Queens on Stage
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Queens on Trial: the Staging of Passions in Shakespeare's Theatre

SIMONETTA DE FILIPPIS[1]

To my Queen-Mother

1. The Queen of History

Gloriana, Belphoebe, Diana, Cynthia, Astraea: these are some of the allegorical and mythological figures sung by Edmund Spenser and other great poets of his time in praise and glorification of Queen Elizabeth Tudor, a model of political intelligence and far-sightedness, a paragon for her open-mindedness and her sensitivity to the cultural vivacity of her time, an emblem of courage and modernity. Indeed, she was a modern Queen in the full sense that the term modernity assumes in relation to that specific historical time: ready to understand the new cultural and political issues, bold in trusting and supporting those economic and commercial initiatives which contributed to transform England into one of the most powerful European countries, fearless in political and military action and able to create the cultural conditions for the English Renaissance with its great flourishing of the arts, theatre and literature; a Renaissance which can well bear comparison with the great Italian Renaissance.

Charming and intriguing, delicate and firm, imperious and welcoming at the same time, the Virgin Queen is one of the most powerful and respected monarchs in Europe. Her boldness and determination guide her actions and choices also in the private sphere

[1] University of Naples “L'Orientale”.

of her life, even when strictly interlaced with her public role; indeed, her choice to reject marriage and, consequently, to refuse to give birth to an heir to the throne, was a strongly disruptive decision, not only as an audacious and provocative challenge to the whole European dynastic system based on the hereditary principle, but also in open disrespect of the expectations of the Protestant world which considered women mainly, if not exclusively, as wives and mothers, that is in terms of their roles within the family system (Levin and Bucholz 2009: xv). Elizabeth's choice assumes, therefore, a particularly sensational significance as it paves the way for the modern discourse on the revision/deconstruction of the gender system, placing the feminine gender on a scale of values of much greater importance than it had been up to that time. The Queen presents herself as a new modern subject able to create around her person that vast Elizabethan cult which places her in a mythic dimension. Moreover, she greatly contributes to the consolidation of her own myth through courageous deeds as when, acting against all cultural expectations in relation to the female image – the weaker sex in need of male protection – she does not hesitate to put on armour in order to inject courage into her army in a moment of weakness and great danger, appearing on the Tilbury plane almost as a mythological divinity: dressed in white, with silver armour and sceptre in hand, she passes in review of her troops, encouraging and urging her soldiers to fight bravely, thus leading the English army to the great – though rather fortuitous – victory against the apparently invincible Spanish Armada, and saving her country from the danger of invasion. It was the 9th of August, 1588, and these are the powerful words which only a great Queen and a great woman could utter:

> I am come amongst you […] to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble Woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a King, and of a King of England too […] there will never Queen sit in my seat with more zeal to my country, care to my subjects, and that will sooner with willingness yield and venture her life for your good and safety than myself. And

> though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving. (Hume 1819: 374-5)

Elizabeth appears on the Shakespearean stage only as an infant, in the final part of *Henry VIII*, for the celebration of her christening. Despite her fleeting and silent presence, the newborn child is already surrounded by that pomp and magnificence which will contribute to the construction of her myth as a great Queen, as it is made clear by the stage directions opening the final scene of the play, where the entrance of the authorities accompanying the newborn princess to the christening ceremony is described[2]. The appearance of the royal baby is announced by the Garter's 'prophetical' words, celebrating the future/past greatness of her kingdom – "Heaven, from thy endless goodness, send prosperous life, long, and ever happy, to the high and mighty Princess of England, Elizabeth" (5.4.1-3) – but it is Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who makes an explicitly laudatory speech, with words of welcome which are apparently prophetic, auguring what history has already written of her, or, better, what she has already written in history:

This royal infant – heaven still move about her –
Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings
Which time shall bring to ripeness. She shall be –
But few now living can behold that goodness –

[2] *Enter trumpet*[*er*]*s sounding: then* [*enter*] *two aldermen,* [*the*] *Lord Mayor* [*of London*], GARTER [*King-of-Arms*], CRANMER [*the Archbishop of Canterbury, the*] *Duke of* NORFOLK *with his marshal's stuff,* [*the*] *Duke of* SUFFOLK, *two noblemen bearing great standing bowls for the christening gifts; then* [*enter*] *four noblemen bearing a canopy, under which* [*is*] *the Duchess of Norfolk, godmother, bearing the child* [*Elizabeth*] *richly habited in a mantle,* [*whose*] *train* [*is*] *borne by a lady: then follows the Marchioness Dorset, the other godmother, and ladies. The troop pass once about the stage, and* GARTER *speaks.* (William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, 5.4.OSD). The quotations from Shakespeare's plays are all taken from the 1997 edition by Stephen Greenblatt *et al.*

A pattern to all princes living with her,
And all that shall succeed […]
She shall be loved and feared. […]
She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An agèd princess. Many days shall see her,
And yet no day without a deed to crown it.
Would I had known no more. But she must die –
She must, the saints must have her – yet a virgin,
A most unspotted lily shall she pass
To th' ground, and all the world shall mourn her. (5.4.17-62)

Cranmer's speech sounds like a true oracle, as King Henry's comment underlines: "This oracle of comfort has so pleased me / That when I am in heaven I shall desire / To see what this child does, and praise my maker" (5.4.66-8). However, the Archbishop has no divinatory art, only a strong political sense that prompts him to sing the praises not only of Tudor's greatness but also of the new, contemporary Stuart dynasty risen from Elizabeth's ashes:

Her ashes new create another heir
As great in admiration as herself, […]
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour and the greatness of his name
Shall be, and make new nations. (5.4.41-52)

Laudatory words in praise of Elizabeth are spoken even before the actual birth of the royal baby. When Lord Chamberlain visits Anne Bullen to inform her of the King's favour, his 'aside' refers openly to the greatness of Queen Elizabeth:

I have perused her [Anne] well.
Beauty and honour in her are so mingled
That they have caught the King, and who knows yet
But from this lady may proceed a gem
To lighten all this isle. (2.3.75-9)

Later on, it is the Duke of Suffolk who, commenting on Anne and her forthcoming coronation, sings the future Elizabeth's praises:

She [Anne] is a gallant creature, and complete
In mind and feature. I persuade me, from her
Will fall some blessing to this land which shall
In it be memorized. (3.2.49-52)

2. Queens in Shakespeare's *Histories*

Henry VIII was written in collaboration with John Fletcher around 1613, a decade after Elizabeth's death[3]; that time distance allows Shakespeare to create his last history play as a further homage to the Tudor dynasty which, in his previous plays dedicated to English history, he had implicitly celebrated by narrating England's suffering in the period before it came under the secure guidance of the strong and enlightened Tudor monarchy. This late English history combines the theatrical genre of history play with *romance*, a genre that Shakespeare favoured in the last phase of his dramaturgy; indeed, *Henry VIII* presents a number of those typical theatrical elements belonging to the *romance* genre such as dreams, visions, prophecies. The use of spectacular elements and the magnificence of some scenes such as the celebrations of Anne Bullen's coronation and Elizabeth's christening, moreover, place this play within that context of the rising baroque theatre which becomes popular at the beginning of the seventeenth century with its major focus on the visual aspects of the theatre productions, and its use of more sophisticated scene devices and theatrical machines producing marvel and astonishment, leaving the spectators to wonder at what they see on stage and ponder how it can be interpreted. In this respect, theatre can be seen as a faithful mirror of life, with its liminal nature between dream

[3] *Henry VIII* belongs to that phase in which Shakespeare leaves London to return to Stratford for the remaining years of his life, a period in which he still writes a few plays in collaboration with other dramatists.

and reality, never showing nor establishing an absolute truth in perfect accord with the new structures of feeling of modernity[4].

If in this play Princess Elizabeth appears only as an infant, royal female figures find their embodiment in Katherine of Aragon, the repudiated Queen, and Anne Bullen, the illegitimate Queen.

Anne, as a speaking character, appears only in one short scene (2.3); as to the rest of the play, she is only mentioned and praised by a few other characters for her beauty, as quoted above. During the spectacular coronation scene, she crosses the stage majestically (but speechless), and the rest of the scene is described in a dialogue among three gentlemen who praise her not only for her beauty, but also for her purity: "At length her grace rose, and with modest paces / Came to the altar, where she kneeled, and saint-like / Cast her fair eyes to heaven, and prayed devoutly" (4.1.84-6). A necessary comment as, in a play dedicated to the figure of Henry VIII, his choice to marry Anne had to be presented in a positive light and made acceptable; indeed, as Katherine's rival in the King's favour, Anne is strongly disadvantaged and therefore, in order to endear her to the audience, praises are scattered throughout the play presenting her as a good and loving figure. It is to be considered that, as mother of the future Elizabeth, Anne's honesty and virtue cannot be put at issue; indeed, her importance seems connected mainly to her maternal role (her pregnancy and the moment of childbirth are described in 5.1). Nevertheless, Shakespeare does not fail to reproduce a faithful picture of his

[4] The term baroque is more generally used in relation to architecture where the sense of the fleeting moment and continuous transformation is clearly rendered through those round forms which replace the clean-cut, sharp edges of the Gothic style. It is significant that one of the most famous British architects of the time, Inigo Jones, was particularly important for the development of the theatre scenery with the introduction of the movable scenery and the proscenium arch. As to baroque in literature, images of movement such as clouds, water, fire, recur largely in the literary imagery of the time in order to convey the idea of fluidity and endless change.

time and, therefore, takes into account those mixed feelings of discontent and forced acceptance that were certainly raised by the coronation of a new Queen. A curt comment on Anne's forthcoming delivery is made by Gardiner, the King's secretary – "The fruit she goes with / I pray for heartily, that it may find / Good time, and live. But, for the stock, Sir Thomas, / I wish it grubbed up now" – but the harshness of these words is soon softened by Sir Thomas Lovell's reply: "my conscience says / She's a good creature, and sweet lady, does / Deserve our better wishes" (5.1.20-6). After the childbirth, Anne is no more heard of and disappears from the speeches and the stage (she is not even present at the ceremony of Elizabeth's christening): she has accomplished her duty of giving birth to the royal baby and therefore her presence is unnecessary.

Unlike Anne, Queen Katherine is given many long speeches and emerges fully as a memorable figure of dignity, honesty, and resignation, a noble and generous spirit and a gentle nature. The deserted Queen – the last significant female figure created by Shakespeare after those appearing in his romances – is a rather unusual character of a defeated woman, perhaps a unique example of the fall of a great though totally innocent character. At her first appearance on stage, Katherine presents herself as a loving Queen, caring for the well-being of her subjects and for the King's reputation. She is a blameless wife to Henry and particularly loyal as when she speaks the truth, however uncomfortable and unpleasant, showing her courage and boldness against ambitious and powerful Cardinal Wolsey, whom she is not afraid to accuse openly of imposing unfair taxation in the name of the unsuspecting King. Her words show her courage as well as her political intelligence and sensibility as when she underlines how the subjects' discontent can turn into acts of protest and disobedience, calling into question the King's authority (1.2.19-29; 44-53).

Her intelligence and freedom of thought comes out again when she tries to defend the Duke of Buckingham against both

the King's and Wolsey's position (1-2.171-6), an intellectual honesty that will cost her dearly (2-1.156-9); however, even when rumours of divorce spread, her reputation remains unspotted, and her virtues are highly celebrated:

NORFOLK:
He [Wolsey] counsels a divorce – a loss of her
That like a jewel has hung twenty years
About his neck, yet never lost her lustre;
Of her that loves him with that excellence
That angels love good men with; even of her
That, when the greatest stroke of fortune falls,
Will bless the King – and is not this course pious? (2.2.29-35)

The most powerful moment in which Katherine gives proof of her integrity and virtues is in the trial scene, one of the most spectacular and magnificent scenes in the play, with the presence on stage of twenty characters beyond the King and the Queen. The two royal characters are invited to stand before the Court but Katherine moves towards the King and kneels down to him to utter a long sorrowful plea in her own defence. She recalls her status as an alien in a foreign land, and highlights her spotless conduct as "a true and humble wife [...] in this obedience / Upward of twenty years" (2.4.21; 33-4). She then challenges the King to prove the contrary and cleverly moves to the major point of the trial – the decision about divorce – underlining her royal lineage and the legitimacy of her wedding:

The King your father was reputed for
A prince most prudent, of an excellent
And unmatched wit and judgment. Ferdinand
My father, King of Spain, was reckoned one
The wisest prince that there had reigned by many
A year before. It is not to be questioned
That they had gathered a wise council to them
Of every realm, that did debate this business,
Who deemed our marriage lawful. (2.4.43-51)

When Katherine leaves after this speech taking no notice of the Crier's request to go back and stand in the Court, King Henry has words of admiration and loving praise for his wife:

Go thy ways, Kate.
That man i'th' world who shall report he has
A better wife, let him in naught be trusted
For speaking false in that. Thou art alone –
If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,
Thy meekness saint-like, wife-like government,
Obeying in commanding, and thy parts
Sovereign and pious else could speak thee out –
The queen of earthly queens. She's noble born,
And like her true nobility she has
Carried herself towards me. (2.4.130-40)

Katherine's trial and plea recall a similar moment in a play written a few years earlier (1610), *The Winter's Tale*, in which Hermione, unjustly accused of adultery by her husband Leontes, King of Sicily, and sent to prison, is subjected to an equally unjust trial. The King opens the scene and the trial by underlining Hermione's royal birth and his own love for his wife – "The daughter of a king, our wife, and one / Of us too much beloved" – though, at the same time, stressing the righteousness of the present trial: "Let us be cleared / Of being tyrannous since we so openly / Proceed in justice" (3.2.3-6).

Katherine of Aragon and Hermione of Russia are both alien subjects and victims of their husbands' authority. Gentle and submissive, loving and obedient, these two innocent Queens, when subjected to trial, find the strength and the words to speak their truth trying to defend themselves from unfair accusations.

Hermione's plea to the King – and to the audience – is very powerful and moving, anticipating the emotional strength and passion of Katherine's supplication:

You, my lord, best know –
Who least will seem to do so – my past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true

As I am now unhappy; which is more
Than history can pattern, though devised
And played to take spectators. For behold me,
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
A moiety of the throne, a great king's daughter,
The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
To prate and talk for life and honour, fore
Who please to come and hear. (3.2.31-41)

Like Katherine, Hermione is not afraid of pointing out the King's wrongs:

Therefore proceed.
But yet hear this – mistake me not – no life,
I prize it not a straw; but for mine honour,
Which I would free: if I shall be condemned
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
'Tis rigour, and not law. (3.2.106-12)

Hermione's last words before fainting and being taken off stage – "The Emperor of Russia was my father. / O that he were alive, and here beholding / His daughter's trial" (3.2.117-9) – disclose the painful awareness that her personal virtues are no longer sufficient to save her from the King's irrational and unjust jealousy. The Queen realises that, having lost the King's favour and trust, she has lost also her authority as the King's wife and, however resigned to her destiny, she tries to recover her royal right and respect as the Emperor of Russia's daughter.

Katherine and Hermione never forget that they are of noble stock, and even when unjustly treated, they behave with the integrity, firmness, and honesty of true Queens. Katherine's last moving words before dying also remind the audience of her royal lineage and of her honourable behaviour:

When I am dead, good wench,
Let me be used with honour. Strew me over
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,

Then lay me forth. Although unqueened, yet like
A queen and daughter to a king inter me.
I can no more. (4.2.168-74)

Even at her very end, Katherine's royal stature shines intact. Her behaviour in preparing herself to embrace death calls to mind that of another splendid and noble character, the legendary Egyptian Queen, Cleopatra, who chooses death rather than the ignominy of being taken prisoner and dispossessed of her royal privileges. Her suicide is carefully prepared in accord with her royal status and sensual character: for her last scene, she wears her most luxurious and regal clothing, and receives the asp as a lover and child applying it to her breast in a final act in which her sensual and maternal nature finds its most extraordinary blend and wonderfully poetic expression in her last words: "Peace, peace. / Doest thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep? / […] / As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle" (5.2.299-302).

Another parallel between these two plays can be drawn in reference to Cleopatra and Anne Bullen. They are both charming and seductive, and their beauty is described to the audience through evocations of scenes of spectacular sumptuousness: the coronation ceremony in the case of Anne, and Cleopatra's first appearance to Antony on the river Cydnus. In Enobarbus' description, Cleopatra is presented like a sea divinity, on a ship richly adorned, a royal vision even more attractive than Venus (2.2.196-207); in *Henry VIII*, the Gentleman who reports the coronation ceremony is equally generous in praising Anne's beauty, using sea imagery which partly echoes the description of Cleopatra:

[…] while her grace sat down
To rest a while – some half an hour or so –
In a rich chair of state, opposing freely
The beauty of her person to the people.
Believe me, sir, she is the goodliest woman
That ever lay by man; which when the people
Had the full view of, such a noise arose

As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest,
As loud, and to as many tunes. (4.1.67-75)

Among Shakespeare's previous Histories, *Richard III* presents an unusual number of royal female characters: Margaret of Lancaster, the dispossessed Queen after the assassination of her husband, Henry VI; Elizabeth, Edward of York's wife, the legitimate Queen up to her husband's death in Act 2; the Duchess of York, Edward's Queen-Mother; Lady Anne, Prince Edward of Lancaster's widow, and then crowned Queen as Richard III's wife.

Elizabeth and Margaret – 'Queens of Hate', as they could be called, concentrating and reinforcing in themselves the longstanding contrast between their two Houses – stand out for their strong personalities and the extent of their speeches. They both lament the most painful family losses – husbands, children, brothers – and compete with each other as to who suffers most: "If ancient sorrow be most reverend, / Give mine the benefit of seniory, / And let my griefs frown on the upper hand" (4.4.35-7) is Margaret's retort to Elizabeth's lamentations for the assassination of her two young children. However, their true rivalry is for the possession of the crown; indeed, they are probably the most politically committed Queens in the Shakespearean theatre as they act (or have acted) in order to ensure the power of their House. Margaret, the deposed Queen, presents herself with that title as she first appears on stage ("I am Queen", 1.3.161), and addresses Elizabeth with the well-known line: "Poor painted Queen, vain flourish of my fortune" (1.3.239). Later on in the play, she recalls her own words to Elizabeth, who finds herself in the same powerless position, with no family nor crown:

I called thee then 'vain flourish of my fortune';
I called thee then, poor shadow, 'painted queen' –
The presentation of but what I was,
The flattering index of a direful pageant, […]
A queen in jest, only to fill the scene.

Where is thy husband now? Where be thy brothers?
Where are thy two sons? Wherein dost thou joy?
Who sues, and kneels, and says 'God save the Queen'? (4.4.82-94)

At first divided by the violent enmity of their two Houses and by their struggle for the crown, in the end they come close, somehow united in their hate against bloody Richard who has deprived them of their dearest loved ones. After all, being a King's wife is a very dangerous position, as these women well know. When Lady Anne is asked to go "straight to Westminster, / There to be crownèd Richard's royal queen" (4.1.31-2), Elizabeth can only pity her and speak words of commiseration: "Go, go, poor soul. I envy not thy glory" (6.1.63). Anne has to obey, though she cries: "O would to God that the inclusive verge / Of golden metal that must round my brow / Were red-hot steel, to sear me to the brains. / Anointed let me be with deadly venom, / And die ere men can say 'God save the Queen'" (6.1.58-62).

History has already been written: Anne's doom is inevitable. She is the last unfortunate Queen of a long period of instability and cruelty which comes to an end with Richard III's defeat and with the accession to the throne of the Earl of Richmond as Henry VII, the first Tudor King.

3. Queens in Shakespeare's stories

In the Shakespearean theatre female royalty is presented from multiple perspectives and takes form through very different types, a confirmation of the astonishing power of Shakespeare's art to sketch out worlds and people with an incredible variety of nuances, passions, actions, be they taken from history, from fables, or from everyday life, created and re-created by his imagination and still generating the magic of theatre.

If Queens such as Katherine, Hermione and Cleopatra stand out for their majesty, the Shakespearean stage presents also some rather undignified examples of Queens who are not even indicat-

ed with their title: this is the case with Goneril and Regan – made Queens by Lear's abdication – and with Lady Macbeth, Queen by right as wife to King Macbeth, mentioned with her royal title only when her death is announced to her husband: "The Queen, my lord, is dead" (5.5.16). Why are they never called 'Queens'? Probably because they have nothing of the noble stature and solemn attitude one would expect from a Queen; indeed, their conduct is far from being royal and honest, and they exert their power, even over their male partners, in a criminal way, unsuited to an enlightened monarch.

A totally opposite case appears in *Cymbeline* where King Cymbeline's wife is deprived of a proper name and is simply defined among the *dramatis personae* as "The Queen". She is perhaps too wicked a woman to deserve to be given a name, as through a name the individual receives a sort of acknowledgement as a human being and a member of human society. Cymbeline himself in the end refers to her as "our wicked queen, / Whom heavens in justice both on her and hers / Have laid most heavy hand" (5.6.463-5).

The rhetoric of evil permeates the character of Tamora, Queen of the Goths, in *Titus Andronicus*. Taken to Rome as prisoner, she entreats Titus to spare her eldest son from a 'barbarous' sacrifice, showing herself as a loving mother and a woman of merciful feelings compared to the fierceness of the Romans (her son is torn to pieces and burnt). The Queen then plots her terrible revenge and reveals her true intentions in an 'aside' in which she also points out the importance of her royal position: "I'll find a day to massacre them all / [...] And make them know what 'tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (1.1.447-52). Her revenge falls on Lavinia, Titus's daughter, who is cruelly raped by Tamora's two sons and then mutilated of her tongue and hands so that she will be unable to reveal the names of her rapists. If this merciless cruelty could find a feeble justification in Tamora's craving as a mother to avenge her son's slaughter, her true motivation seems to be of a totally different nature

as, just before the horrific rape and mutilation, the Queen is discovered by Lavinia in lascivious acts with her servant, Aaron the Moor. Her revenge, then, rather than an extreme act of a distressed mother, appears as a means to protect herself from the disclosure of her adulterous and libidinous relationship which could otherwise be revealed to the Emperor. In fact, her maternal instinct and love is drastically questioned and denied when she shows herself ready to get rid of the fruit of her sinful relationship with the Moor in order to maintain her powerful position as an Empress. The Nurse reports the Queen's cruel death sentence to the Moor:

Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad
Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime.
The Empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal,
And bids thee christen it with thy dagger's point. (4.2.66-70)

For Tamora, power is more important than her own child; an attitude which recalls the famous lines spoken by Lady Macbeth in her frenzy for power, when she fears her husband's mild nature ("It is too full o'th' milk of human-kindness") and summons all the courage and strength necessary to reach the golden crown in a total rejection of her own femininity:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty. […]
Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall […] (1.5.15; 38-46)

A peculiar example of a Queen is Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. She wears the crown twice – as wife to King Hamlet first, and then as wife to King Claudius who introduces her as "our sometime sister, now our queen" (1.2.8) – but her royalty and true feelings to her two husbands are questioned throughout the tragedy: was she truly loving and faithful to King Hamlet? Was she an ac-

complice in his assassination? Has she married Claudius for sincere love, or has she accepted that "o'er-hasty marriage" (2.2.57) to keep her crown? Will she keep her word to her son, or will she reveal the truth of Hamlet's pretended madness to Claudius? These are only a few of the many unanswered questions that *Hamlet* poses. Throughout the tragedy Gertrude remains an ambiguous and sensual character whose purity of soul and honesty of mind is highly controversial and debatable.

In Shakespeare's romances female royal characters have a much more limited space than in the tragedies; indeed, they could be defined 'Ghost Queens' or 'Queens of Memory' as they appear only passing in their husbands' speeches as a fleeting recollection of a distant past.

It is worth noting that in *King Lear*, often considered the tragic model of Shakespeare's romances, the King's wife is only mentioned briefly when Lear, after having experienced the ingratitude of his daughter Goneril, goes to Regan's court hoping for a loving welcome and trusting his second daughter's filial affection. When Regan greets him with the words "I am glad to see your highness", Lear replies: "if thou shouldst not be glad, / I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb, / Sepulchring an adultress" (2.4.122-5) – a comment which casts a heavy shade on Lear's dead Queen as the mother of two monsters of wickedness and ungratefulness. Similarly, in *The Tempest* Prospero, Duke of Milan, mentions his wife briefly only once in his narration of the family story to his daughter Miranda, though in a very different tone from Lear's ("Thy mother was a piece of virtue", 1.2.56).

In *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, Queen Thaisa and Queen Hermione are on stage for the first tragic part of their respective play, till both disappear, each embracing a sort of voluntary, extended exile in order to leave their husbands the necessary time for repentance and for the recovery of their noble and royal stature; both Queens are believed dead by their husbands (and, in the case of Hermione, by the audience too), and come back on stage

only for the final scene of agnition and reunion, as required by the *romance* genre, allowing the happy ending of the story.

One last memorable Shakespearean Queen is Titania, the Fairy Queen of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, queen of dream worlds, and yet deeply and wonderfully human in her feelings and behaviours. But that is a different story.

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