge and power, but also in relation to the ambivalent flux of unconscious fantasy and desire. This ambivalence points to the anxiety and instability of the dominant discourse but also to the possibility of resistance from the marginal subject.[97] *Les Portugais Infortunés*

[96] In *English Ethnicity and Race,* Floyd-Wilson, calls into question existing scholarly beliefs about early modern notions of Africans; see especially pp. 1-23.

[97] Campbell, *Arguing with the Phallus*, p. 196. Campbell analyses Bhabba's utilisation of the Lacanian unconscious which destabilises a fixed and unitary view of colonial discourse and demonstrates how through the fetishistic stereotype, conscious knowledge and power are constantly

by Chrétien des Croix is the first French exotic play (1608) and stages the encounter, first marked by curiosity and fascination but also by fears and prejudices, between a group of Portuguese travellers after a shipwreck and Africans, called 'les Caffres' in the play. But the originality of the play resides in the inverted and 'decentred' point of view given, as the play stages the Africans' discovery of the Portuguese and their differences in terms of clothes, voice, skin and the shock of whiteness.[98] An essential feature of the discourse of Orientalism is the objectification of both the Orient and the Oriental, but in the play, it is the Portuguese, 'ce peuple barbare' (III.1.1108) who are treated as objects that can be scrutinised and analysed:

> Vos habits, votre voix et votre poil aussi
> Sont assurés témoins que vous n'êtes d'ici.
> Outre, cette blancheur, s'elle n'est d'artifice,
> De vos pays lointains est un certain indice.
> Approchez vous un peu que je voie si l'eau
> La pourrait effacer de dessus votre peau.
> Elle ne s'en va point, je crois que la nature
> Vous apporte naissants cette blanche teinture
> (I.1.495-502)

The physical and moral differences between European women and African women are dramatised in the curiosity and desire of the Queen of Mocondez to see and touch the breast of Eléonor in public:

> Les femmes blanches ont petites les mamelles,
> Que je tâte pour voir si vous les avez telles.
> En ce pays ici longues nous les avons,
> Mais les vôtres encor plus belles nous trouvons.
> Je les voudrai bien voir.
> (IV.1.1608-12)

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undermined by the ambivalent unconscious; see also her section 'Colonial desires and the Postcolonial subject', pp. 191-218.

[98] Bovilsky, p. 11. The choice of Portuguese might be significant here as Portugal was the most Southern country. So one of the questions that this raises is: how white were meant to be these Portuguese? Besides, Portugal was one of the first countries to explore unknown territories. Portugal was possibly regarded as an in-between space. Moreover, racial stereotypes were not limited to non-Europeans. English racism drew deeply on the notion of the domestic barbarism of the Irish as a marker of racial difference, McClintock, p. 53.

But Eléonor refuses, invoking the difference of standards of modesty and decency between European and African women:

> Excusez-moi, Madame,
> Si ce n'est en secret, j'en acquerrais du blâme.
> Comme en divers climats diverses sont les mœurs,
> Tout de même les teints variés de couleurs:
> Chacun est en pareil de grandeur différente,
> De ce qui plaît à l'un, l'autre ne se contente.
> (IV.1.1613-17)

After the initial interest in the Portuguese, the Africans' cruelty and perversity are revealed, as the king of Mocondez orders the white Europeans to be divested of their weapons but also of their clothes:

> Sérif, qu'on s'aille tôt de tous les Blancs saisir,
> Qu'on leur ravisse tout, les laissant sans chemise,
> Puis vous m'apporterez ce qu'aurez fait de prise.
> […]
> Ils sont tous désarmés, il ne reste sinon
> Les séparer d'ensemble, et le veuillent ou non
> Prendre tout ce qu'ils ont de chose plus exquise
> Jusques à les laisser dénués de chemise.
> Ni l'âge, ni le sexe, excepter je ne veux,
> Pour frivoles tenez leurs prières et vœux.
> (IV.2.1979-81; 2010-15)

The spectacle of colonial violence is inverted as it is the Africans who torture and violate the ideas and values of the Portuguese; indeed colonial violence is understood as including an 'epistemic' aspect, i.e. an attack on the culture, ideas and value systems of the colonised people.[99] The seventeenth-century French audience is confronted with the spectacle of agony, suffering and humiliation of the Europeans in act V, who are left naked, harmless and vulnerable:[100]

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[99] Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, p.51.

[100] On the performance of blackness, see Mason-Vaughan, especially pp. 107-30. Vaughan explains that for the audience, staged torture creates a unified and nationalized identity by codifying the power and entitlement of the racialized white/right gaze. This 'racialized' audience directs judgment against white actors in black-and brown face, resulting in the vacillation between essence and construction that is endemic to racial epistemology. But in representing 'whiteness' as the signifier of racial normativity, white actors in blackface were paradoxically reassuring for an audience, as it deployed a

> Ha! Dieu, quel crève-cœur ! Et de se voir tout nu,
> Dénué de secours, en un pays étrange,
> Où tout genre de mal de tous côtés se range,
> Voir sa femme de même et ses petits enfants
> Tous nus, pâles de faim, de crainte gémissants,
> N'attendant que la mort pour terminer leurs peines !
> (V.2183-88)

Besides, this staged performance of torture emphasises the racialised/ white female body, as the play explicitly stages the shock of the nudity of the white woman:

> Cette pauvre princess aboyant le cercueil,
> Toute confite en pleurs, en sanglots et en dueil,
> Pour se voir toute nue, et encore vergogneuse
> Qu'aucun de nous la vit aussi calamiteuse,
> Jusques à la ceinture elle a voulu sa chair
> Dans un monceau de sable honteusement cacher:
> Et de sa chevelure elle couvre le reste
> De ce qui peut se voir du nombril à la teste,
> Sa poitrine, son sein, ses épaules, ses bras
> C'est un spectacle encor pire que le trépas.
> (V.2222-31)

The 'other' becomes the naked body of the white woman as well as the actress recently introduced on the French stage, as noted by Christian Biet:

> L'étrangeté devient le corps tel qu'il apparaît radicalement nu sur la scène. Le corps blanc de l'acteur. […] L'originalité de la punition, et de cette tragédie, est donc que la nudité blanche apparaît sur le théâtre, ou est écrite pour apparaître (ou être imaginée, sur une scène possible, par le lecteur). […] Ce que voit le spectateur, ce que représente le lecteur par l'imagination, ce sont les corps blancs des acteurs-et des actrices nouvellement incluses dans les troupes- sur la scène même.[101]

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strategy of racial containment in an age of exploration, trade, commerce, slavery, and the resulting insurgent intercultural mixing.

[101] Christian Biet and Sylvie Requemora, 'L'Afrique à l'envers ou l'endroit des Cafres: tragédie et récit de voyage au XVIIè siècle', in Baccar-Bournaz, pp. 371-403 (p. 384). Christian Biet remarks: '[…] même si elle [la nudité] n'est que proposée par le texte et peut-être juste bonne à être lue, elle est quand même là, infiniment présente, aveuglante pour quiconque lit la pièce, en 1608 comme en 2002 […] ce texte est publié sous la forme du théâtre et que le lecteur doit imaginer une représentation précise des corps nus […] ce théâtre met en scène (sur plus d'un quart de texte) des

Thus, *Les Portugais Infortunés* participates in the renewal of French tragedies in the early seventeenth-century and offers both an orientalist and a counter-orientalist discourse. The category of exoticism that was being developed, refined, and displayed on the French stage contributed to shaping a sense of cultural solidarity and superiority.[102] But at the same time, by giving voice to the 'colonised', *Les Portugais Infortunés* can be seen as an anti-colonialist tableau, justifying the violence of the colonised and punishing in return the Europeans for the moral, physical and social violence they exerted, as expressed by Serif: [103]

> Ils viennent de pays fort éloignés d'ici
> Pour emporter nos biens, et nous dompter aussi.
> Ils apportent, subtils, de petits instruments
> Qui ne peuvent servir qu'à nos ébattements,
> Puis quand ils ont connu quelque riche contrée,
> Et qu'ils y ont acquis une facile entrée,
> Des forts ils font bâtir, et pauvres fugitifs,
> Par leur invention ils nous rendent captifs.
> (II.1.675-84) [104]

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acteurs nus (on parlera plus tard d'indécence, même si l'on mit en doute le fait que cette pièce ait été représentée)', pp. 386-87.

[102] Longino, p. 6

[103] Biet and Requemora, 'L'Afrique à l'envers ou l'endroit des Cafres', p. 372.

[104] Prologue, Génie 'Mais je me déplais fort de la subjection / Où réduire me veut si grande ambition.'

4.6 Conclusion

In the seventeenth century, the new colonial venturism represented a major shift, involving personal, social, financial, and institutional transformation, not simply abroad but also at home.[105] Both nations, France and England, spurred by an accelerated and intensified mercantilist drive, broke out of the hexagon and became a colonial power during the seventeenth century. The process of shaping the nation's story became a significant function of the theatre and plays can indeed serve as the ideal vehicle for nurturing a coherent early colonial mentality. In that sense, the similarity between the colonialist and the playwrights has been noticed by Hawkes who explains that a 'colonialist' acts essentially as a dramatist, by imposing the 'shape' of his own culture but as he explains, the dramatist is metaphorically a colonist:

> his art penetrates new areas of experience, his language expands the boundaries of our culture, and makes the new territory over its own image. His 'raids on the inarticulate' open up new worlds for the imagination.[106]

The plays ambivalently deal with the threat of the sexual and racial other by reproducing the colonial stereotype and discourse but also by questioning it. As it has been demonstrated, the figure of the exotic other serves as a screen, into which Renaissance European men project their darkest and most compelling fantasies. I have demonstrated how in all the plays, sexual and racial fetishisation are inextricably linked. The story of Sophonisba of Carthage is the story of an African royalty defeated by Rome which announces the central importance of the exchange of women and of racial purity to the development of empire; at the heart of the colonial enterprise there is 'the fantasy of sexual dominion over and physical subjugation of the attractive but threatening black woman'.[107]

Besides, the subversive potential of the repetition of the dominant sexual and racial discourse has to be acknowledged, notably through the use of racial mimicry.

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[105] Longino, p. 3.
[106] Greenblatt*, Learning to Curse*, p. 24, quoting Terence Hawkes*, Shakespeare's Talking Animals, Language and Drama in Society* (London: Arnold, 1973), p. 212. Terence Hawkes suggests that in creating Prospero, the playwright's imagination was fired by resemblance he perceived between himself and a colonist embodied in his speech.
[107] Imtiaz, p. 16.

As has been discussed, the cross-dresser is a figure that disrupts and can be invested with potent and subversive powers. But cross-dressing can be identified also as a cultural variant example of ‘mimicry’ and ‘racial mimicry’ through the repetition of racial stereotypes. In her analysis of Bhabba, Diana Fuss distinguishes between masquerade and mimicry and defines ‘the masquerade’ as unconscious identification, whereas mimicry is a parody that ironises dominant systems of representation. Therefore racial mimicry, as the repetition of the dominant racial discourse based on strategic stereotypes, can be identified not only as a strategy of the dominant as perceived by Bhabba, but also as a strategy of subversion, encapsulating both dominant identification and subversion.[108] By reproducing the stereotypes associated with the exotic other (male and female) *Titus Andronicus* and *Les Portugais Infortunés* both stabilise the dominant colonial discourse and expose the strategic use of stereotypes and therefore the ‘normalizing’ authority of the colonial discourse is thrown into question. Like masquerade, mimicry becomes ‘at once a resemblance and a menace’.[109]

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[108] Quoted in Campbell, *Arguing with the Phallus*, pp. 200-7. Bypassing Irigaray’s gendered intervention, Homi Bhabba takes the idea of mimicry into the colonial arena and in turn subtly explores mimicry as ‘one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. For Bhabba, mimicry is an important strategy and support for colonial power. Operative in stereotyping, mimicry enables the colonial subject to be identified as recognizably the same, but different: ‘not quite/not white’, in Bhabba, *The Location of Culture* p. 92.

[109] McClintock, p. 127.

CONCLUSION

Main conclusions of the research

This thesis has analysed the ambivalent representation of 'women as threat' in a selection of French and English plays and has not attempted to position any plays as either misogynistic or anti-patriarchal, but has acknowledged the permeability of the literary and the historical, showing that literary works and especially plays are the product of collective negotiations and exchanges between text, playwrights and audiences.

The various theoretical approaches used throughout the thesis have provided the tools needed to analyse and explore the interrelation of power, gender, race and sexuality and to take into consideration the plural and ambivalent representation of women in the plays. By using and focusing on the concept of ambivalence, I have outlined the various and heterogeneous effects of representing women as threat that the plays achieved, by reproducing and questioning the anti- feminine discourses on women. The thesis has not aimed to draw together these multiple meanings; rather, it has revealed contradictory impulses within a text and acknowledged the impossibility of any fixed textual interpretation. I have acknowledged that each individual play and the institution of the theatre can be related to the larger cultural, political, ideological and social contours of their age and of their respective countries.

My analysis of the ambivalent representation of threatening female characters has allowed me to question both the extent to which the plays reinforce the dominant ideology, and how textual subversiveness in the spheres of gender and race can have a destabilising effect on cultural, political and patriarchal authority. I have both taken into account and questioned how dominant ideology has the capacity to assimilate and incorporate oppositional views and thus contain the danger of subversion. I have also considered the historical, political, social and theatrical circumstances and conditions under which the plays were written and

performed, in order to uncover the potentially subversive elements of the plays' representation of women as threat and the playwrights' shifting positions. In the thesis I have put forward the various strategies which enabled the dramatists to do so.

First, I have analysed the ways in which textual instability or ambivalence in the plays subverts or supports phallocentrism and the definitions of gender and gender roles of the Renaissance. I have identified the effects of instabilities, ambiguities, gaps, overlaps and dissonances that co-exist within the discourses on women as threat in the plays, and their potential for subverting the dominant patriarchal discourse by questioning gender roles, notably the period's definition of masculine values and qualities. In the plays, the female characters are represented as negotiating and subverting the cultural constraints imposed on women, and the gendering of power, violence, language and sexuality. One of the strategies of empowerment for women is the appropriation of masculinity, as has been shown in Chapters One and Two. In both the French and English plays studied in Chapter One, I have demonstrated that in a period which saw anxiety about female power both in France and in England, the playwrights confront a male audience with their deepest fear, by representing women as a threat to social and political order. But the representation of women and power has contradictory effects: it seems to be a pretext to allow a reflection on the definition of the good ruler, since women are given the qualities of the good ruler. They are only involved in the public realm and interfere in power to expose the flaws of Renaissance patriarchal society's definition of gender roles and dramatise the danger for social order of having a weak ruler. Chapter One has demonstrated that the female characters are able to play with and manipulate gender roles; such awareness of gender codes not only empowers the female characters but also threatens the male characters' masculinity. By violating gender roles and transgressing the limits assigned to their sex, they also confront men with the threat of gender reversal, expose the frailty of gender definition and illustrate the feminist claim that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed roles, by playing the woman's part when they need to and the man's part when they want to achieve their goals, in spheres coded as masculine. Chapter Two has analysed plays that stage violence by women and confront their audience with female characters who transgress the boundaries of their sex, showing their capacity

to use manly violence, and exposing again the frailty of gender definition. The expectation of passivity in women is only prescriptive, and I have contended in Chapter Two that the representation of women and violence exposes the ‘performative’ nature of violence which was considered a masculine and manly attribute.

Chapters Two and Three have offered an original analysis of female violence, both active and reflexive, by focusing first on the under-studied and unique representation of female revenge in *Titus Andronicus*. Then, the comparative perspective has enabled me to illuminate the representation of female reflexive violence, by linking it to issues of power and politics in the French plays and in Marston’s *Sophonisba*.

Chapter Two has also identified a strategy of displacement of male fears onto violence inflicted on female bodies to contain the threat that the collapse of the definition of masculinity raises for definitions of femininity and of gender roles. But as the chapter discussed, female violence might also be staged as the focus of attention, so that Renaissance audience would unite as a community in its condemnation, to help maintain the construction of patriarchal values, by silencing the violent woman. In any case, by relying on female figures of transgression to define and delineate a masculine sense of identity, the plays expose the precariousness of masculine identity. The study of reflexive violence in Garnier, Jodelle and Marston has explored how the plays redefine feminine agency through subversion of codes of passivity. Likewise, Chapter Three has analysed how the female characters are empowered by using what was regarded as a manly rhetoric but also typically feminine linguistic strategies and tools, in order to convince men and prove that they are aware of what speech can do, and how it can be used by speakers in social situation to achieve certain effects. The French and English plays question the gendering of language and the female characters use language to invert power relationships and assert their own authority. These plays exemplify a general quality of theatrical language: language is shown to be an instrument of power, a powerful tool that can be controlled and possessed. Language is also expanded into an act of creativity, self-assertion and power through the invasion of the manly sphere of rhetoric; it is also a tool to subvert apparent feminine powerlessness in order to invert power relationships and more threateningly to enact psychological

and verbal violence. Chapter Four has analysed the close association between female speech and female sexuality which both needed to be contained in the Renaissance. The plays stage Renaissance patriarchal society's fear of women's sexual power, which is associated with their verbal power.

I have demonstrated in my various chapters that the plays question the gendering of power, violence, speech and sexuality in the period, and have discussed how women can threaten patriarchy by appropriating and subverting masculinity and masculine values in Chapters One and Two, and also femininity and so-called disempowering feminine values to exert agency and invert power relationships, notably in chapters Three and Four.

Though the codes of masculinity are re-appropriated and subverted by the female characters in various ways, it is the use and subversion of femininity and feminine codes which has been identified as the most threatening strategy through which the female characters question both gender codes and the very definition and notion of power in the plays.

As Toril Moi has pointed out, 'feminism is not only about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures, and in the process transforming the very c*oncept* of power itself.[1]

However, the violation of gender roles through the appropriation of masculinity can potentially threaten to deprive women of the specificities of their sex, and as such becomes a threat for the definition of women and femininity as well as masculinity.[2]

The second strategy which has been identified as producing ambivalence in the representation of women as threat is the strategy of the 'veil'. Following the postulate that the strategy of praising women may hide a latent discourse which aims to marginalise women, I have considered whether the opposing strategy, whereby women seem to be condemned, could also work as 'a veil' for the real discourse, which would be potentially subversive. By refusing to categorise the female characters into villainous, secondary, or passive characters, the thesis has acknowledged and broadened the potential readings of the female characters. I have argued that by depicting threatening female figures, the plays offer an ambivalent

[1] Moi, p. 148.

[2] Kofman, *Le Respect*, p. 111, 'plus chaque sexe s'éloigne du modèle qui doit être le sien, plus il s'éloigne de la Vérité, plus il est méconnaissable, plus il perd de consistance ontologique et d'identité et acquiert, en définitive, la nature fantomatique du simulacre.'

discourse on women and power, violence, speech and sexuality, and that this textual instability is both constitutive and subversive of phallocentrism.

Chapter One has demonstrated that representations of transgressive and deviant female figures serve more as a 'sacrifice' to male insecurity. I have analysed the ways in which the playwrights expose the mechanisms that trigger anti-feminine discourse by reproducing it. The chapter has shown that when the female deviant is represented, she can be positioned as a scapegoat, pretext or dramatic tool. This can be identified as one of the strategies of containment of the threat that the deviant woman represents as a figure in the game of politics. But their role in the plot has been redefined: the female characters never create disorder in the tragedies but exacerbate or bring into the open already existing tensions by unveiling them. Thus, whilst containing the threat that the female deviant represent, the plays expose male characters' weaknesses and inabilities, thus destabilizing anti-feminine discourse in what can be described as a subversive strategy.

Chapter Two has contended that the representation of female violence in the plays is deeply problematic and ambivalent from a feminist point of view. The plays' representations of female violence seek to deny female agency or refuse to accept female aggression; such strategy can be considered as an attempt to contain the threat that female violence presents to Renaissance definitions of femininity, motherhood, and masculinity as well as to the stability of social, moral and cultural standards. But I have argued that the discourses on female violence are ambivalent in the plays and reflect on French and English actual social, political, and historical contexts. Indeed, through the representation of female violence the plays comment on and expose the threat posed by male violence and state violence to the social fabric and norms.

In Chapter Four, I have analysed the extent to which the plays reflect how patriarchal oppression and colonial domination are conceptually and historically connected to one another, and argued that the black female other becomes a convenient locus for those dark forces that threaten European society from within, i.e. the culture's pre-existing fears about the female sex, gender and the racial other, that can be projected on the outsider. My inquiry has explored the emergence of a discourse that could be called 'orientalist', and which requires the maintenance of rigid boundaries in order to differentiate between the Occident and the Orient; such

discourse is based on a strategy of differentiation from and rejection of the exotic other, whilst acknowledging the interdependency of the definition of the 'other' and of the self. I have also examined how the two versions of the story of Sophonisba adopt a strategy of silencing or whitening of the historical black female characters since the black woman is doubly 'other' and therefore doubly threatening, because of her sex and because of her race.

Moreover, the staging perspective has been an important *fil conducteur* of the thesis. Though English Renaissance staging practices allowed the containment of the female threat by the very absence of the female body on stage, I have analysed how, depending on the degree of illusion, the staging of women as threat could have ambivalent and dual effects: it might enhance Renaissance patriarchal society's fears and anxieties, as well as allowing an audience to be fascinated by threatening deviant female figures. The staging of the threatening women can thus be seen as 'politically dangerous' and subversive to an early modern patriarchal society, as the playwrights stage women, who are both tempting and terrifying, for both a female and a male audience. However, as the thesis has shown, the staging practices 'veiled' the greatest threats of the time, as episodes of sex and violence always happen offstage, and the black other wears 'the veil of whiteness'.

Contribution of the comparative analysis to research

This thesis is a unique comparative analysis of French and English drama of the period between 1553 and 1610 and reassesses the relationships between the two countries' respective theatrical cultures, through a focus on gender. The study is distinctive in its comparative angle, its stress on the ambivalence of gender representation, its different approach to female violence, and its unique interrogation of postcolonial perspectives in the reading of Humanist drama. The comparative analysis has acknowledged both the parallels between and the specificities of each corpus and each play on the issues of women and power, violence, speech and sexuality.

The comparative analysis has complemented and questioned Walter Cohen by re-evaluating French and English national theatrical distinctions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have demonstrated that there are substantial parallels and differences between the French and English plays of my corpus that cannot be adequately accounted for without particular emphasis on gender. Besides, in response to Walter Cohen's arguments, I have argued that Humanist drama participated in the writing of history, or as Cohen defines it, of a drama of the nation. It is undeniable that the parallels between the French and the English stage traditions are not straightforward; however, the theatrical institutions took similar paths but at a different pace. Indeed the theatrical conditions in the French capital – between 1600 to 1625 – roughly duplicated those of the Elizabethan period. The French political context explains indeed the delay in the evolution of drama.

I have enhanced our understanding of the French Humanist plays studied in this thesis by showing that they have richer gender implications than previously thought. My focus on gender has demonstrated more continuities than scholars have previously assumed between the two dramatic traditions and between individual plays within each corpus. I have also rehabilitated the role of female characters in both the French and English plays through my focus on ambivalence in the representation of women.

This work has also contributed to illuminating the French staging perspective of the 1553-1610 period. I have used existing English material on staging practices, notably on issues of audience responses and the boy actor, to analyse the effect of the performance of the French plays.

The evolution of the chapters reflects the seriousness and complexity of the various threats that women represent as well as the increasing parallels between the French and English plays. The thesis has shown how the French and English plays of the corpus corroborate and complicate one another. It has shown that the discourses on women conveyed by each corpus can be closely linked to political and theatrical backgrounds. Such a comparative analysis has made it possible for me to identify similarities in the strategies used by the playwrights, and in the effects of representing women as threat. I have argued that the representation of women as a social and political threat enables the French and English dramatists to comment and reflect on the social and political contexts of their times. The representation of

female characters who use and are empowered by masculinity and masculine codes, such as active violence and manly rhetoric, allows the playwrights to question gender codes and masculine values and to represent women who claim agency, authority and who gain power in the plays. Another similarity between the French and English plays is to be found in the representation of the female other and the exotic other, which are both represented as threatening because of their verbal power, which is always associated with their sexual power. However, the comparative analysis has also put forward the specificities of the French corpus in the representation of female reflexive violence and rhetoric as the female characters in the French plays tend to use and subvert disempowering tools. As has been argued, this strategy can be identified as even more threatening.

The thesis has examined the means by which French and English plays were able to articulate potentially divisive or subversive gender views in a medium that was shaped by a combination of commercial imperatives and aristocratic pressures and doing so, the thesis has also given place in the history of theatre to the forgotten voices of the French playwrights, Gabriel Bounin, Antoine de Montchrestien and Nicolas Chrétien des Croix. One of the key goals of the comparative analysis has been to re-evaluate sixteenth-century French drama of the period 1553-1610, by revealing thematic complexity, rhetorical effectiveness and dramaturgical impact by putting forward the importance of gender in French humanist drama.

Moreover, I have offered a new reading of tragic female heroism in Shakespeare, by acknowledging the ambivalent potential of the characterization of Margaret, Joan and Tamora as threat, refusing to fit them into stereotypical categories or discourses; though they already exist on the margins of the community, they cannot be positioned simply as representations of male fantasies or male fears, stereotypes, or mere devices of the plot.

As analysed in Chapter Four, female sexuality and sex were the ‘great other’ for Renaissance patriarchy and raised ambivalent feelings about the creative and destructive power of the womb. Though adultery is suspected or staged in *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*, it is still exceptional in Shakespeare, as opposed to his Jacobean contemporaries. The issue of female sexuality through adultery is constantly explored and even becomes a topos in Jacobean drama, which saw the emergence of new genres, and new dramatists, such as Ben Jonson and Thomas

Middleton. As such it becomes the main form of threat to patriarchy, but it can be said that the over-representation of female sexuality through the 'commodification' of cuckoldry has ambivalent effects: it confines female threats to the sexual domain and therefore the threat they represent is inherently limited and contained. As stated earlier, in France the theatre of Alexandre Hardy will over-represent sexuality and violence, but one might wonder which strategy is the most subversive: over-representing an 'unrepresentable' threat, or silencing it by censoring it?

The thesis has offered a unique postcolonial approach in the reading of the French plays through the comparison with the English plays and the English theoretical apparatus. I have analysed the interrelation of discourses on gender, race and also of class in Marston, and have demonstrated that the same pattern emerges of scapegoating the other, be it a woman in a homo-social world or an exotic other from the lower class in a noble world. The plays are to be understood as motors/agents, not simply as products or symptoms of their times, in situating the dramatic texts within the pre-colonial battlefield. The plays do not simply reflect dominant ideologies, but encode the tensions, complexities and nuances within pre-colonising cultures and are an important means of appropriating and interrogating dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies.

Therefore, the thesis can be of interest to a broad potential audience such as scholars from early modern studies, theatre studies, gender and racial studies and French and English feminist scholars.

Plan for future research: Can the 'subaltern' speak?

The period covered by the corpus saw also the emergence of the first female playwrights, both in France and in England, who were regarded as a threat themselves. The threat of such a profession relies on the fact that it might entitle women with the marks and rank of the bearer of the penis in the Renaissance and give them the phallus, in the form of cultural symbolic power. As such according to Kofman, the woman writer 'begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and at least in holding opinion, insists on being like a man.'[3] Interestingly, according to this definition, in the female playwrights' representation of women, one is likely to find contempt for their own sex, since one must not take for granted that female playwrights are more likely to use a strategy of subversion in their work. Despite the relatively small number of female dramatists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a study of the representations of the contemporary burning issues of women and power, violence, speech and sexuality in their plays, compared with their male counterparts, is still needed.[4] Such a study will need to explore the extent to which the first female playwrights can be positioned as 'more' pro-feminine and will question whether they could possibly break away from the standardised roles prescribed by their gender, race and class (as most of the first female playwrights were from the ruling elite and the governing classes).[5] The extent to which the female playwrights could

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[3] Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman*, p.182

[4] Studies and editions of French female playwright's plays have recently been published, thanks to the work of the SIEFAR, see for instance *Théâtre de femmes de l'Ancien Régime*, Vol. 1 and 2, ed. by Aurore Evain, Perry Gethner, Henriette Goldwyn (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université, nº5, 2006, nº6, 2008); *Femmes dramaturges en France: 1650*-1750, ed. by Perry Gethner (Tübingen: Narr, 1993); *Women's Writing in the French Renaissance: Proceedings of the Fifth Cambridge French Renaissance Colloquium*, ed. by Philip Ford and Gillian Jondorf (Cambridge: Cambridge French Colloquia,1999); *L'écriture des femmes à la Renaissance Française*, ed. by Diane Desrosiers-Bonin (Montréal: Editions littéraires, 1998); Henriette Goldwyn 'Femmes auteurs dramatiques au XVIIe siècle: la condition inhumaine' in *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 1 (1990), 51-62; also on the first French female philosopher, see Véronique Desnain, 'Gabrielle Suchon: de l'éducation des femmes', *Seventeenth Century French Studies*, 26 (2004), 259-71.

[5] Such as Marguerite de Navarre, *Comédie des quatre femmes*, written around 1542[?] and published in 1547; *Comédie des Parfaits amants*, written around 1549; Louise Labé *Sur le Débat de folie et d'amou*r, written around 1550, published in 1555, and translated by Robert Greene in 1584, Catherine de Parthenay *Holopherne (?)*, Catherine des Roches *Les Oeuvres, Tobie,* both published in 1579; on the English side, Mary Sidney *The Tragedy of Antonie*, 1595; Elizabeth Cary *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry*, 1613.

have a distinctive voice, expressing themselves through and against patriarchal modes of writing the woman in the period is to be questioned indeed, since not all misogyny is conscious, and even women may unconsciously internalise sexist attitudes and desires;[6] but another strategy whereby they could achieve literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards can be potentially identified.[7] It is interesting also to note that the first English female playwrights tend to put forward tropes of beauty and race in their plays; the ultimate threat may not be enacted through women's sexual encounter with the racial other but through white men's fascination for the female exotic other who can be the ultimate threat to 'white women'.[8] However, since theatre has multivalent potential, the potential of female-authored plays can involve different elements or combinations.

Moreover, for the patriarchal critic, the author is the source, origin and meaning of the text but in drama the text is out of the control of the author, and offers a multiplicity of meaning depending on time, culture, staging conditions and choices in performances, and as such it always escapes a definite meaning.

Another instance of this dramatic polysemy can be identified in the representation of violence which demonstrates first the instability of audience reaction and the paradoxical and disturbing link between laughter and violence; indeed violence can make us laugh at something frightening and extreme, but also following the Freudian logic, laughter may work to diffuse power, and thereby make safe, otherwise unthinkable and threatening ideas. Violence has played, over the centuries and in a variety of forms, a complex role in the process of individual or social identity formations; the way violent women are perceived and represented reveals much about what a society considers the norm for acceptable female

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[6] Moi, p. 28, about Cora Kaplan's analysis of Kate Millett.

[7] Moi, p. 59. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[8] See Mac Donald, *Women and Others*; she explains that Cary's representation of a conspicuously white female protagonist and a tawny black villain and the interesting differences in terms of characterization between her Mariam and Hardy's Mariamne. Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry* (1613) places a brown Cleopatra offstage to highlight the white-skinned, chaste heroine Mariam, and puts her heroine against a number of female foils, figured as lecherous, duplicitous, and dark-complected, in contrast to her own complexional and moral superiority (note the term 'fair' in the title), p. 5. In *Things of Darkness*, Kim Hall observes that, 'the play constructs white privilege by aligning beauty, virtue, high rank, and white skin as superior qualities all signifiable by fairness', p. 6. Likewise, in her translation of Robert Garnier's *Antonie* (1592), Mary Sidney creates an exemplary and sexually pure Cleopatra, but that character is also represented as white.

behaviour. It is necessary to offer more analysis of the representation of female violence in early modern theatre (but also at other periods), in order to resist a strategy whereby female violence is either ignored or suppressed, both in the early modern period and in today's literary criticism, since such a stance perpetuates certain stereotypical notions of female qualities and capacities. The legal, psychological, philosophical and literary writings on early modern female violence need to be interrogated and real cases of female violence and revenge need to be explored in order to understand the way the 'emancipation' of women was also perceived to be linked to their crimes.[9] Such a study should provide deeper and different insights into understandings of female violence, especially through the figure of the female avenger, and address some of the shortcomings in current conceptualisations of the problem, by including a broad comparative perspective in order to analyse the cultural obsession and fascination with stories of female violence alongside the more troubling question of female revenge. This analysis would need to explore the ways in which violence is understood, explained or justified in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, notably in female playwrights' works, in order to analyse how they could potentially gain control of violence through their act of authorship. Physical violence can function as a cathartic assertion of identity or as part of a process of self-discovery.[10] Such research will need to identify the ways in which the wider divisions of race, class and gender intersect with various forms of female violence in order to reassess how female violence is understood and reveal connections that have not previously been explored.[11]

One always speaks from a specific position shaped by cultural, social, political and personal factors, and it is still challenging to speak for women or for the 'other' woman or for the woman of the Renaissance, since one might ask if it is right that women should take up and potentially perpetuate masculine patriarchal

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[9] See for instance Susanne Kord, *The Murderess in German Writing, 1720-1860: Heroines of Horror* (Cambride: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[10] Helen Chambers, *Violence, Culture and Identity: Essays on German and Austrian literature, Politics and Society* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 21.

[11] For instance Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*, (Volume 1, 2003; Volume 2, 2004); the film shares numerous parallels with the genre of revenge tragedy and demonstrates that the heroine shares characteristics with Classical female avengers such as the two famous brides of mythology Medea and Hecuba. One can also think of the Pink Saris in India and their fight for women's rights through notably the use of violence and intimidation.

position of ventriloquism in relation to other women.[12] I have tried to avoid sympathetic approaches to women and wondered if indeed it is enough to be a woman to speak as a woman and for women, but it still remains politically essential for feminists to defend women as women in order to counteract patriarchal oppression, which changes over time, but is still a contemporary issue today.

[12] Moi, pp. 67-68. Today in the new trend of Eastern studies and autobiographical novels by Eastern women, it is interesting to note that in representations of themselves, they tend to reproduce stereotypes associated with them as exotic, oriental, as ‘types/stereotypes’ and definitely other.

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