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Margaret of Anjou and the Struggle Between Merit and Gender

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## **The Tigress: Margaret of Anjou and the Struggle between Merit and Gender**

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### **Abstract**

The English Queen Margaret of Anjou (b.1430 d.1482) was a figure who actively behaved in a way that challenged the gender norms of her time. Spurred on by the hazardousness of the Wars of the Roses, Margaret took uncommonly bold stances for a woman of the fifteenth century. Regardless of the personal merit that led her to become an exceptional queen, the inescapable social norm that men were the paramount political players ultimately prevented Margaret from achieving the political goals she pursued. Historians have, over time, depicted Margaret as having a wide variety of characteristics and motives. This paper places two aspects of Margaret's life in opposition to each other: the high degree of political ability she consistently displayed, and the limiting societal circumstances that surrounded her. When these two aspects interact, either with Margaret combatting her circumstances using personal skill or with outside forces trumping her abilities, a narrative of gender-based limitations in fifteenth-century England emerges. With the help of that narrative, this paper will argue that although her political influence was short-lived, Margaret of Anjou's impact on gender roles in England would prove to be profound and long-lasting.

In 1445, at the age of fifteen, Margaret of Anjou married Henry VI of England. As the niece of the French King, Margaret's marriage to Henry served as a diplomatic maneuver between the two countries. Within England, the political climate inside the royal court was extremely tense due to a long-standing dispute between the Houses of York and

Lancaster, both of which had claims to the English throne. King Henry VI was the head of the House of Lancaster, and as his wife, Margaret was placed at the center of this complex domestic conflict. By 1455, civil war had broken out in England, and in the face of her husband's administrative inadequacies, Margaret was driven to take a forceful political role, attempting to keep the House of York from usurping her husband's Lancastrian throne.

Margaret's was an unusually strong stance for a woman to take in the fifteenth century and thereby attracts interest from historians, who have posed conflicting explanations for her motives.<sup>1</sup> There is a constant question of whether Margaret acted as a power-hungry manipulator, or as a disadvantaged hero.<sup>2</sup> While the latter depiction of Margaret has received less attention, neither characterization is sufficiently nuanced. Margaret was manipulative, but there is strong evidence that she was not simply seeking power. Instead, her political manipulation could well have been a tool for survival in a world that at many points wanted her and her son dead. This paper seeks to offer a more nuanced examination of Margaret's motivations by revisiting her circumstances, her character, and her actions.

Despite her aptitude for the role of queen, Margaret of Anjou existed within a system that viewed men as the ultimate sources of political power, a social norm that ultimately prevented her from making a lasting contribution towards maintaining the reign of the House of Lancaster. This difficulty is due largely to something essential to note moving forward: the political and marital circumstances that Margaret found herself in as queen of England were completely unprecedented, and are key to revealing her unique role in the story of the British monarchy. Never had an assertive Queen been so obviously unmatched and unsupported by her spouse in the way that Margaret was; Henry VI was essentially absent during the latter half of his tumultuous reign, and even before that, he arguably did not wish to perform his royal duties. Many have compared Eleanor of Aquitaine, the notoriously bold twelfth-century English queen, to Margaret, as proof that Margaret's political activity was not so impressive or unusual. But Eleanor of

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<sup>1</sup> J.L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445-1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

The author does briefly insert her own opinion into the historiographical section of this book, but overall, the section provides an unbiased chronicle of the different arguments regarding this subject.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia-Ann Lee, "Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1986):194.

For an extensive discussion of different arguments on this matter, which various historians have presented, see Laynesmith, pp. 12-15.

Aquitaine famously had a cooperative political partner in her husband, Henry II.<sup>3</sup> Margaret, in contrast, had no collaborator; she was left to develop and wield her political power on her own. In doing so, Margaret set a new precedent for British queens of the future, helping to ensure that the female gender would be less likely to hinder their political influence.

To fully understand the severely stressful situation Margaret found herself in once she became the Queen of England, as well as the possible reasons behind her daring actions thereafter, one must first understand the events that led up to the Wars of the Roses. First and foremost, there was the previously mentioned dynastic dispute between the House of Lancaster and the House of York. Both houses were branches of the Plantagenet line and found themselves in a succession conflict in 1377 when King Edward III died and was succeeded by his grandson, Richard II, rather than any of his four surviving sons. Lancaster was founded by John of Gaunt, Edward III's third son, and took a red rose as its emblem, while York was founded by the fourth son, Edmund of Langley, and took a white rose as its emblem, hence the Wars of the Roses.<sup>4</sup> The House of Lancaster took control of England after Richard II's death, when the previously exiled Henry Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, ascended the throne as Henry IV. Lancastrian reign continued until Henry VI fell from power, but tensions still ran high between the two houses in the meantime.<sup>5</sup> While all this domestic strife was occurring, the political situation in France was becoming more and more fraught for the English. Henry V had managed to take control of numerous French lands for England and brought an end to the Hundred Years' War. The vast swaths of territory that he had spent decades conquering, in addition to the Lancastrian claim to the French throne, were called into question when Joan of Arc led a resistance and facilitated Charles VII's coronation.<sup>6</sup> Where England had previously stood on the solid political and military ground, her realm was suddenly quite threatened and risked losing all of its French lands. At court, the Yorkist nobility blamed the Lancastrians, and by extension the king, for this significant failure.<sup>7</sup> Margaret, as the wife of the now unpopular king, would have felt that her life, as well as her political status, was acutely at risk of being taken away from her by those who opposed Lancaster.

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 150-151.

<sup>4</sup>Anthony Cheetham, *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. Antonia Fraser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Cheetham, *The Wars of the Roses*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Dockray, *Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou and the Wars of the Roses; A Source Book* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 20.

The purely diplomatic nature of Margaret's marriage to Henry signifies how her standing and power were determined by the dealings of the men who surrounded her. According to the standards set by previous royal matches, she would normally have been a less-than-optimal choice for Henry's queen. This inadequacy was due to her father's lack of power; although he was bestowed with many titles (King of Sicily, King of Jerusalem, Duke of Anjou, Duke of Calabria, and Count of Provence), Rene of Anjou had very little monetary wealth.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Margaret's family could not provide a dowry in her marriage to Henry.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Henry had such a strained relationship with France that he was willing to settle for Margaret to maintain some semblance of peace between their countries.<sup>10</sup> Given that the two countries were vying for dominance, every public aspect of the wedding was an opportunity for the French and English leaders to flaunt their respective wealth and influence. Charles VII of France celebrated the marriage agreement by holding Margaret a "proxy wedding" and a grand feast, during which her new position as the queen was made the focal point.<sup>11</sup> Alternately, her transfer from England to France allowed England to boast of its power, Henry spending an extravagant amount of money to ensure that Margaret maintained an appropriately noble appearance.<sup>12</sup> Aside from the overt competition between England and France displayed through Margaret's wedding celebrations, the ceremony also involved a covert power play. King Charles planned to use the marriage to achieve his political agenda, with Margaret as his agent tasked with influencing Henry.<sup>13</sup> Early on, this plan proved successful when Margaret appeared to convince Henry that he should surrender the French territory of Maine. It seems initially that both Margaret's actions and her royal authority were completely controlled by her uncle's agenda.

Although she is often credited with manipulating Henry into surrendering Maine, it has also been argued that because of her young age and French heritage, Margaret could not have singlehandedly persuaded the English King to cede such a crucial piece of territory.<sup>14</sup> Instead, her attempts at convincing Henry might have been confirmations to Henry of his preformed notion that giving up French territory was the only way to achieve peace with France.<sup>15</sup> Henry himself credited her with his decision to surrender the territories, writing that

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<sup>8</sup> Dockray, *Source Book*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, *The Dark Side of Queenship*, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 74-78.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 176

<sup>14</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 185.

“Our most dear and well-beloved companion the queen,” had “requested us to do this many times.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, she would have been an easy scapegoat for the king because of the very nationality that had been her advantage in becoming the Queen of England. Miri Rubin, the author of *The Hollow Crown*, notes that there had been a longstanding “atmosphere of suspicion and exclusion,” in England surrounding the French that was fueled by the Hundred Years War.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is unclear whether Margaret was truly a political player in the early days of her marriage, or simply received the blame for the king’s controversial actions because of her nationality. While both arguments lack conclusive evidence, it is interesting to consider the convenience of placing blame on Margaret as the young, newly-crowned, foreign queen. Perhaps some combination of the two versions of events occurred, with additional, unknown voices urging Henry to surrender Maine in addition to Margaret.

Although her first deeds as Queen of England were not necessarily driven by her political agenda, there were distinct signs that Margaret had the potential to become a strong leader. Despite the ambiguity of her role during her early years as queen, it is clear from reading her letters, as well as contemporary accounts, that Margaret’s personality lent itself to a strong ability to engage in politics, even from an early age.<sup>18</sup> During her childhood, she endured a substantial amount of hardship, when her father, Rene of Anjou, was held as a prisoner of war by her uncle over a dispute regarding the succession of her mother’s native land, Lorraine. Thus, her mother, Isabella, Duchess of Lorraine, was left to take care of her family and her duchy. Rene even went so far as to appoint Isabella his substitute governor, and by all accounts, she managed admirably well.<sup>19</sup> During this trying period, Margaret reportedly displayed wisdom and emotional intuition beyond her years, earning her the fitting nickname, “Le petite créature.”<sup>20</sup> Polydore Vergil described

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Stevenson, ed. “Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the reign of Henry VI.” (London: Longman Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861) 640, cited by Lee, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Miri Rubin, *The Hollow Crown: A History of Britain in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 88.

<sup>18</sup> Lee pg. 186

<sup>19</sup> Helen E. Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou; Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Cowden Clarke, *World Noted Women; Or, Types of Womanly Attributes of All Land and Ages* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1857), 207.

It is important to note that this source is both outdated and not written for historical purposes, so Margaret’s nickname is potentially an anecdote. However, several historical sources have referenced this book in an allusion to a primary source, which I have been unable to obtain. In addition, there is very little written on Margaret’s childhood, and many sources that do are from the nineteenth century as well.



her in his *Historia Anglica* as “a woman of the sufficient forecast, very desirous of renown, full of counsel, comely behavior, and all manly qualities, in whom appeared great wit, great diligence, great heed, and carefulness,” alluding to her future role as a stand-in king.<sup>21</sup> Margaret proved capable of managing an estate – a substantial portion of her letters are related to land disputes and in these letters, she invariably demands that the issues be resolved by the adjudged wrongdoers. In one such letter, she complains to the corporation of London in defense of her tenants that “Summe of yor officers, havynge no rewarde [regarde] therto, unad- visely toke fro day to day the horses of our said tenants,”<sup>22</sup> thereby pointing out an injustice committed against her subjects, and attempting to position herself as their defender. She also made awkward attempts at matchmaking in court, writing to Dame Jane Crew, a woman sixteen years her senior, that “Squier Thomas Burneby... aswel for the greet zeale, love, and affeccion that he hath unto yor personne, as for the womanly and vertuose governance that ye be renowned of, desireth with all his hert to do yow worship by wey of marriage.”<sup>23</sup> In subsequent years, she wrote similar letters to Nicholas Straunge and William Gastrik regarding the marriages of their daughters in the following years, almost as if she were practicing the same skill again and again.<sup>24</sup> All of these letters can be taken as examples of the attempts Margaret made to wield her power effectively. This desire to take the role of a leader may have come from observing the women around her. As discussed earlier, both her mother and grandmother had assumed positions of authority when their husbands had been rendered incapable, and Margaret was likely influenced by this familial standard.<sup>25</sup> Later, when she began to take control of the Lancastrian party, it is quite probable that Margaret saw her actions as a sensible solution to a dire problem rather than the shameful political scandal that the Yorkists claimed them to be.

While Margaret was proving herself to be largely competent, Henry VI acted as an incompetent and unenthusiastic ruler, leaving a vacuum in the British power structure. These flaws had existed since Henry’s youth when he showed himself to be susceptible to the influence of others and behaved in a conceited manner.<sup>26</sup> He inherited the crown at the tender age of eight in 1429, relying on a minority council to make important decisions such as those regarding France. Even after growing up, Henry seemed to be so immature that the

<sup>21</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Historia Anglica*, 71, quoted in Dockray, *Source Book*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Cecil Monro, ed., *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Becketington and Others* (Camden Society: London, 1863), 96.

<sup>23</sup> Monro, *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou*, 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 161.

<sup>26</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 69.

minority council continued.<sup>27</sup> This prolongation was a complete anomaly; usually, adult kings only utilized such councils during times of emergency.<sup>28</sup> Contemporary critics of Henry wrote that “the king’s reason was indistinguishable from that of his counselors.”<sup>29</sup> His guardian, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, described Henry as having developed “conceit and knowledge of his high royal authority and estate,” and claimed that he even openly took offense at Warwick’s “chastising of him for his faults.”<sup>30</sup> This inadequacy as ruler was fueled by Henry’s apparent distaste for political affairs; he would occasionally complain that he preferred to focus on religious matters.<sup>31</sup> In 1443 and 1444, he spent time at Christmas and Easter residing in the monasteries at Bury St. Edmunds, distracting himself from his kingly duties with religious learning.<sup>32</sup> Often his disinclination towards his job would lead Henry to take an inactive approach to both foreign and domestic disputes; his choice to surrender Maine instead of taking military action against France was one such example.<sup>33</sup> Domestically, he was skittish when it came to dealing with one-on-one confrontations between members of the nobility. His handling of the heated conflict over the possession of Berkeley Castle is characteristic of his approach. Richard Beauchamp (Henry’s previously named guardian) had laid siege to the property after the death of his father-in-law, the 12th Baron Berkeley, despite his wife’s brother, James Lord Berkeley, being the rightful heir. Henry V restored James’s possession of the Castle, but upon Henry VI’s accession to the throne, Beauchamp stole it once again. Rather than upholding his father’s ruling, Henry chose to avoid confrontation by summoning James to scold him. He wrote to Lord Berkeley of his “Great displeisir,” with the actions of the lord’s allies, “which, if they be not hastily seen unto and remedied, been likely to turne to greet inconvenients and manslaughter,” and went on to command that Berkeley force his allies to stop and summoned him to court after that was done.<sup>34</sup> Henry’s inability to hand down a just resolution left the opposing parties to sort things out for themselves, and the conflict continued for many years afterward.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>28</sup> J.L Watts, “The Counsels of King Henry VI, C. 1435-1445” *The English Historical Review* 106, no. 419 (April 1991): 288.

<sup>29</sup> Rubin, *Hollow Crown*, 227.

<sup>30</sup> R.L. Storey. *The End of the House of Lancaster*. (Stroud: Sutton, 1999) 33.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>32</sup> Rubin, *Hollow Crown*, 235.

<sup>33</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 183.

Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Monro, *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou*, 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Thus, we see a clear contrast between the respective abilities of the king and the queen. Margaret, as shown above, was never afraid to take charge of her subjects' land disputes. Henry, however, preferred to avoid conflict, and even when forced to confront matters, he chose to evade issues rather than resolve them. On one occasion he even attempted to bring a dispute in his court to a halt by lecturing the lords with long-winded speeches about the value of peaceful reconciliation and subsequently retired to a different property, giving the impression to everyone who watched that he had fled.<sup>36</sup> This "paix," (peace) which Henry was so obsessed with defending was an utter delusion; he was essentially at war with France, and his own country had sunk into hostile factionalism.<sup>37</sup> In addition to all of these ineptitudes, there were several recorded observations made during his reign that Henry had the mind and face of a child, possibly a physical indication that he was mentally ill in the early years of his reign.<sup>38</sup> The English historian R.L. Storey attributes Henry's mental condition to his lineage, noting that his great-grandfather, Charles VI of France suffered a similar collapse at around the same age, and suggests that this illness may have been a case of catatonic schizophrenia.<sup>39</sup> In any case, Henry suffered his first mental breakdown in 1453, effectively debilitating him, and leaving him susceptible to bouts of insanity for the rest of his life.

In reaction to the rise in Yorkist power that began with her husband's first mental collapse (many followed in the years afterward), Margaret attempted to fill the political space that resulted from Henry's instability. The very same year as his first collapse, Margaret requested that Parliament grant her regency. Thus, in the words of Miri Rubin, Margaret's entrance into politics "cannot be dissociated with her husband's collapse."<sup>40</sup> As the de facto leader of the Lancastrians, Henry's collapse left that House party weak and vulnerable.<sup>41</sup> Because the Yorkists were gaining power, there was suddenly a significant threat to her son's claim to the English throne, and Margaret probably entered the political arena in an attempt to secure the prince's inheritance when Henry could not.<sup>42</sup> Historians often cite Margaret's probable fear over her son's future well-being as the reason for her bold, controversial actions.<sup>43</sup> This argument seems reasonable, but there was probably also an element of self-preservation in the mix since Margaret's position as a

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<sup>36</sup> Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, 185.

<sup>37</sup> Monro, *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 16-18.

<sup>39</sup> Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, 33, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Rubin, *Hollow Crown*, 232.

<sup>41</sup> Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, 136.

<sup>42</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 277.

<sup>43</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 12-15.

foreign queen in an enemy land left her particularly vulnerable. After watching her mother step in for her father during his imprisonment, taking a strong political stance for the sake of her family's survival would likely have been a natural reaction for Margaret to her husband's incapacitation.<sup>44</sup> But selfless or not, it is clear that Margaret consciously and carefully endeavored to salvage the House of Lancaster so that it could rise once again.

Margaret used her circumstances to vault herself into a highly important political position, claiming her power plays served the interests of her incapacitated husband and defenseless young son. When her claim to the regency was denied, Margaret aimed to publicly emphasize the authority of the royal family as a whole, rather than give way to the traditional notion that Henry alone held sway.<sup>45</sup> This strategy was especially clever because it simultaneously drew attention away from Henry's invalidity *and* minimized the impropriety of her domineering actions. Previously, the fate of the House of Lancaster rested solely on the king's shoulders, and thus his debilitating illness would have spelled out doom for the future of the party. Now, however, with the royal family ruling as one unit, the faults of any one individual would be less injurious to the House of Lancaster. The minority council had hoped that by presenting herself next to Henry, and thus equalizing the pair, Margaret would be able to "transform her lordship into a national power."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, she would often execute her political agenda through her son's power as the Prince of England. One such occasion occurred at the end of the second Battle of St. Albans when Margaret facilitated her son's power by allowing the prince to demand the beheading of several of their captured enemies, giving the illusion that her son was the one with ultimate authority.<sup>47</sup> This strategy of masking her political actions behind the authority of her husband and son was one, which she used both during special occasions and everyday life. As one historian points out, she often "appealed to [Henry VI's] authority... or enlisted his support," in mundane complaints made by tenants (it should be noted however, that this "support" was merely formal – Henry would send an official letter affirming Margaret's stance and nothing more).<sup>48</sup> At the same time, on September 14th, 1456, during a large procession, Margaret aligned herself with the authority of her male counterparts. According to J.L. Laynesmith, an expert on medieval queenship, "The messianic and heroic construction of her son, coupled with the array of

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<sup>44</sup> Laynesmith, 161.

<sup>45</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 165. See also Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 167.

<sup>48</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 190.

worthies promising Margaret their service and its final image of the female conqueror, St. Margaret,” was a forceful visual message to any onlooker that the Queen could be just as powerful, as the men in her family.<sup>49</sup> By providing this clear, bold message, Margaret positioned herself at the forefront of decision-making in the Lancastrian party, and as a primary political player in England.

The rise in Yorkist power that Margaret perceived was not imagined; Richard, Duke of York, and leader of the Yorkist party had many attributes that made him eligible to become king.<sup>50</sup> His great-grandfather on his father’s side had been Edward III, giving him a legitimate claim to the throne.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Richard held several influential titles, including Lieutenant of France. Miri Rubin writes that by 1450 there were, “popular prophecies... with an explicit demand to replace the king by the Duke of York.”<sup>52</sup> With the support of the public masses, York’s movement towards political control would have certainly been a serious threat to the future monarchy envisioned by the House of Lancaster. Furthermore, there was open animosity between the queen and Richard, who was outspoken in his belief that he was the only individual capable of restoring justice in England.<sup>53</sup> He wrote to the king several times, listing his grievances against the current state of affairs in his country, and pleading that Henry “examine these matters and do such justice [as] the case requires.”<sup>54</sup> But Henry, true to form, pushed Richard’s complaints aside, claiming that they would be dealt with later.<sup>55</sup> As the *Cronland Chronicle* eloquently put it, the wrongs that Richard perceived as having been committed by the royal family, “Were only to be atoned for by the deaths of nearly all the nobles of the realm.”<sup>56</sup> War did indeed break out, with the first major military action occurring in 1452. In an event dubbed the Dartford Uprising, York raised an army, marched on London, and then quickly entered negotiation with the Lancastrians.<sup>57</sup> The first Battle of St. Albans in 1455 was the major Lancastrian defeat of the war and led to the capture of Henry VI, as well as parliament’s decision to name York Protector of England.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 165.

<sup>50</sup> Rubin, *Hollow Crown*, 271.

<sup>51</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Rubin, *Hollow Crown*, 271.

<sup>53</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 81-82.

Dockray, *Source Book*, 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> Dockray, *Source Book*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 119-120.

When her family was forced to flee England after numerous Yorkist victories, Margaret desperately attempted to regain their former power, negotiating a marriage contract between her son, the prince, and James III's sister in Scotland. This arrangement failed, and in the end, she arranged a marriage for the prince with the daughter of the new Earl of Warwick (tellingly nicknamed "The Kingmaker"), while she sought refuge at home in France. Again, by forming such a pivotal agreement, Margaret was using the political leverage her son inherently had as Prince of England to execute significant power plays that she would not have been capable of had her husband has been in good health.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, she was able to hide the controversy of her actions as a woman behind the political power of her male counterparts. She made one final attempt to take back England with the aid of Warwick and Charles VII's naval fleet, which led to a brief reinstatement of her husband to the throne in 1470, but within a year, all hope of permanent Lancastrian Restoration died. Warwick was killed at the Battle of Barnett in April 1471 and the Prince was killed at the Battle of Tewkesbury a month later. Margaret was taken captive by the Yorkist King, Edward IV, and Henry was killed in the Tower of London.

Once both of the important men in her life, Henry and her son, died, and the Lancastrian cause disintegrated, there was no reason for Margaret to maintain her previous controversial political role. Before being sent back to France, Margaret lived in the homes of several of her noble friends. The contemporary accounts of Margaret's life become more and more ambiguous after she lost her queenly status, indicating that she no longer played a significant role in English politics.<sup>60</sup> This downward spiral continued after she arrived back in France, where she lived under the support of the French king, Louis XI. She died in obscurity, stripped of power by the death of her son, and stripped of wealth by the French king, who confiscated her possessions, claiming that she was in debt to him, as he had paid the ransom for her release from the Tower of London.<sup>61</sup> Her last will is particularly pitiful: its final few lines read "I implore the king [to] meet and pay the outstanding debts as the sole heir of the wealth which I inherited through my father and mother and my other relatives and ancestors."<sup>62</sup> There are no accounts of Margaret's funeral and it was likely a small, nondescript event, given her meager financial situation at the end of her life.<sup>63</sup> A lackluster funeral for an English queen was unusual, especially when

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<sup>59</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 326.

<sup>60</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 170.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, *The Dark Side of Queenship*, 183.

<sup>62</sup> Dockray, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens*, 122.

compared to the extravagant funerals of subsequent English queens, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville, and Elizabeth of York.<sup>64</sup> The latter's funeral, in particular, was beyond lavish, complete with a solemn procession of "poor folk," and elaborate depictions of Elizabeth.<sup>65</sup> It is safe to say that Margaret lost any of the utility and influence she previously had during her husband's reign.

Margaret was a figure who actively assumed a political role that challenged the gender norms of her time. Yet her ability to take power and hold on to it was completely tied to the men who surrounded her. This could be an indication that in Margaret's time, England was not ready to have a woman exercise royal authority based solely upon her merit. Indeed, the victorious Yorkist party strongly rebuked the standard that Margaret had set, picking queens who never took as strong a stance as she had, and none of whom were foreign. However, it is important to note that about one hundred years after Margaret's reign, Elizabeth I would rule England on her own. Perhaps the incremental shift in gender roles made by Margaret laid the groundwork for larger changes that were slowly approaching England. William Shakespeare, writing in the time of Elizabeth, certainly saw Margaret as a powerful historical figure; in 1591, Shakespeare wrote the third part of *Henry VI*, in which Margaret is described as "A tiger's heart rapt in a woman's hide."<sup>66</sup> The animalistic quality of that description points to a common theme throughout all accounts of Margaret, and it points to the idea that Margaret resorted to forceful behaviors that were thought at the time to be more natural for men than for women; to Shakespeare, she was a "tiger," to her family, she was a "créature."<sup>67</sup> Thus, Margaret did not only challenge the rigid gender confinements of the fifteenth century, she overcame them. She was able to embody the ferocious characteristics that society perceived to be essential to the male gender, without the onlookers questioning her femininity, proving that women were capable of being multi-faceted in a way that English society had not yet considered.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>66</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Third Part of Henry VI*, ed. Michael Hathaway, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) Act I, Scene IV, Line 37.

<sup>67</sup> Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 5-8.

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