Raising their Voices: Women, Articulation and Power in Shakespeare's Henriad

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RAISING THEIR VOICES:
WOMEN, ARTICULATION AND POWER
IN SHAKESPEARE'S HENRIAD

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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The purpose of this study is to bring to light the structural and thematic pattern of strong female agency embedded in Shakespeare’s second tetralogy: *Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

This study focuses on three important female characters: the Duchess of York, Lady Mortimer and Katherine who are linked in their mission to express themselves despite men’s attempts to keep them silent. In three interconnected scenes, each woman either literally or figuratively speaks a different language than her spouse, illustrating the dramatic division between the sexes in Renaissance England. In each scene, the woman successfully negotiates power for herself—the Duchess of York through direct protest, Lady Mortimer through song, and Katherine through learning and careful manipulation—to make her views heard.

I will show how and why Shakespeare draws attention to these women in three strategically positioned moments in the text—in 5.1 and 5.2 of *Richard II*, at the precise midpoint of *1 Henry IV* (3.1), and in the final scenes of *Henry V*—forming a pattern of female agency in the plays. He then juxtaposes two key scenes—one idealizing the marriage between Mortimer and his Welsh wife with the difficult bilingual dialogue between Henry and Katherine—to show that there is a more democratic alternative to the unequal view of marriage enforced by the patriarchy and sanctioned by Renaissance law.

By giving voice to these female characters and staging their defiance in three key scenes, Shakespeare actively engages in one of the most important debates of his time, which centered around the role and place of women in sixteenth-century culture. Shakespeare allows the audience to view the world from a woman’s perspective—highlighting her obstacles, documenting her struggle, and ultimately, hearing her story. Thus, this paper proposes that the Henriad deliberately exposes Renaissance gender roles as lacking and alerts the audience to women’s struggle for voice in a society that wished them silent. Most importantly, it highlights the ways in which women bravely resisted oppression and remained individuals of integrity, strength and purpose.
Many contemporary Shakespearean scholars have focused on the women in Shakespeare's tragedies, comedies, problem plays and the very bold and aggressive women in the first tetralogy: Eleanor, Constance, Joan of Arc and, of course, Margaret. However, while the women in the Henriad (Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV and Henry V), may not be given as much stage time as those in the first tetralogy, or contribute to the movement of the dramatic action as much as the others mentioned, they are equally powerful and nonetheless subversive. Perhaps it is because they operate on a subtle, even veiled level in the way they resist patriarchal demands that they have been generally overlooked by scholars. When examining their defiant actions in light of the larger thematic structure of the Henriad, one begins to see very clearly how these women do not recede into the background, but rather successfully resist the unjust demands placed upon them and emerge as women of power, agency and strength.

Although Shakespearean scholar E.M.W. Tillyard is widely criticized by postmodern, Marxist and new historicist critics for his monolithic view of the complex “Elizabethan world picture” and belief in the “Tudor myth,” he astutely observed that the Henriad was thematically and structurally conceived as “an organic whole embodying a network of cross references that anticipate and echo each other” (235-7). Contemporary critic Harry Berger agrees, stating that the plays “unfold as a process of continual revision in which earlier textual moments persist like ghosts and haunt and complicate later moments and thus take on new meaning” (227). Considering the Henriad in this way brings to light a rich subtext of interconnected scenes, contributing to a deeper, more rewarding experience of the plays. The three textual moments I will discuss constitute a triad of interlocking scenes in which a woman challenges a man's attempt to keep her
silent. In each, Shakespeare disrupts the main historical action to focus on a domestic situation where the woman either literally or figuratively speaks a different language than her husband, illustrating the dramatic division between the sexes in Renaissance England. The scenes showcase three passionate, vocal women of different nationalities who are linked in their mission and message and successfully circumvent seemingly impossible linguistic and gender barriers to make their views heard. Symbolically, their acts of defiance occur at three important, strategically positioned scenes in the tetralogy, and establish a pattern of strong female agency in the Henriad.

The pattern begins in 5.2 of *Richard II* where the Duchess of York is deliberately excluded from the conversation between her husband and Henry about the fate of Aumerle, the Yorks' son who has plotted treason against the new king. Enraged at being kept from a decision that directly concerns her, the Duchess demands to be let into the king's chambers and successfully convinces Henry to spare her only son's life. This short but telling scene has been generally overlooked by critics or dismissed as irrelevant. It is important because it illustrates how her husband intentionally excludes the Duchess from knowledge that directly impacts her life. Instead of standing by in silence, the Duchess vehemently rebels against the gender roles of the day and claims control of the typically "masculine" domain of speech and action. The woman's reaction, grounded in the bond of innate maternal love, clashes with her husband's unquestioning devotion to the crown, so much so that it is as if they are speaking two different languages. The couple is so alienated from one other that the Duchess of York must stand up against her husband (a violation of Renaissance doctrine), and passionately argue for her son's life.

Building on this scene, Shakespeare pairs two interlocking domestic situations and positions them at central moments in the plays. One features the Welsh Lady Mortimer and her English spouse and occurs at the midpoint of *I Henry IV* (3.1). It is juxtaposed with the difficult bilingual dialogue between Henry and the French princess
Katherine that concludes the tetralogy. The scenes illustrate that these women (both
members of colonized nations) literally speak different languages than their husbands. If
a woman could not communicate with her husband, the person who is supposed to be her
companion and the closest person to her, with whom can she communicate? Prohibitive
laws, confining gender roles and condescending attitudes estranged women from the
community and made them feel literally alien.1

In the Henriad, Shakespeare figures the woman as an outsider and links a noble
Englishwoman (the Duchess of York) with foreigners to show that all Renaissance
women (even nobility) experience the same plight. Dramatically, each scene questions
the rules of conduct for Renaissance women on moral and practical levels. Each hints at
the deep anxieties held by the English about foreign cultures, alerts the audience to the
deliberate silencing of women, and demonstrates the lengths to which women will go to
break that silence.

A few critics have analyzed the scene between the Yorks and Mortimers, while
others have provided telling insight into the final scene of the tetralogy, but no one has
considered these scenes as a unit or recognized the many interconnected themes running
throughout them.2 These scenes are not isolated moments that appear randomly in the
plays. They feature a group of women who violate every ideal of a “good” sixteenth-
century woman. Instead of remaining silent, obedient and chaste, these women are
aggressive, disobedient, outspoken, outwardly passionate, in a word, threatening, because
their behavior challenges the dominant ideology and exposes its inadequacies. Rather
than focusing on “victim feminism,” this paper brings to light the important pattern of
female agency built into the plays and discusses the empowering techniques the
characters employ in order to successfully protect themselves and their interests. For
example, the Duchess refuses to relinquish control until her views are acknowledged by
the king. Lady Mortimer, unsatisfied with her father’s attempt to translate her Welsh
words to her English husband, claims center stage, and in a subversive, empowering way, uses song to transcend linguistic barriers and express herself. Finally, Katherine refuses to be blindly courted by Henry. She deceptively plays up a passive "womanly" role, and uses silence and her sparse knowledge of English (which she has learned in secret), to expose Henry's self-centered, patriarchal and imperialistic motives. Each woman uses different methods to achieve the same goal: to maintain her integrity despite a man's attempt to control her.

The scenes dealing with the Welsh Lady Mortimer and French princess Katherine build on the dramatic framework established in 5.2 of Richard II and the scenes assume greater relevance because in them patriarchal and imperialistic issues meet. Lady Mortimer speaking and singing in the forbidden language of Welsh was a "discomfiting reminder" to the Elizabethan audience that "Wales continued to be a foreign and hostile colony, ruled and to an extent subjected, but never quite controlled by Tudor power" (Mullaney 162), just as Katherine, a French woman and innocent victim of English nationalism, was forced to wed her country's conqueror and adopt his language. Indeed, when examined closely and as a unit, these scenes bring to light important, controversial issues in sixteenth-century culture, including an examination of women's place in Renaissance society, the socially constructed nature of gender roles, divisiveness between the sexes, and alternative ways women expressed themselves in a culture that wished them silent.

Shakespeare draws attention to these three outspoken women and validates their points of view to prove that women do have something valuable to say but the power structure often works against them, suppressing their expression at all costs. Like the few exceptional women who managed to be published during the Renaissance, these women refuse to surrender to silence. Their active and vocal presence on stage makes the audience want to hear their perspectives, and their valid arguments prove that women's
views were as logical and legitimate as their male counterparts'. In giving women characters a voice and deliberately halting the main historical action to draw attention to them in key scenes, Shakespeare allows us to see the world from a woman’s perspective—highlighting her obstacles, documenting her struggle, fighting for her voice and ultimately, hearing her story.

In literature as in life, discord in the home reflects greater social turmoil, therefore the utter division, even animosity, between the sexes points to deeper issues of gender division and societal unrest in Renaissance life. If “the household was the microcosm of the state and women’s subjection a happy paradigm of civil order” (Dusinberre 79), then the Henriad proves that England was not as unified as the monarchy would like to believe. Since political power was largely fixed in the hands of men, the English monarchy created and enforced laws that alienated women so drastically that a self-imposed world of difference existed between the sexes in the Renaissance. Although the country was ruled by a female monarch, scholars agree that Elizabeth did little to improve women’s lives.4

The gender division in the Renaissance has been well documented. A Renaissance man’s education centered on the arts, sciences, philosophy and politics. He was able to think independently, write, travel and advance socially, politically, and academically, while a Renaissance woman did not enjoy these opportunities.5 Forbidden to enter public affairs, women’s duties focused solely around the home and family. Unlike her male counterparts, a woman’s first educational goal was piety. Obedience, chastity and silence were fundamental values instilled in Renaissance women and stressed throughout their lives. “A woman’s whole life was a lesson in submission to the will of another,” wrote Ruth Kelso, who summarizes the conditions of Renaissance women in her compendium, Doctrine for the Lady of The Renaissance: “Obedience must underwrite all the other virtues and had to be complete, unquestioning” (44), wrote Kelso.
Women's access to education was severely limited. Women were discouraged from thinking and speaking for themselves and admonished not to transgress these boundaries through strict laws, conduct books, theological exhortations and educational tracts. Many women were not taught to read for fear that they would use this knowledge to rise above their social position.

Pamphlets and conduct books dictated strict rules of feminine behavior. Calvinist preacher John Knox proclaimed in *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558):

Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him...Nature, I say, doth paint them [women] forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish: and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruel and lacking in the spirit of counsel and regiment. (2ff, 94ff)

Thomas Becon, a Protestant preacher, advised in *Catechism: Of the Duty of Maids and Young Unmarried Women* (1564), a pamphlet providing rules of conduct for the maiden, that a woman should:

be not full of tongue, and of much babbling, nor use many words, but as few as they may, yea and those wisely and discreetly, soberly, and modestly spoken, ever remembering this common proverb: *a maid should be seen and not heard*...Except the gravity of some matter do [sic] require that she should speak, or else an answer is to be made...let her keep silence. For there is nothing that doth so much commend, advance, set forth, adorn, deck, trim and garnish a maid as silence (fos. 431v-4v, 513r-7r)

Catholic humanist Juan Luis Vives, who influenced prevailing ideas of women's education between 1540 and 1600, emphasized in *Instructions of a Christian Woman*
(1523), that the ideal godly woman was one who refrains from speaking. He states that whenever a woman is “in company” she must “hold her tongue demurely. And let few see her and none at all hear her” (f. 18). Young girls were taught at a young age not to speak or think for themselves: “Intellectual curiosity would have been choked off at infancy...Girls were to study vernacular speech but warned against becoming too talkative for they must always remember to be seen and not heard,” writes Retha M. Warnicke in *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (35, 34), echoing sixteenth-century writer Thomas Becon. As girls grew older, calculated psychological tactics were put into practice to encourage compliance and obedience.

Carroll Camden writes in *The Elizabethan Woman*, “As part of her love, then, she must give honor, reverence, respect to her husband, since he was her lord and master. She must submit herself to him and acknowledge and revere him as the head in all matters” (121). Men used Biblical metaphors to emphasize that women were inferior. As Juan Luis Vives states: “In wedlock, the man resembleth the reason, and woman the body. Now reason ought to rule and the body to obey if man will live. Also St. Paul saith: *the head of the woman is the man*” [1 Cor. 11] (fos. 71R-71v). Shakespeare was fully aware of the laws and psychological tactics that aimed to keep women of the sixteenth century “in their place.” Instead of depicting meek women, he highlighted defiant women who actively transgressed forbidden social and gender roles so the Elizabethan audience could view for themselves the unrealistic and unjust notions presented in these conduct books, treatises and laws. Unlike Renaissance chronicles, where women were largely absent or mentioned only in marginal notes, Shakespeare uses the theater to give his women characters a sounding board and these characters express their wills and opinions loudly and clearly. They do not stand on the sidelines—they rebel against restrictions placed upon them and make their defiance known. As Juliet Dusinberre writes in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, “In the sixteenth century the idea that women had
a conscience which might operate independently from men's or might even judge and oppose male consciousness was revolutionary" (86). By giving voice to women at pivotal moments in the second tetralogy, Shakespeare reminds his audience that women, who are supposed to be seen and not heard, do speak and he beckons his audience to listen.

The scene that establishes the interrelated pattern of strong, vocal women in the tetralogy occurs between the Duke and Duchess of York in 5.2 of Richard II where the Yorks learn that their son has plotted treason against the usurper, Bolingbroke. Aumerle's actions are especially difficult for York to handle because, throughout the play, he has been caught between "tender duty" (2.1.165) to Richard and accepting that Richard abused his power and committed wrongful acts such as "Gloucester's death...Hereford's banishment" (166) and cruelty to John of Gaunt. Torn between love for the providential King Richard and sympathy for the machiavel, Henry IV, York wishes to appear the "good subject" to his new king, so he sacrifices his son for the crown. Completely left out of the conversation, the Duchess, furious that she has just learned such important information, demands to be let into the king’s chambers.8

York is worried that Aumerle's treason will blemish his good name, while the Duchess cannot bear to see her only son sentenced to death. As a woman and mother, the Duchess fights for her son's life because she values her flesh and blood over the crown. Unlike her husband, who has no qualms advocating Aumerle's execution, the Duchess protects her son at all costs. She stands up for motherhood, women's rights, and self-preservation and retaliates against her husband's petty notion of proving a point with their son's life. Defiant, she will force him to recognize her perspective, "And wilt thou pluck my fair son from mine age, / And rob me of a happy mother's name? / Is he not like thee? Is he not thine own?" (5.2.92-4). The Duchess's words imply her critique of the Renaissance idea of honor—unnecessarily sacrificing one's life for the sake of saving one's "good name." She does not subscribe to the patriarchal idea that honor is all and
that, “The purest treasure mortal times afford / Is spotless reputation; that away, / Men are but guilded loam, or painted clay” (1.1.177-9). She grounds her convictions in natural law and does not concern herself with self-aggrandizement or political favoritism.

Feminist critic Linda Bamber erroneously regards this scene as tangential, stating that “the conflict between the Duke and Duchess of York is obviously comic and will not have serious consequences,” continuing, “There can be no real question of Bolingbroke’s verdict on Aumerle when it has been proceeded by such family antics.” She goes on to say that, “the Duchess as Mother offers only a comic contrast to the serious world of men” (147). This short but important scene should not be brushed off in this way. Not only does it establish a pattern of female resistance in the plays, but it is essential in understanding a woman’s place and struggle for voice in Renaissance society. Bamber sounds like a typical Renaissance man in her reaction. Her view of the Duchess as a “silly woman” with no business meddling in men’s affairs is disconcerting because the Duchess’s behavior is not melodramatic. She has to be this forceful for the king to change his mind. Surprisingly, even feminist critic Phyllis Rackin considers the exchange between York and his wife “farcical wrangling” (Stages 141). Examining the scene more closely reveals that the woman is literally outside of the conversation and has no business interfering in the decision to spare or end her son’s life. That is exactly how the Elizabethan power structure viewed women. York goes to such great lengths to ensure that the Duchess will not speak, indicating his underlying fear of her power and his desire to control it.

Puritan clergymen John Dod and Robert Cleaver, who wrote a popular marital conduct book entitled, A Godly Form of Household Government for the Ordering of Private Families According to the Direction of God’s Word (1598), advocated that any good wife must:
take reproof meekly...and she must acknowledge her inferiority and
carry herself as inferior...she must hold her peace, even though she is not
to blame...for it is better to continue peace by obedience, than to break it
by resistance...The best means, therefore, that a wife can use to obtain
and maintain the love and good liking of her husband, is to be silent,
obeidient, peaceable, [sic] patient... (f. 214, Q4v-Q3r)

Clearly, if the Duchess obeyed her husband, she would have helped advocate her son's
death. In this exchange, Shakespeare proves that a woman's blind obedience to her
husband's will is as impractical as it is dangerous. The Duchess's honest intentions and
direct, passionate approach serve as a foil to York's devious, manipulative actions and
reveal his selfish agenda.

This scene emphasizes the sexes' access to and reasons for speech. In her
discussion of women in the history plays, Linda Woodbridge argues: "Women's tongues
are instruments of aggression or self-defense; men's are tools of authority. In either case,
speech is an expression of authority; but male speech represents legitimate authority,
while female speech attempts to usurp authority or to rebel against it" (208). York
declares the facts and the Duchess reacts against them. While her husband's role is
originally more authoritative, hers is more retaliatory. Catherine Belsey agrees:

To speak is possess meaning, to have access to the language

which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become

a subject, but for women to speak is to threaten the system of
differences which gives meaning to patriarchy. (191)

A woman's act of rebellion automatically draws attention to the restrictions placed upon
her and illustrates that once again, men are the rulers and decision makers and women are
expected simply to obey.
Meanwhile, as Aumerle speaks with the king, York enters proclaiming his son's villainy. During York's conversation, he continually steers the focus back to himself, emphasizing his honor and faithfulness as he entreats the king to sacrifice his son. "Mine honor lives when his dishonor dies, / Or my shamed life in his dishonor lies - / Thou kill'st me in his life: giving him breath" (5.3.68-70). When the Duchess arrives, York is enraged that she may thwart his plan as he exclaims, "Thou frantic woman, what dost thou make here?" (87)—as if the Duchess has no business in affairs of court even if they involve the life of her only son. The Duchess delivers an impassioned entreaty for her son's life.

Pleads he in earnest? Look upon his face.

His eyes do drop no tears, his prayers are in jest.

His words come from his mouth; ours from our breast

He prays but faintly, and would be denied;

We pray with heart and soul, and all beside. (97-102)

Here, the Duchess uses the plural "ours" when she speaks of herself and Aumerle and dramatically draws attention to men's and women's divergent use of speech.

Knowing that the Duchess will not surrender until she has her will, York deviously asks Henry to trick his wife by using a foreign language she won't understand. He asks, "Speak it in French, King: say "Pardonnez-moi" (5.3.117) so the Duchess will believe that he has in fact excused Aumerle. The Duchess (and the audience) know that the French expression, "Pardonnez-moi" does not mean "I pardon you," but rather, "Excuse me." Shakespeare places this obscure exchange into the play to show that York wants Henry to use the foreign words as a means of trickery and a way of withholding information from his wife in order to advance his own motives. The Duchess, aware of this dangerous word-play, exclaims:
Does thou teach pardon pardon to destroy?
Ah, my sour-husband, my hard-hearted lord
That sets the word itself against the word!
Speak 'Pardon' as 'tis current in our land;
The chopping French do not understand. (119-22)

Although French was generally associated with the language of the court and the upper classes since the Norman Conquest, the Duchess does understand enough of the language to know that her husband has manipulated the French phrase for deceitful purposes (Price 227). Had she not understood any French, she may have innocently agreed to her son's death. However, her small amount of bilingual expertise gives her the power to prevent further harm to herself and her son.

The Duchess's honest, legitimate appeal to save her son's life has no doubt influenced Henry, but Shakespeare reminds us that Henry's decision to excuse Aumerle may likely have been fueled by his own self-seeking motives. Aumerle has committed treason, one of the most serious crimes in Renaissance England, and Henry excuses him because, as the usurper, he wishes to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). He has stolen the crown from Richard and wants God to pardon him for that fault (and appear the forgiving compassionate ruler among the populace), as he states, "I pardon him [Aumerle] as God shall pardon me" (5.3.130). The scene illustrates that the king is indeed God's substitute, his deputy anointed in his sight—authorized by the state to grant or withhold pardon at will. His motives (however subjective or egotistical), carry the utmost authority. Henry may have granted the Duchess's wish because of her passionate plea or rather, simply because it agreed with his motives. This scene emphasizes that countless factors play into the king's decision—and many are politically motivated.
Shakespeare stages a similar scene in which men use foreign words to deliberately deceive women in *Henry VIII* or *All is True* when Cardinal Wolsey visits the dejected, dethroned Spanish Queen Katherine in her chamber. After Wolsey has successfully encouraged Henry to pursue Anne Boleyn, which created the royal rift, he visits the Queen under the guise of offering her Henry's wishes and wise counsel. Wolsey aims to manipulate the noble Katherine and upon his visit, immediately suggests adjourning to her private chambers. Katherine flatly refuses. She will not condescend to Wolsey's level nor give him the satisfaction of entertaining his views, especially in private. She states openly, "Seek me out and that way I am wife in, / Out with it boldly. Truth loves open dealing" (3.1.38-9). In his reply, Wolsey attempts to place her in a subordinate position by speaking to her in Latin, a language she does not speak or understand: "*Tanta est erga te mentis integritas, Regina serrissima*" [Such is my integrity of mind toward you, O most serene queen], he says (3.1.40). Echoing the Duchess of York, Katherine demands to be addressed in English, emphasizing that she has done nothing wrong to warrant being addressed in a foreign tongue:

O, good my lord, no Latin.

I am not such a truant since my coming

As not to know the language I have lived in.

A strange tongue makes a strange case more strange

    suspicious—

Pray, speak in English. Here are some will thank you,

If you speak truth, for their poor mistress' sake.

Believe me, she has had much wrong. Lord Cardinal,

The willing'st sin I ever yet committed

May be absolved in English. (3.1.41-9)
This is a stealthy attempt to insult the Queen’s intelligence, as Wolsey knows she most likely would be unfamiliar with the language. Like the Duchess of York, Katherine sees through the Cardinal’s conniving words, stands her ground and demands to be addressed in English, in the language that places them on equal footing. Both men resort to deceptive means to achieve their goals. The women catch the men in their dishonest, deceptive tactics, which in turn, emphasize the women’s integrity and strength of purpose.

Following the pattern that began with the Yorks’ exchange in Richard II, Shakespeare introduces another domestic scene addressing issues of gender division and female agency, but complicates it by calling into question England’s oppressive practices toward the Welsh. At the exact midpoint of 1 Henry IV (3.1), Shakespeare halts the play’s main action and introduces a Welshwoman who is married to Mortimer, the rightful heir to the English throne. Indeed, to many, this scene seems puzzling, even misplaced; however, when viewed in its proper context, it fits perfectly with the play’s thematic structure and contributes to its larger commentary on gender, sexual and cultural relations. Introducing a Welshwoman, a member of the Celtic fringe on stage, reminds the English of their colonial practices toward their neighboring countrymen. The presence of a Welsh character onstage—let alone a woman—was jarring to the English audience. During this period, the Welsh were no doubt, like women, “the most remote and strange of provincials and the nearest and most intimate of foreigners” (Blank 130). While the Duchess of York figuratively speaks a different language from her husband, Lady Mortimer literally does—making her isolation painfully apparent. As a Welsh woman, she cannot verbally communicate with Mortimer, her English spouse, but does everything in her power to cross these linguistic barriers and express her thoughts to her husband.

Despite their cultural differences, the Mortimers’ relationship stands in direct contrast to the Yorks’ because the Mortimers’ union is based on equality and respect.
Although the Mortimers most likely married because of a war alliance, their relationship shows no evidence of oppression or animosity, offering a welcome alternative to the domination and subordination seen in the Yorks’ union—and later, Henry and Katherine’s marriage. While many Renaissance partnerships were founded on authority and dominance, “there were also marriages characterized by mutual trust and generosity, marriages in which dominance was not a critical issue,” according to Henderson and McManus (80), and the Mortimers seem to be one of them.

Glendower knows his daughter is passionately devoted to Mortimer and will be distraught upon his departure: “I am afraid my daughter will run mad, / So much she doteth on her Mortimer” (3.1.141-2). Her father’s description introduces Lady Mortimer as a passionate woman who adores her husband despite cultural differences. In this political and romantic union, Mortimer does not act as an oppressive colonizer; rather, his genuine understanding and concern for his wife shows that he sympathizes with her situation. He proclaims his frustration with the language barrier: "This is the deadly spite that angers me: / My wife can speak no English, I no Welsh" (188-9).

Here, a traditionally intimate scene between a husband and wife becomes public spectacle. The passionate Lady Mortimer learns that her husband must leave for war and cries out frantically in Welsh while her father serves as translator. This linguistic division draws attention to the underside of the Acts of Union (1536), which were passed to assimilate Wales into the Crown and institute English as the official language of England. At the time, Welsh was outlawed by Henry VIII who considered it a barbarous language, “a Speech nothing like, nor consonant to the natural Mother Tongue within this Realm” (Bowen 75). Although the Welsh were part of the British kingdom, the English government did not treat them as such. Many of the privileges given to Englishmen were simply not enjoyed by their Welsh brethren.
Despite the fact that many viewed the Acts as a way to advance using "the English language as a prime route to the cultural, social and political emancipation of the Elizabethan Age" (Thomas 94), a growing number of women spoke only Welsh (96). No one who used the Welsh language was permitted to hold office in England (94) and "the only persons likely to be awarded ‘offices or fees,’ of course, were Anglicized Welsh people or the English appointees. The statute did little to disseminate the use of English among the majority of the population" (97). Since women would never have the opportunity to learn English, this caused a feeling of increased estrangement for women, an already alienated group, because they could not assimilate into a more prestigious realm of society without this knowledge. In this way, Lady Mortimer’s Welsh represents the language of the colonized nation. More specifically; it represents the language of women, of the private sphere, of the realm removed from matters of law, power or privilege. The voicing of this language on stage draws attention to the schism between England and Wales, men and women, the gentry and commoners, illustrating an invisible social and cultural barrier that could not be easily crossed.

To make this point, Shakespeare carefully selects a line in Holinshed that mentions Mortimer’s marriage to a Welshwoman. He creates a story around it during a pivotal moment in his history play to bring these issues of English and Welsh relations to light. When the Welsh Lady assumes center stage and speaks and later sings in Welsh, this purposefully estranges the Elizabethan audience and makes them feel alien. Welsh was most likely unintelligible to Shakespeare’s largely English-speaking audience. Through this theatrical role reversal, the audience is suddenly ostracized, cut off from understanding what is being spoken onstage. In this highly subversive scene, the audience assumes the position of a Renaissance woman who observes a life of action and cannot participate, yearns for a forum by which to express herself but is forbidden. Similarly, the translation is not represented in modern day prompt books, leaving readers, like the
Elizabethan audience, grasping for the exact meaning to Lady Mortimer’s words. Even today, the Welsh language is textually represented only by stage directions that read: *The lady speaks in Welsh.*

By transferring the experience of estrangement onto the audience, Shakespeare achieves an atmosphere resembling Brecht’s alienation effect, where spectators are placed in a position of critical detachment so they can reexamine what they have taken for granted. The purpose of Brecht’s A-effect or *Verfremdung* (German for estrangement or disillusion), is similar to Shakespeare’s—which is to make the familiar strange and “transform [the audience from] a generally passive acceptance into a state of suspicious inquiry” (Brecht 192). This scene turns the tables and prompts the English audience to examine why Lady Mortimer must undergo this unequal situation. By witnessing a Welshwoman struggling to communicate in her own language (which no one but her father understands), illuminates Welshwomen’s linguistic, geographic, and social isolation in English Renaissance culture.

On the other hand, men had access to English because it coincided with their role as authorities and lawmakers. Glendower speaks English because, as he tells Hotspur, he was "trained up in the English court" where he also learned the harp and "[M]any an English ditty lovely well, / And gave the tongue a helpful ornament" (3.1.119, 121-2). However, Glendower saw no need to teach his daughter English as she would never enter the public sphere, yet ironically, she has now wed his co-conspirator and cannot communicate with him. Shakespeare makes a point of noting that Lady Mortimer is a noblewoman, yet is still forbidden from learning English, indicating that the common folks’ predicament was far worse. Mortimer, however, would have no reason to learn Welsh as he is a member of the colonizing country, yet he is so frustrated and saddened by this failure to communicate that he proclaims to his wife:

But I will never be a truant, love,
Till I have learnt thy language, for thy tongue
Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer’s bower
With ravishing division, to her lute. (202-6)

He calls his wife’s tears “pretty Welsh / Which thou pourest down from these swelling / heavens” (196-8) and vows to learn her language. Mortimer’s unorthodox response to the Welsh language would likely offend his countrymen. The British considered it demeaning for the colonizer to stoop to the level of the colonized and learn their language. As Edmund Spenser writes:

it is unnatural that any people should love another's language more than their own...for it hath been ever the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all means to learn his. (84)

Michael Neill claims that Mortimer’s love and the Welshwoman’s sexual allure moves him to “linguistic submission” (17)—uncharacteristically to surrender the King’s English in favor of what the English considered to be the "barbarous" language of Welsh. Unlike Henry, who forces Katherine to speak English, Mortimer does not attempt to Anglicize his wife. He accepts that her language and culture are as legitimate as his own. Although the couple cannot communicate linguistically, they have managed to forge a bond based on shared affection. Each party wants to understand and empathize with the other and has no qualms about expressing themselves openly. In depicting this equal partnership, Shakespeare presents the rare yet attainable alternative to the inequality that characterized many marital relationships in the sixteenth century.

In contrast to Mortimer’s acceptance of Welsh language and culture, Hotspur adopts a condescending attitude toward the Welsh and is particularly annoyed by Glendower’s self-aggrandizing tirades about his supernatural origins. Hotspur loses
patience and states of Glendower: "I think there's no man speaketh better Welsh" (3.1.48), i.e. "no man speaks more nonsense." Hotspur's reply to Glendower's refusal to dam up the Trent River and re-route it because it blocks his land is: "Let me not understand you, then: speak it in Welsh" (117), echoing York's comment in Richard II where he asks Henry to "Speak it in French, King: say "Pardonnez-moi" (5.3). Both men attempt to achieve their self-centered desires by transforming their requests into foreign languages—thus attempting to camouflage the true meaning of their words. Hotspur's, York's, and Cardinal Wolsey's attempts to alter meaning are foiled—in every case, the people see through their charades. In these three corresponding scenes, Shakespeare demonstrates the equality of languages and proves that despotic attitudes toward foreign cultures and tongues are grounded in fear.

Since Glendower is the only person fluent in both languages, he serves as translator. Like most Renaissance women, Lady Mortimer, unable to speak for herself, must have her words interpreted by a man. Readers and the audience must rely on the veracity of her father's translation. Glendower reports, "My daughter weeps she'll not part with you. / She'll be a soldier, too; she'll to the wars" (3.1.190-1). The statement reveals that Lady Mortimer, frustrated because she must remain in the domestic sphere and occupy herself with "womanly" activities while her husband goes to war, would rather enter into battle than risk separation from her husband.

When Mortimer asks, "Good father, tell her that she and my aunt Percy / Shall follow in your conduct speedily" (192-3), the audience witnesses a verbal exchange between father and daughter. Instead of translating her exact words, Glendower reinterprets them by saying, "She is desperate here, a peevish self-willed harlotry, / One that no persuasion can do good upon" (194-5). Shakespeare deliberately edits Lady Mortimer's words out of the text. We never hear exactly what Lady Mortimer says; all that is relayed is her father's translation. This scene symbolizes accepted practices in
Renaissance culture. Women were not granted a voice. They were always categorized, reinterpreted and spoken for. Unlike speech, translation usurps the power from the speaker and redistributes it to the translator. Shakespeare makes this statement literal by choosing to create scenes in which married couples do not share the same perspective or language, and he illustrates how Renaissance women will do everything in their power to speak their minds.

In the Renaissance, vocal women brought shame upon their families. Lady Mortimer’s outward display of affection embarrasses Glendower because Renaissance women were taught that “the ornaments of a good woman is temperance in her mind, silence in her tongue and bashfulness in her countenance” (Rich 11ff). Clearly, Lady Mortimer exhibits none of these characteristics. Glendower worries about his public image because with his daughter’s deviance there is “a loss of public esteem when private digression is made public” (Dusinberre 33). He feels that he cannot indulge his daughter’s passions completely (because that would bring shame to both parties), so instead of translating his daughter’s extensive and passionate expression word-for-word, he edits her words through his very brief translation. Because Lady Mortimer is denied access to the knowledge that would give her the power to express herself directly, her words are summarized, cut or rescripted at will. To save his own good name, Glendower characterizes her behavior as “harlotry” because in the Renaissance, a woman who “refuses silence was known as a harlot” and “signs of the harlot were a woman’s linguistic fullness and frequenting of public space” (Hannay 7, 280). Popular Renaissance conduct books reiterated these dictums: “The woman that is impudent, immodest, shameless, insolent, audacious...she that hath these properties hath the certain signs and marks of a harlot” (Rich 11ff): Shakespeare exposes the irony behind this statement because Lady Mortimer is clearly not a harlot, but a devoted wife.
Women’s speech was as shocking as the naked body. Renaissance conduct books resorted to threatening a woman’s honor by enforcing damaging psychological stigmas that link verbosity with harlotry. As Henderson and McManus note:

Women’s public speech was often linked with sexual dishonor in many people’s minds; a ‘loose’ tongue implied other sorts of loose behavior and a woman who wanted her thoughts known by others was suspected of wanting to make her body available as well... women who petitioned against certain unjust laws or who spoke out against male authority were labeled ‘bawds’ or ‘whores’ reflecting the common notion that women speaking in public must be of questionable sexual virtue. (160, 245)

Peter Stallybrass takes this analogy one step further, explaining:

A woman thus calls attention to the subversive nature of her body by calling attention to its openings— its mouth and vagina. And, given the wife’s position as her husband’s ‘possession,’ it was not surprising that the surveillance of women concentrated upon these specific areas: the mouth, chastity and the threshold of the house. Thus by allowing a man other than her husband into his house, a wife figuratively also allowed him into her vagina, since both were a husband’s possessions. Similarly, the mouth’s openness, especially when accompanied by an excess of speech, mimicked a (presumed) openness of the vagina. (126)

In addition to being chastised as a harlot or whore, “various punishments were meted out to wives who violated the societal restrictions placed upon their tongue” (Jankowski 38). Creating a social stigma and publicly punishing women was a way to keep them silent. Typical Renaissance practices for punishing overly vocal women included wife-beating.
The law permitted beating if a wife was intransigent—though the husband also had the option of leading the wife through town in a “scold’s bridle, an instrument with an iron framework to enclose the head and a metal gag or bit which restrained the tongue.” “Ducking” the woman in water was another way of scolding wives. They could be “carted” i.e. paraded throughout the town, encouraging public humiliation (38). Clearly, with Lady Mortimer we are not in the presence of a loose woman or harlot; but rather, a devoted and passionate wife who may be seeing her husband for the last time—and all her fear, passion and longing is brought to the surface during his impending departure. It would be inhuman for her not to want to express these emotions to him.

As in the scene between the Yorks, where it would have been absurd for the Duchess to stand by and watch her only son sentenced to death, so too would it be impractical for a loving wife not to express her innermost soul as her husband leaves for war. By drawing a direct contrast between his characters’ heartfelt motives and valid actions with restrictive laws of the day, Shakespeare exposes the fears that lay behind these social constructs and suggests reasons for them—i.e. the men in power wanted to keep strict control over that which they did not understand and which challenged their positions of authority.

In the same vein, Shakespeare presents contradictory viewpoints and lets the audience make up their own minds. For example, the audience is first introduced to Welshwomen in the first scene of I Henry IV where Westmoreland reports through a “post from Wales” (37) that Welshwomen had castrated some of the dead soldiers and sodomized them:

A thousand of his people butchered,
Upon whose dead corpse’ there was such misuse,
Such beastly shameless transformation,
By those Welshwomen done as may not be
Without much shame retold or spoken of. (1.1.42-6)

This report is also based on an historical account in Holinshed:

yet did the women of Wales cut off their privates, and put one part hereof into the mouths of every dead man, in such sort that the cullions hung down to their chins; and not so contented, they did cut off their noses and thrust them into their tails as they lay on the ground mangled and defaced. (3.34)

Christopher Highley reads Shakespeare’s inclusion of the Welshwomen’s act of castration as a direct response to their enforced silence, stating:

The Welshwomen’s violence [is] a kind of ritual specific performance that turns the human body into a text upon which gender and power relations are symbolically contested...The women consummate their performance with what the Renaissance regarded as the ultimate sexual transgression. Penetrating the soldiers with their victims’ own noses, the women assume the kind of sexual dominance that the culture reserved for men while making it appear as if their male victims are sodomizing themselves. In short, the women’s act of silent ventriloquism destroys the soldiers’ last vestigial claims to manhood. (102-3)

Highley’s compelling explanation reflects both texts. Indeed, the Welshwomen’s act is so shocking that Holinshed cannot bring himself to write about it in detail, stating, “The shameful villainy used by the Welshwomen towards the dead carcasses, was such, as honest ears would be ashamed to hear, and contingent tongues to speak thereof” (1.1.55-8). To Holinshed, the Welshwomen’s savage act is a devastating, physical violation of the soldier’s honor, body and life, yet women were made to endure equally devastating silencing. Shakespeare’s presentation of Lady Mortimer as a caring and loving wife directly contrasts with the beastly Welshwomen of the first act, provoking the audience to
question the validity of earlier reports or ponder the reasons for this atrocity. Witnessing Lady Mortimer’s heartfelt wooing of her husband complicates one-sided characterizations of the Welsh and makes it difficult to envision a woman like this practicing such violence. By presenting, in a sense, two sides to the story, Shakespeare allows the audience to consider both perspectives and question the reasons for the disparity.

While Lady Mortimer transcends gender barriers, so does her husband. Mortimer claims he is “too perfect in” (198-99) the language of emotion, but knowing his masculinity is at stake, he checks his feminine behavior with societal restrictions, “but for shame / In such a parley should I answer thee” (199). Glendower warns against yielding to his emotions, “Nay, if you melt, then she will run mad” (207). Lady Mortimer, crying, desperately wanting to be understood, struggles verbally one last time, to no avail (the stage directions read): The lady speaks again in Welsh. And Mortimer cries out in confusion, “O, I am ignorance itself in this” (208). Lady Mortimer’s mounting frustration over possibly being misunderstood and mistranslated leads her to release her passion in song. She assumes center stage, commands an audience and expresses her strong love for her husband, which links the two lovers in an unbreakable bond that transcends spoken language.

Lady Mortimer’s use of song plays into the larger cultural debate about music and gender in the Renaissance. On one hand, thinkers such as Henry Peacham, Richard Mulcaster and others, defended music as a means of spiritual transport, signifying divine order and uniting man with the greater cosmos. Robert Burton praised the melodious art and celebrated its qualities as an incitement to love. “The doubly enchanting beauty of music performed by women in English Renaissance literature has two standard effects on the men who listen by chance or design,” writes Austern (“Sing Againe” 436). It either
liberates the soul or ensnares both the soul and body (420), inspiring either pure spiritual ecstasy or destructive physical passion.

Many viewed music solely as an expression of spiritual transport, representing the highest form of rhetoric and containing the power to contemplate the divine. On the other hand, it was also seen by some Puritan thinkers such as Philip Stubbes and William Prynne, as “an incitement to whoredome” (Price 156), possessing the potential to overturn gender roles. Stubbes wrote in *The Anatomy of Abuses*, music “can make men soft, womanish, unclean, smooth mouthed, affected to bawdry, scurrilitie, filthy rhymes and unseemly talking” and privy to licentiousness (f. 110v). Excessive indulgence in music was fabled to cause a man to be “transnatured to a woman or worse” and a woman to become “whorish, bawdy and unclean” (f. 110v). Stubbes claimed music could only lead to perdition and its sexual aspect completely negated its spirituality (Austern, “Sing Againe” 433). Thomas Salter, another Renaissance thinker and author of a Elizabethan manual for feminine behavior, claimed that women should, “refrain from the use of Music, seeing that under the overture of virtue, it openeth the door to many vices” (sig. C6).

While music was a discipline that women could use for a pastime or vehicle to inspire spiritual contemplation, it was not meant for passionate self-expression. According to many Puritan thinkers (Gosson, Stubbes and others), women should not have access to music because it had the power to incite lewd and wanton sexual behavior and disrupt the mind from higher, pious thoughts. Realizing music’s lascivious potential, Elizabethan conduct books warned women against its dangers and directed them to “safe” expressions such as religious hymns or quaint songs to be used as entertainment in social situations only. Many feared that exposure to music would inflame sexual passion; others felt women might use this powerful tool to their advantage, so some households would not allow the girl to be trained to play an instrument or sing at all. Others would have
taught her but only for private use as recreation and consolation in times of sorrow, trouble and anxiety, or as a pastime in vacant hours when she has nothing better to do. Indeed, women were supposed to be seen but not heard, just as they were supposed to practice music in private and always modestly and not to be heard. Many Renaissance thinkers feared women's use of music as much as they feared their power.

Clearly, the Welshwoman uses song not for sheer ornament, but as a means to express her innermost feelings. She uses the typically "feminine" outlet of song and wields its power to her advantage to communicate that which she cannot express through words. Within the play, her Welsh words are not recorded. The text merely reads, *The lady sings in Welsh*, so readers are left to imagine what she actually sings. At this poignant moment, Shakespeare does not record the English words in his text as he does in other plays. To this day, each director can use his or her own imagination to set their own music and words to Lady Mortimer's expression. Although early productions have likely attributed the Lady's words to a Welsh melody called, "Cavililly Man," no one is certain what she actually sings. In fact, one director takes the liberty of supplying an emotional interpretation to her words by writing her song as such:

A virgin I was,
Sheltered in a cozy home,
Before falling in love.

I was bewitched and happy
From an abundance of love
Wild flowers flourished
In my green paradise.

But I'll desert my world
If my husband does not return.

Down dangers! Fair sun shine on him
Lest he die.¹⁴

These provocative, passionate lyrics have been copied until the present day and are used in many productions of the play (perhaps because they are so deeply personal and in keeping with Lady Mortimer's character). Lady Mortimer is one of the only characters in Shakespeare whose lyrics are not included in the play. Clearly, Shakespeare had an idea of what he wanted the Welshwoman to say and purposely did not include her words. This strategic move exposes the constructed nature of Renaissance historiography and indicates how and why certain events, people and dialogue are recorded in history and others are conveniently omitted.

Lady Mortimer's words in a sense, become secondary. She is able, finally able to speak. Her voice, body language, emotionality, and the effect these have on the listeners remain most important. Instead of being translated, the song allows Lady Mortimer the freedom to express herself fully on her own terms. Through the intonation of sound, the voice acts as an instrument, operating directly on the emotions, expressing passion in the artist and eliciting the same in the listener. The transformative, unifying nature of song provokes the usually contemptuous Hotspur to admit of Glendower, "By'r Lady, he's a good musician" (228). This reaction is not unusual. Elizabethan educator Richard Mulcaster attests to the power and lure of music, stating:

The scie[n]ce [of music] itself hath naturally a very forcible strength to try and touch the inclination of the mind, to this or that affection...for which cause Music moveth great misliking in men, as to great a provoker of vain deities, still laying bait, to draw on pleasure...because it carries away the ear with the sweetness of the melody and bewitcheth the mind, with a Siren's sound, pulling it from that delight wherein of duty it ought
to dwell, unto harmonical fantasies, and withdrawing it from the best meditations and most virtuous thoughts to foreign conceits and wandering devices. (38)

The symbolic atmosphere is in keeping with the dramatic moment. The Lady uses her womanly power to ravish her lover's senses and through her song and her body language, which "cuts across boundaries of race and nation," she triumphs (Donawerth 62).

Glendower accompanies his daughter on the lute in this ayre (Elizabethan love song with lute accompaniment). Although lute playing was a common practice during the Renaissance, it is included in the play for subversive effect. As John Hollander points out, "the lute was an instrument common to Scotland, Ireland and Wales... in the latter, the ayre was mentioned in poetry in order to evoke the venerable Welsh origins of the paternal side of the Tudor line" (46). Shakespeare's inclusion of the lute reminds the audience of the underlying contention for the crown.

In addition to never learning her exact words, readers and the audience never discover Lady Mortimer's first name. Shakespeare and his characters only refer to her as "Lady Mortimer." In contrast to Lady Percy to whom Hotspur and others refer to as "Kate," Lady Mortimer is known only through her relations to men namely, Glendower or Mortimer. Shakespeare sets up these constructions to make an important point. He announces Lady Mortimer's presence and then does not include her words. He creates a vivid picture of her relationship with her husband and then does not tell us her name. By constructing the text in this way, Shakespeare proves that despite Lady Mortimer's protests, her words go unrecorded in history. This inclusion, then elision, proves that although women do have something to say, as valiantly as they fight, they are deliberately edited out of history. While Shakespeare does allow Lady Mortimer a voice, he also tempers the scene with a dose of reality to show (to use the phrase Stephen Greenblatt's made famous in Renaissance Self Fashioning), the "subversion and
containment" of women, to show how despite their valiant resistance, the dominant ideology prevails. What is paramount, however, is that Lady Mortimer chooses a medium which can be used to keep women subservient, as a means of power. She does tell her story. She does not acquiesce—she raises her voice at the precise apex of a history play and the audience has no choice but to pay attention and this they will not forget.

The woman who completes the trinity of powerful female agents in the Henriad is the French princess Katherine. Many critics have written about Katherine’s subjection, her naïveté, and unenviable position as Henry’s war prize. Some, like Joseph Porter in *The Drama of Speech Acts*, have chosen not to recognize the many contradictory elements in the last scene and attempts to enforce false unity onto the text. Porter claims that the play’s “repeated emphasis” on the difficulty the language barrier presents for Henry and Katherine “makes it all the more impressive their ease in overcoming it, communicating to the point of betrothal” (123). It is difficult to ignore the tension between Henry and Katherine in this scene. Similarly, Katherine is not simply a naïve maiden who is blindly manipulated by Henry. When Katherine’s words and actions are read closely and inquisitively, when she is considered as part of the larger structural and thematic pattern of female resistance evidenced in the Henriad, Katherine becomes much more three-dimensional, much more of a shrewd, calculating woman who knows more than she lets on. Like the Duchess of York and Lady Mortimer, she becomes a woman who does everything to stake a claim for herself and maintain her dignity in a world that denies her freedom.

When he has nearly conquered France, Henry stands before the doors of Harfleur and in heartless, graphic fury revels in the rape and violence he will inflict on the sleepy French town: “What is’t to me, when you yourselves are cause, / If your pure maidens fall into the hand / Of hot and forcing violation?,” continuing, “If not—why, in a moment look to see / The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand / Defile the locks of your shrill-
shrieking daughters (Henry V 3.3.102-5; 116-9). Shakespeare symbolically juxtaposes this graphic depiction of the ravages of war with the appearance of one of its victims. In the very next scene, we meet the virgin princess Katherine in her chambers. Her elderly, half-literate maid attempts to teach her English. Although Katherine may be unaware of the day-to-day battles, she clearly realizes that should England conquer France, she will be forced to marry its conqueror. To protect herself, Katherine decides to learn the conqueror’s language in secret. “Je te prie, m’enseignez; Il faut que j’apprenne à parler” [I pray you, teach me, I have to learn to speak it] she tells Alice (3.4.4-5). But like all Renaissance women wishing to acquire knowledge forbidden to them, she must do so independently and surreptitiously, and she must never let on that she knows too much.

As the Welsh Lady Mortimer was denied the right to learn English, most Renaissance women did not have access to education. “Households remained the only viable places for the instruction of women,” writes Retha A. Warnicke in Women in the English Renaissance and Restoration, but there were some exceptions (43). Throughout the history plays, Shakespeare selectively chose certain historical facts to emphasize, and others to downplay, to serve his dramatic purpose. By constructing Katherine as a character ignorant of English, Shakespeare makes a statement about the gender divide. As Lance Wilcox points out in a fascinating article, “Katherine as Victim and Bride”:

Notice Katherine’s curious ignorance of English, given the easy mastery of the language by the rest of the French aristocracy. In the Famous Victories, all the French, the princess included, spoke fluent English; in Shakespeare’s version, all do except the princess and her serving woman.

(67)

Shakespeare chose to alter this historical fact for dramatic effect — to stress women’s lack of access to education and important resources.
Since Katherine must arm herself with enough knowledge to maintain her identity and self-respect in her eventual dialogue with Henry, she embarks on a quest to learn English. Appropriately, if her body and country are going to be conquered by the English king, Katherine begins her language lesson by learning parts of her body—so she may claim ownership of it. Critic Helen Ostovich notes that Katherine’s mispronunciation of many of the English terms turns into an elaborate French joke, full of erotic puns. She mistakes “D’elbow,” for “biblow,” or “de ilbow,” sounding suspiciously like “dildo”...and “foot,” punning on the French “foutre” (to fuck) (154). Although this interlude may provide the Elizabethan audience with comic relief, it makes a chilling statement about sexual politics. First, it shows a young maiden preparing herself for her battle ahead. Her mispronunciations of words for body parts have sexual connotations and foreshadow an alarming reality. Katherine is a sweet, naïve girl about to become a political and sexual pawn.

A committed Katherine knows she must learn the conqueror’s language out of necessity. Although Alice’s comment, “Oui. Sauf votre honneur, en vérité vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs d’Angleterre” [Yes, by your leave, indeed, you pronounce the words just like a native of England] (3.4.34-5), provides comic relief, it emphasizes Katherine’s serious dedication to her task when she says, “Je ne doute point d’apprendre, par la grâce de / Dieu, et en peu de temps.” [I have no doubt that I shall learn with the grace of God and a little time] (36-7). After studying a little while, her comment, “C’est assez pour une fois” [That is enough for one session] (57), hints that this one lesson forms part of Katherine’s larger objective to learn as much English as she can before her meeting with Henry. Indeed, it marks the beginning of Katherine’s plan for self-protection and self-assertion.

In this short but telling scene, Katherine’s plight resembles that of Renaissance women who did not have access to information or knowledge. Here, an upper-class
gentlewoman learns English at home, by stealth and with a less than literate maid, knowledge that will save her self-respect. As Margaret Hannay states in *Silent but for the Word*, “The controls humanism placed on women’s education were severe. Lurking behind this fear of a woman’s moral frailty was no doubt a different fear: education was power” (113). Katherine reclaims power by learning English. At the same time, this scene directly parallels Hal’s access to education when he travels from alehouse to battlefield, court to foreign country, gathering knowledge and “offend[ing] to make offence a skill” (*I Henry IV* 1.2.213). However, in contrast to Henry, who is free to travel and can interact with all sectors of society, Katherine has no such access and can only communicate with her maid. This lack of freedom does not stop her from finding ways to gain control of her situation. She formulates a plan to acquire knowledge for a higher purpose, as a shield to maintain her self-respect.

We meet Katherine next in the final scene of the tetralogy. The difficult bilingual dialogue (more like a tennis match with Katherine trying to fend off Henry’s clever word-play), directly contracts with the scene of marital bliss between the Mortimers. Henry makes no attempt to understand Katherine’s position; he wants to manipulate her as quickly as he can into agreeing to marry him. What has been deemed “the wooing scene” is hardly that. Far from being a romantic wooing, this very serious and subversive scene is a rich commentary on gender, cultural and sexual relations. While the Duchess vehemently challenges her husband, and Lady Mortimer uses the feminine vehicle of song to express herself, Katherine employs yet another technique. As a way of overturning the power structure, the French princess complies with it. She downplays her knowledge (which she has learned in secret), to stake out a position of safety and force Henry into admitting his true motives. She uses the dictums she was taught as a “proper Renaissance woman” to her advantage. As Carroll Camden states in *The Elizabethan Woman*, “What every woman knows is that she must let her husband think he runs all
affairs” (124). Katherine’s guise goes unnoticed by Henry and others because acting as a “silly maiden” is the behavior expected of a typical Renaissance woman.

Throughout the plays, Henry presents himself as a king who can mingle with rogues and nobles with ease, yet here he shows neither comfort nor verbal acuity. Instead, Katherine plays a role—the role of a woman, not very skilled in English, who uses words, silences and her own native tongue very carefully. In this role, Katherine does not act like a giddy girl, but a very serious woman who refuses to participate in Henry’s game. She hides her knowledge of English rather than flaunts it. To Henry’s direct question of “Do you like me, Kate?” (5.2.106-7), she feigns ignorance, offering neither a yes or no answer, and plays the coy girl. Her behavior harks back to the Duchess of York when Katherine responds, “Pardonnez-moi, I cannot tell vat [sic] is ‘like me’ ” (108), which prompts Henry to express school-boy flattery and compare her beauty to the angels, to which Katherine remarks in her native tongue (quite possibly as an ironic aside or a played-up as a dramatic exclamation), “O bon Dieu! Les langues des hommes sont pleines de tromperies” [O good God! The tongues of men are full of deceit!] (116-7). Clearly, she sees through his empty words and Henry downplays his skills to patronize Katherine and position himself as a humble man with little bilingual expertise:

I am glad thou canst speak no better English, for if thou couldst, thou

wouldst find me such a plain king that

thou wouldst think I had sold my farm to buy my

crown. (123-7)

Since Katherine understands more than she lets on, she ironically responds, “Sauf votre honneur, me understand well” (132), which can be interpreted as: “Except your honor, I understand you all too well.” Katherine’s secret education pays off. She sees through Henry’s extravagant flattery and knows exactly how to directly insult him and convey her meaning, yet still pass it off as if she is an inexperienced maid with little English
expertise. Had she not diligently learned English in secret, she would be in the subordinate position, ignorantly allowing Henry to manipulate her while remaining unaware of his meaning. She would literally be speechless.

Through Katherine’s shrewd strategy in “playing the woman,” she maintains her dignity and stands her ground. She is hardly the docile female. She puts up a valiant fight and makes it difficult for the king to woo her with flattery. As John Cox states in *Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power*, “Humility is often but the mark of submission, assumed in order to conquer. It is an artifice of pride, which stoops so it may rise the higher” (114). Indeed, Katherine uses her false humility to manipulate Henry into revealing his true self.

This last scene is not a neat scene of betrothal, typical of the Bard’s romantic comedies. Katherine’s obvious unwillingness to cooperate leaves the reader uneasy; moreover, the king’s poise unravels before our eyes, making him seem desperate. After an extended tirade, Henry asks Katherine for her response to his pledge of love. In a devious move, she answers with a rhetorical question: “Is it possible dat I sould love the ennemi o f France?” (sic) – deliberately forcing him to a yes or no answer (169-70). Instead of back-peddling into further rhetoric, he answers directly, “No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate,” and he states his territorial motives outright, “But in loving me you should love the friend of France, for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it, I will have it all mine” (171-5). His circular reasoning reveals its own gaps in logic and belies his true motives: “when France is mine, and I am yours, then yours is France, and you are mine” (175-6). Clearly, France is hers—it is her country that he has invaded! Katherine does not make it easy for Henry to get away with this double talk by smiling like a coy young girl and accepting his long-winded explanations. She continues to hold her ground and says flatly, “I cannot tell vat is dat” (sic) (177). At this point, Henry knows he’s not getting anywhere, gives up and tries to
speak her language—but he does so only half-heartedly, remarking that he finds it easier to conquer a kingdom that speak more than a few words of French. Indeed, communicating in a foreign language requires empathy, patience and a desire to understand the other—qualities the Mortimers have but Henry lacks. Henry, the “fellow of infinite tongue,” quickly resorts to English, asking Katherine plainly, “Canst thou love me?” (192) Katherine’s responds honestly: “I cannot tell” (193). Clearly, the princess’s responses surprise Henry who thought he could charm her easily to the point of betrothal. A frustrated and desperate Henry asks, “Can any of your neighbors tell, Kate?” (192-4), bringing an element of farce into their verbal volley and proving that the princess’s responses have worn his patience down.

Because Henry believes Katherine cannot understand him, he blatantly reveals his true purpose and colonialist intentions to expand the Empire and acquire more land when he tells his new wife that she “needs [sic] prove a good soldier-breeder,” producing male heirs “half-French, half-English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard” (203, 205-6). Although Katherine probably does not understand a large portion of his dialogue, she knows enough not to submit too easily. Most importantly, the audience witnesses Henry’s long-winded, desperate attempts to charm Katherine and this double-talk exposes his true self. Even as Katherine submits, which she eventually must, because Henry has conquered her nation, she never willingly gives in. To Henry’s question, “Wilt thou have me?” (244), she never responds affirmatively. Instead, she defers to her father—and insults Henry with one last dig, citing her father as king—saying, “dat [sic] is as shall please de roi mon pere” (245). Katherine’s strategic use of language allows her to maintain her composure. In addition to fighting Henry off linguistically, Katherine physically rejects him. She reacts viscerally to Henry when he kisses her hand, protesting that she is not worthy of this treatment when really she is repulsed by it. For example, when Henry moves in to kiss her lips, Katherine backs away, emphatically telling him
that it is not customary in France to kiss before marriage. Disrespecting her statement and
taking advantage of her solitude, he steals the kiss anyway and pretends that the couple
exchanges their first kiss in front of the king and queen.

Henry acknowledges that Katherine has blocked his advances by admitting that he
“cannot see many a fair French city for one fair French maid...stands in my way” (314-5).
Henry admits to Burgundy, “I cannot so conjure up the spirit of love in her that he will
appear in his true likeness” (286-8), to which Burgundy curtly replies, “if [you would]
conjure up love in her in his true likeness, he must appear naked and blind” (292-3).
Indeed, Henry probably did not expect such a strong-willed princess. As the text proves,
Katherine successfully protects her interests as much she possibly can, by maintaining
confidence and control in spite of Henry’s manipulation.

The Duchess of York, Lady Mortimer and Katherine are strong, passionate,
shrewd, vocal women of nobility who face insurmountable odds. Linked in their mission
and message to express and protect themselves, these resourceful women seek out
whatever means necessary to reclaim their autonomy in a largely patriarchal world.
Instead of quivering in silence or blindly obeying the rules prescribed for them, the
Duchess of York, Lady Mortimer and Katherine fight back. The refuse to be “shut up” in
the home and shut out of decisions that directly concern them and their families. In this
way, Shakespeare gives his characters what few women in Renaissance society
enjoyed—a voice—and offers the audience what they seldom witnessed or
heard—women successful at speaking their minds and overturning decisions, women
staking their claim in society.

In the Henriad, Shakespeare gives a voice to the voiceless. Instead of
characterizing women as victims, or worse yet, simply not including women in the plays
at all, Shakespeare characterizes the Duchess of York, Lady Mortimer and Katherine
more as heroines because they are successful—if only briefly—in holding center stage
and demanding to be heard. The playwright did not create these women as frivolous asides or simply to provide comic relief. He very strategically emboldened the Duchess with a strong will, created a central role for Lady Mortimer from a brief marginal mention in Holinshed, and made Katherine so much more than a silly young maiden.

These female characters didn’t change the world, but they also didn’t stand by passively and watch their worlds collapse. Shakespeare intentionally featured strong-willed women at key points in his history plays to show that women as a collective group were treated as aliens, as second-class citizens, as, more or less, invisible individuals. Shakespeare reminds us that these three women are members of royalty and if nobles had such difficulty communicating, what must the commoners feel? Rather than focusing on women’s oppression, Shakespeare introduces a structural and thematic pattern of female agency in the Henriad to identify, document, and recover the voices of the oppressed and silenced. Creating these characters—and linking them in a powerful union—carries deep and meaningful resonances to Elizabethan society. At the time, the pamphlet wars waged over women’s place and role in society, English/Welsh relations continued to be a sensitive issue, and English imperialism was in full force. By registering women’s rebellious voices—whether in speech or song, in the language of English, Welsh or French—Shakespeare presents a rarely seen, but very real, glimpse into the world of Renaissance women. On one hand, these characters’ foreign words are meant to be shocking, but their motives and meaning are quite natural. By introducing women who speak their minds and documenting the reactions of those around them, Shakespeare intends for us to pause, question and ultimately begin to see in new ways the underlying reasons for this behavior. Although women were indeed largely absent from Elizabethan historical chronicles and barred from expressing themselves in Renaissance society, Shakespeare makes certain that his women characters were not invisible—that they had a powerful presence on stage and they were seen, heard and validated.
NOTES TO TEXT

NB: For consistency, I have modernized all of the spellings from sixteenth-century sources.

1 Phyllis Rackin, one of the major critics who has written extensively on the women in the histories, notices that many outspoken women in these plays are of foreign descent. “Beginning with I Henry IV, in which all the female characters are French, the women are typically inhabitants of foreign worlds and foreign worlds are typically characterized as feminine” (“Foreign Country” 80).

2 Rackin is one of the only critics who addresses the scene between the Mortimers in Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 170-76. She discusses how women and the Welsh are linked because they both pose threats to the English historical narrative. Leslie C. Dunn analyzes the Welshwoman’s song in “The Lady Sings in Welsh: Women’s Song as Marginal Discourse on the Shakespearean Stage” in Place and Displacement in the Renaissance Alvin Vos (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 51-67, however her argument claims that women use song because they are marginalized by the larger English society. I concentrate on the power Lady Mortimer stakes for herself through her forceful and subversive use of a typically feminine medium. Michael Neill briefly mentions the scene in “Broken English and Broken Irish: Nation, Language and the Optic of Power in Shakespeare’s Histories” Shakespeare Quarterly 45 (1994) 1-32 as does Christopher Highley in “Wales, Ireland and I Henry IV” Renaissance Drama 21 (1990) 91-114. Both articles deal with the question of English nationalism and demonstrate how Wales and Ireland were subjugated by the English crown. However, no one notices the structural and thematic pattern among the three scenes or links these women together as powerful, active agents.

For enlightening articles on the final scene of the tetralogy, see: P.K. Ayers, “‘Fellows of Infinite Tongue’: Henry V and the King’s English” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 34:2 (1994) 253-77; Helen Ostovich, “‘Teach you our Princess English’: Equivocal Translation of the French in Henry V” in Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History Ed. Richard C. Trexler
3 “The total publications by women in the early seventeenth century was (sic) only 0.5 percent of the total number of publications in England, a figure which rose to only 1.2 percent after 1640: thus, relative to men, most women remained under-educated and articulated their experience in ways which are irretrievably lost” (Aughterson 230).

4 Betty S. Travitsky admits in The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon, “The impact of Elizabeth’s presence at the top of the English social pyramid and her continuing influence on a society in which women were subordinated is difficult to assess,” but states that “by and large, Elizabeth did not interest herself in bettering the lot of women, perhaps she felt that her own success depended on setting herself apart from women.” Ed. Anne N. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1990) 12. Historian Margaret L. King states in Women in the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1991) that Elizabeth’s deliberately constructed androgynous image worked in her favor and had she married, she “would have fallen under the influence of a male consort, restricting her power considerably. Unlike most Renaissance women who had no choice but to marry, Elizabeth was an anomaly. She was in the exceptional position to reject the oppressive yoke of marriage that many of her contemporaries had to bear” (158-9).

5 A middle-class Renaissance woman’s education included learning to cook, spin and sew; for gentlewomen, the curriculum included cultivating social graces like singing or playing a lady-like instrument. Men, on the other hand, were taught logic, rhetoric, mathematics, Greek, Latin, astronomy, philosophy and physics (Henderson and McManus 82-3). Although learning was traditionally supposed “to educate a person to benefit [oneself and] the state, for women, education was a way of keeping them busy...in a fashion which did not threaten the power structure” (124).

6 Church records from various dioceses provide a measure of writing literacy for the female
population in England. Witnesses were required to sign their names—at births, deaths and the like. In East Anglia between 1580 and 1640 approximately 95% of female witnesses were unable to sign their names; in London during the same period about 90% of women could not write their signatures (Henderson and McManus 88).

7 Knox's tract elaborated on the absurdity of female rule and specifically protested Mary Queen of Scots' reign. Ironically, it was published in 1558, just before Elizabeth ascended the throne in England.

8 This scene is reminiscent of the "garden scene" in 2.2 of Richard II. The Queen learns that Richard has surrendered the crown by overhearing Bushy, Bagot and Green's conversation while walking in the garden. In both instances, husbands refuse to share important information with their wives that directly affect them i.e. their child's life or death or their husband's disgrace. However, neither woman stands by in silence. They speak up and their voices are both passionate and powerful.

9 "Although aristocratic women had often shared in the intellectual training of the laymen of their class, they had usually not learned to write English and their knowledge of Latin has been confined to memorization of religious devotions" (Warnicke 31).

10 Raphael Holinshed does not clearly state in The Third Volume of the Chronicles (1587) that the Mortimers' union was in fact a war alliance, although all signs point to this. His chronicle states: "Edmund Mortimer, earle of March, prisoner with Owen Glendouer, whether for irkesomness of cruel captivity, or fear of death, or for what other cause, it is uncertain, agreed to take part with Owen against the king of England; and took the daughter of the said Owen" (Bullough 183-84). In the margin, Holinshed records: "The earle of March marieth the daughter of Owen Glendower." Shakespeare takes this small marginal reference and transforms it into a major scene in the play, using it as a vehicle to discuss issues of sexual difference and colonialism. Holinshed, like most English historiographers, confines his mention of women to a marginal note at best, because most sixteenth-century citizens felt that women were of little
importance and unworthy of mention.

11 It is unlikely that Shakespeare knew the Welsh language although he is known to have had a Welsh schoolmaster named Thomas Jenkins (a master at Stratford Grammar School in 1577) and may have gleaned knowledge from his friend Drayton, the Warwickshire poet, who had considerable knowledge of Wales. No doubt, Shakespeare met many Welshmen in London, and although there is no evidence that points to the fact that Shakespeare visited Wales, his knowledge of the habits and customs practiced by the Welsh was extensive (Harries 64-7).

12 "Undoubtedly there was affection between many husbands and wives that helped mitigate the harshness of the system of submission and obedience," writes Retha Warnicke in Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation (12), "for the custom of arranged marriages did not preclude the development of strong personal attachments between spouses." It was simply rare because the rights of the patriarchy were firmly entrenched in custom and law.

13 According to the Quartos and the First Folio of I Henry IV, "the play was entered at Stationers’ Hall on 25 February 1598, probably within a few months of its production," according to W.W. Greg in Shakespeare’s First Folio: Its Bibliography and Textual History (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955). He states that Shakespeare’s original manuscript records: “Glendower speaks to her in Welsh, and she answers him in the same.” Unlike the many songs in Shakespeare’s plays, there are no Welsh words or lyrics recorded in the text. The text simply reads, “Here the lady sings a Welsh song.” In early productions of the play, “A traditional Welsh text was adapted to the Welsh dance-song melody, ‘Cavililly Man,’ which dates at the latest from the early seventeenth century,” (Charlton viii), however, the author includes the Welsh lyrics of ‘Cavililly Man,” set to music, and titles Lady Mortimer’s piece, “Welsh song,” but does not take the extra step in translating the Welsh lyrics. He adds, “It will be necessary to find someone who speaks Welsh to coach the singer in the correct pronunciation” (72). However, discovering the words for this Welsh ditty would not shed any more light on Lady Mortimer’s character because choosing this particular
tune is a convenient way of staging her expression. We will never know the meaning of Lady Mortimer’s words because Shakespeare wanted them to remain elusive. The need to ascribe precise words to Lady Mortimer’s expression is symbolic because it shows that women are always spoken for, interpreted and translated.

Bryan N.S. Gooch, David Thatcher, and Odean Long’s comprehensive A Shakespeare Music Catalogue (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) lists over 150 different variations or entries for Lady Mortimer’s song but the scholars note, “Unfortunately very little is known about the vocal and instrumental music actually used in the first performances and even early revivals of Shakespeare’s plays” (vi). Since the playwright mentions no specific song, the editors show that directors chose to set Lady Mortimer’s song based on personal preference. They list one 1951 production in Stratford where Lady Mortimer sang a selection entitled, “YGwyed” (“The Weaver’s Song”), and in 1984 in a production performed in Greenville, SC, Lady Mortimer recited a Welsh text from Ceiriog’s “Daffyd y Garreg Wen” set to music (430, 434). Some authors who claim to have gathered complete collections of all of the songs in Shakespeare do not even mention Lady Mortimer. Tucker Brooke’s edition, The Shakespeare Songs. Being a Complete Collection of the Songs Written or Attributed to William Shakespeare (NY: W. Morrow, 1929), contains no mention of Lady Mortimer nor does Peter J. Seng’s The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967). Since Shakespeare does not record Lady Mortimer’s lyrics, the authors use it as justification for not including her in their “complete” reports as if she didn’t exist. This mirrors Renaissance historiography. Since women were likely to have said or done nothing of “importance,” they were deliberately erased from history.

Scholar Barbara Hodgson explains, “In Royal Shakespeare Company practice, the Lady’s speech as well as her song, relies on a Prompt Copy for the Royal Shakespeare’s 1964 production of Henry IV, Part One, which has been copied right up to the 1990s. It contains the Welsh passages and a translation of them” (270).
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