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► **To cite this version:**

Line Cottagnies. ”Puzel or Pussel” and the Virgin Mary: 1 Henry VI and Anti-Catholic Polemic. Journal of Marlowe Studies, 2024, 4, pp.151-173. 10.7190/jms.4.2024.pp151-173 . hal-04513921

HAL Id: hal-04513921

<https://hal.science/hal-04513921v1>

Submitted on 21 Mar 2024

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“Puzel or Pussel” and the Virgin Mary: *1 Henry VI* and Anti-Catholic Polemic

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The collaborative nature of *1 Henry VI* has long been recognized, and although the extent of Marlowe’s involvement is still debated, he is widely accepted as one of its authors, together with William Shakespeare and Thomas Nashe.¹ In 2016 the *New Oxford Shakespeare* argued that the play was written by Marlowe, Nashe and a third unidentified author, and later “adapted by William Shakespeare.” Even if this was what happened, the extent of the revision involved is impossible to assess, given the mysterious time-lapse between the first performance of the play, probably in the spring of 1592, and its first publication by Heminges and Condell, thirty years later, as part of the *Henry VI* trilogy in Shakespeare’s First Folio. In spite of differences in appreciation, scholars who have recently worked on questions of attribution using computer analysis have identified Marlowe as having contributed to several scenes in which Joan of Arc (or Pucelle) features. Among these scholars, Hugh Craig has attributed all of the most substantial of these scenes to him, although others have argued for a more selective involvement of Marlowe.² This study, however, does not aim at discussing issues of authorship: it seems established now that Marlowe was closely associated with the Pucelle scenes, alongside Nashe and Shakespeare, and that he contributed to the artistic vision they manifest.³ This article argues that these scenes must be read as deploying a consistent semantic that is aligned with contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda, in particular by infusing Joan of Arc, the champion of the French, with elements of a pre-Reformation

¹ Hugh Craig, “The Three Parts of *Henry VI*,” in *Shakespeare, Computers, and the Mystery of Authorship*, ed. Hugh Craig and Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40–77. Craig’s findings are contradicted by Santiago Segarra *et al.*, “Attributing the Authorship of the *Henry VI* Plays by Word Adjacency,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67, no. 2 (2016): 245, and the by the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Gary Taylor *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016–17) (henceforth *NOS*). For a summary of the attribution argument, see Warren Chernaik, “Shakespeare as Co-Author: The Case of *1 Henry VI*,” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 27 (2014): 192–220, and *The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion*, ed. Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 497–520.

² In this article, scene and act numbers follow *The NOS Critical Reference Edition*, ed. G. Taylor, J. Jowett, T. Bourus, and G. Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 2 (i/j and u/v have been silently modernized). Joan of Arc appears in 1.3, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7. For a comparative census of attributions to Marlowe, see *NOS Authorship Companion*, 514. Of the scenes in which Joan appears, editors of the *NOS* have confidently identified Marlowe as the author of: 3.2, 3.3, 3.5., 3.7, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5; Segarra *et al.*, 1.7, 1.8, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 5.2, 5.3 (“Attributing”), and Craig, 1.3, 1.8, 2.1, 3.2, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7 (“The Three Parts”).

³ See also M. L. Stapleton, “Marlovian Joan la Pucelle,” *The Journal of Marlowe Studies* 1 (2020): 122–44, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7190/jms.v1i0.86>

spirituality. As has been argued by, among others, Patrick Ryan and Gillian Woods, proto-Papist Joan, set against the English Talbot, is defined in the play by a series of binaries—female / male, French / English, Catholic / Protestant, cunning / heroic...—but these oppositions seem to be undermined in the course of the play, calling into question the ideological framework in which they were created.⁴ While *I Henry VI* deploys some familiar attributes of anti-Catholic polemic to characterize Joan as an avatar of the Whore of Babylon of Revelation 17,⁵ she is seen by the French side as a “Prophetesse,” and defines herself in relation to the Virgin Mary, although even that characterization is subject to ambiguity. It is easy to dismiss these Marian associations because they only seem there to serve the anti-Catholic, anti-French grand narrative, and seem to be invoked only to be cancelled out in the last act by the sensational revelation of Joan’s commerce with “fiends” and her nature as a witch; yet the earlier focus on Joan’s exclusive relationship with the Virgin Mary is intriguing: it has no precedent in the sources available to the dramatists, and seems unique to *I Henry VI*. This article argues that Joan’s “troublesome body”⁶ is treated in the play as the site of an ideological contest that is illuminated by references to contemporary religious polemic. As will be apparent, a fresh examination of her insistent associations with the figure of the Virgin Mother further complicates our interpretation of the play as a straightforward anti-French satire, as they merge with a more conventional misogynistic satire.

Joan Pucelle / Puzel as a Visual and Verbal Anamorphosis

It has been argued that Joan’s presentation espouses a series of binaries which obey both a dramatic and an ideological logic, but that the play lacks a unique perspective that would allow the spectator to completely make sense of Joan. This is due, in part, to the perspective shift in act 5, when Joan is revealed to be a witch conjuring spirits: while in act 1, she is presented as a divinely-inspired mystic and “a Woman clad in Armour” (1.7.3) serving the crypto-Papist French,⁷ in act 5 she is revealed as the witch and the whore the English have

⁴ See Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 25–57 (37), and Gail Orgelfinger, *Joan of Arc in the English Imagination, 1429–1829* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 101–103.

⁵ Patrick Ryan, “Shakespeare, Joan and the Great Whore of Babylon,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 4 (2004): 55–82. See also Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁶ Woods, *Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions*, 54.

⁷ For a study of the relation between Joan as a witch and virago and the iconographic traditions of the amazon and the warrior woman, see Gabriele Bernhard Jackson “Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc,” *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988): 40–65; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 60–66, 68–70.

accused her of being all along, which aligns her with the figure of the Whore of Babylon in anti-Catholic polemic. The play clearly deploys a familiar semantic. For the English lords, the “glorious Prophetesse” of the French (1.8.7) can only be a pious fraud, as Talbot makes clear: “Heavens, can you Suffer Hell so to prevayle?” (1.7.8). While Joan Pucelle is described by the French Bastard as a “holy Maid,” in 1.3.30, Talbot exclaims only a few scenes later: “thou art a Witch,” (1.7.7), later calling her “damned Sorceresse,” (3.4.3), and “rayling *Hecate*” (3.5.24); and he promises: “I will chastise this high-minded Strumpet” (1.7.7, 12), thus introducing the two smears with which she will literally come to be identified in act 5. The image of the strumpet naturally calls to mind the Whore of Babylon of Revelation 17, a common allegory for the church of Rome.⁸ The imagery of the Whore as a symbol of Roman Catholicism was found in numerous printed books, engravings, woodcuts, and broadsides of the period. The play only vindicates this English ideological perspective on Joan Pucelle, when she is subjected to her spectacular metamorphosis in 5.4.

The “revelation” of Joan’s commerce with the devil corresponds however to a shift from one regime of representation to another within the play, the shift from a mimetic representational mode (where she is treated as a rounded character in the fiction of the play) to a satiric or ideological one.⁹ This shift has in fact been found in some of Marlowe’s plays themselves in the split treatment of his “overreachers.” John Cox, in particular, has shown that Joan is like a “parody of Marlovian overreachers, and Tamburlaine in particular,” and, like him, she is turned into a one-sided, grotesque version of herself.¹⁰ The parallel might be even stronger with *Doctor Faustus*, not only because both plays share an equally spectacular conjuring scene, but also because after a serious opening which sets Faustus’s problem as a philosophical drama, the play stages a mockery of Faustus’s initial quest: like Joan Pucelle’s quest, Faustus’s enquiry turns into a series of comic and grotesque performances, a succession of tableaux carrying out his most basic fantasies, like embracing Helen, poking fun at the

⁸ See for example Lewis Evans, *The Hatefull Hypocrisie, and Rebellion of the Romishe prelatie* (London: 1570): “Rome, the whore of Babilon, the mother of ydolatrie, & fornication, the sanctuarie of heresy, and the schoole of errour. Rome is as the second Babilon.” (E2r). For contemporary iconography, see Hugh Broughton, *A Conent of Scripture* (London, 1590), F5r.

⁹ According to Richard Hardin, Joan “transcends mimesis.” See Richard E. Hardin, “Chronicles and Mythmaking in Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc,” *Shakespeare Studies* 42 (1990): 35.

¹⁰ John D. Cox, “Devils and Power in Marlowe and Shakespeare,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993): 57. There might be an echo of Tamburlaine, “the scourge of gods,” in Pucelle dubbing herself “the English Scourge” (1.3.108), although Talbot, Joan’s antagonist, is himself called “the scourge of France” (2.1.14)—the play seems intent on eluding clear epistemological oppositions. For more echoes, see Cox, “Devils,” 57–58.

Pope, and, incidentally, mocking the rites and formalism of the Catholic Church as he disrupts the ritual of exorcism, for instance.¹¹

Equally elusive, Joan of Arc is very early on characterized by her sexual and theological ambivalence. Joan “*Puzel or Pussel*” (1.6.85), is presented as having a problematic body, as a transgressive female, and from this a Janus-like character, a cypher; she embodies a principle of equivocation, one way like a “holy Maid” (1.3.30), the other like a devilish strumpet. Her name itself is a crux and a riddle. It is in fact a first name (Joan) associated with a pseudonym, or an alias by which she is commonly known, *Pucelle*. As critics have noted, *Pucelle / Puzel* works as an anamorphic name, pointing in two opposite directions at once, maid and strumpet, as attested by the *OED*.¹² The English hero Talbot calls attention to its ambivalence when he famously exclaims, in the Folio version:

Puzel or Pussel, Dolphin or Dog-fish
Your hearts Ile stampe out with my Horses heeles,
And make a Quagmire of your mingled braines. (1.6.84–6)

This cue has caused some perplexity among editors. It led for instance the 2000 Arden 3 general editors to dissociate themselves from the editor of the play, Edward Burns, in an afterword, to express their disagreement with Burns’s choice to retain the Folio archaic spelling “puzel” for *pucelle* in an otherwise modernized text: “*Puzel or Pussel*.”¹³ As Burns argues, the term “*pucelle*” or “*puzel*” is “a notably unstable term, persistently teased at in the play;”¹⁴ it produces an equally unstable hesitation between two opposed meanings. The French Chroniclers all present Joan as “*la Pucelle de Dieu*,” and the word means “maid” or “virgin.” The duality of the word “*pucelle*,” its various spelling variants and the alternative stress placement in early uses are all recorded in the *OED*: the word is in many ways a crux. The English word, imported from the Anglo-Norman, is attested early in the fifteenth century. It is spelt interchangeably, with or without the final “e,” with one “l” or two (*Pucelle*, *Pucell*, *Pucel*), or one “s” or two, (*Pusel* or *Pussle*, *Pusle*), or one “z” or two (*Puzel*, *Puzell*, *Puzzel*, *Puzzle*)—the last element of each series implies a metathesis, i.e. a stress shift from second to first syllable. The two main variations concern the substitution of “z” for the “s” sound, and the placement of the stress (which affects the vowel sounds). These spellings

¹¹ For Marlowe’s dismissive attitude towards Catholicism and his scepticism at the efficacy of sacramental rituals, see Kristin M. S. Bezio, “Marlowe’s Radical Reformation: Christopher Marlowe and the Radical Christianity of the Polish Brothers,” *Quidditas* 38 (2017): 140–43.

¹² See “Appendix 1,” William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 1*, Arden Shakespeare, ed. Edward Burns (London: Thomson Learning, 2000), 291–294.

¹³ 1.4.106. Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 1*, 294–96.

¹⁴ “Introduction,” in Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 1*, 26.

naturally imply different ways of pronouncing the word: “Pucelle” and its variants could be pronounced as in French (with the stress on the second syllable); it could also be “nativized” and stressed on the first syllable, like most two-syllable English words. The variants “Puzel” and “Puzell” could also be pronounced as the modern “puzzle.” In the course of the sixteenth century, the word “pucell” seems to have collided with the word “puzzle,” whose etymology is unclear, but which seems to have been formed within English by conversion (*OED*). While the word “Pucelle” refers specifically to the French periphrase *Pucelle d’Orléans*—which encapsulates her youth, unmarried status, and virginity—it is also in English a generic word for a girl, a maid. It acquired the meaning of “a harlot, a courtesan” towards the last decades of the sixteenth century: the first recorded occurrence is to be found, according to the *OED*, in Golding’s 1578 translation of *Seneca* (spelt “puzzle”), then in Stubbes’s 1583 *Anatomy of Abuses* (spelt “pussel”). The two senses are not correlated to specific spellings, however, although the spelling “pucelle” does not seem to have been used in the sense of “strumpet.” The reverse is not true. Burns argues in his introduction that “in English, ‘pucelle’ means virgin, ‘puzel’ means whore.”¹⁵ Unfortunately for Burns, “puzel” can be used both to designate a “whore” and a “virgin.”

In the Folio text, the word “Pucelle” is alternatively spelt Pucell / Pucel, or Puzel / Puzell, and the French heroine is also called Joan or Joan de Puzel. Joan refers to herself twice, first as “Pucell” (3.5.18), then “Jone” (5.7.60). These variations have been attributed by Gary Taylor partly to compositors, partly to scribes or the authors themselves.¹⁶ They could also reflect differences between the sources used by the authors: Hall mostly uses “Puzel” (like Grafton), Holinshed “Pucell.” The Folio variants do not follow a significant pattern, however. While the semantic opposition behind the two terms in Talbot’s comment is clear (virgin vs. strumpet), the words *puzel* and *pussel* are basically one and the same repeated twice, although spelt and pronounced differently—and to make matters worse, an additional pun on “pizzle” (as penis) cannot be completely excluded. Even the iambic metrical pattern of the line suggests homophony between the two words. The hesitation in spelling and pronunciation, served by the actor’s intonation, suggests a host of negative connotations, like Talbot’s suspicion of the maid’s purity, and perhaps of her real gender.

By unloosing the potential ambiguity of the word, Talbot’s play on words creates slippage which releases the slanderous connotations of her name. The pair “puzel” and

¹⁵ “Introduction,” in Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 1*, 26.

¹⁶ See Gary Taylor, “Shakespeare and Others: The Authorship of *Henry the Sixth, Part One*,” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 7 (1995): 155.

“pussel” is modelled on the opposition between “Dogfish” and “Dolphin” which follows. The “Dolphin” refers both to one of the nobler kinds of “fish” (as it was then believed to be), and to the title traditionally given to the eldest son of the French king (more usually spelt “Dauphin,” as in French). The title is mocked and defiled by its association with the dogfish—one of the lowest species in the order of fish, also a common insult. For Talbot, who at that point has not yet met Joan, the French warrior is literally a “puzzle”: a “Woman clad in Armour” (1.7.3), who can only be a “high-minded Strumpet” (1.7.11). The verb “to puzzle” (in the modern sense of “to perplex”) is attested around 1595 as a verb (*OED*), but the noun is recorded only in the mid-seventeenth century—although usage is often ahead of lexicography. Joan Pucelle’s name functions therefore as an equivocating signifier, a riddle which might be aligned with amphibology, the figure of ambiguity Puttenham associates with prophecies, witchcraft, and political sedition.¹⁷ In the 1590s in England, equivocation was notoriously associated with the Jesuits, who theorized it as an art.¹⁸ Joan Pucelle’s anamorphic, reversible name is therefore particularly apt for a French character (anachronistically) associated with *Catholic* France, and is emblematic of the polarities that define her in the play.

Marian Associations

Just before she appears for the first time in 1.3, Joan is presented by the Bastard of Orléans to the Dauphin and his companions as a messianic figure, a “holy Maid,” inspired by the “spirit of deepe Prophecie” (1.3.30, 34) and moved by “a Vision sent to her from Heaven” (1.3.31). Here the authors seem to have borrowed from positive accounts of Joan Pucelle, rather than from the hostile anti-French propaganda spread by the chronicles they used as their main sources. As a result, they—paradoxically—seem to rehearse the adverse propaganda effort which aimed at turning Joan Pucelle into a powerful nationalist myth for France—although to eventually mock the latter.¹⁹ As a “Prophetesse” (1.8.7)—in the sense of a “divinely-inspired person” (*OED* 1)—she is thus described as capable of seeing through lies and shams (“there’s nothing hid from me,” 1.3.47), and predicting the future: “What’s past and what’s to come

¹⁷ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. John Lumley (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 267.

¹⁸ In Garnet’s 1607 trial, a manuscript of a “Treatise of Equivocation” allegedly written by him on the occasion of Southwell’s 1595 trial was produced by Sir Edward Coke; it defined equivocation as a doctrine aiming at making lying lawful. See F. L. Huntley, “*Macbeth* and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation” *PMLA* 79, no. 4 (1964): 390; Janet Halley, “Equivocation and the Legal Conflict Over Religious Identity in Early Modern England,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 3, no. 1 (1991): 34–52; and Alison Knight, *The Dark Bible: Cultures of Interpretation in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 88–91.

¹⁹ This paradox is noted by Richard Hillman in *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 139.

she can descry” (1.3.57). She is also compared to a series of female worthies. She thus exceeds “the nine *Sibyls* of old Rome” (1.3.34), who predicted the advent of Christ. Joan was in fact celebrated by French chroniclers as a “*Sybilla Francica*,” and praised for her art of divining the future.²⁰ When Charles celebrates her as France’s “glorious Prophetesse” (1.8.7), he clearly echoes this rhetoric. She is then compared to several worthies of the Old and the New Testaments, a common feature both of the genre of the catalogue of worthies, and of Christian hagiography, which was often based on typology. Christine de Pisan thus described Joan as surpassing both male and female worthies, citing Esther, Judith and Deborah;²¹ and Holinshed himself admits that the French subsequently celebrated her as “a damsel divine [...] likened to a Debora, Jahell, and Judith.”²² In 1.3.84, the Dauphin praises her for fighting “with the Sword of *Debora*,” a prophetess who allegedly led the armies of Israel against the Canaanites (Judges 4 and 5). Then he compares her to Christian figures: Helena or Helen, who converted her son Constantine to Christianity (1.3.121), and Saint Philip’s chaste daughters (1.3.122), who in Acts (21. 8–9) are also said to “prophesy”—here in the sense of “speak[ing] out on scriptural or other religious matters, as an expression of divine inspiration” (*OED* 3).²³ As a hybrid between a witch and a Popish “prophet” and a messianic figure, Joan Pucelle embodies everything Protestant authorities had come to fear. In early modern England, Popish rites were commonly assimilated to magic, and magic was also considered seditious. The issue of “magical treason” was taken very seriously by sixteenth-century authorities. According to Francis Young, “Elizabeth I was perhaps the most magically attacked monarch—at least while on the throne of England—in English History.”²⁴ Over her long reign, Elizabeth was the targets of several plots at the hands of Catholics, as well as of self-proclaimed “prophets.” Just a few months before the first performance of *I Henry VI*, in July 1591, William Hacket, a deranged Puritan and alleged “prophet” claiming to be the Messiah, marched through London calling for the deposition of the queen before

²⁰ See for instance the anonymous *Sibylla Francica: seu de admirabili puella Johanna Lotharinga*, Ursellis [Oberursel], 1606; see also Jean Baptiste Joseph Ayrolles, *La Vraie Jeanne d’Arc. La pucelle devant l’Eglise de son temps* (Paris: Gaume, 1870), 69.

²¹ Christine de Pisan, *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc*, ed. Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1977), stanza XXV–XXVIII.

²² Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: 1587; London: J. Johnson et. al., 1808), 171–2.

²³ Saint Philip’s chaste daughters are also mentioned in Nashe’s *The Terrors of the Night* (London, 1594), G3v.

²⁴ Francis Young, *Magic as a Political Crime in Medieval and Early Modern England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 87. For the conflation of the play’s anti-Catholic religious ideology and the “culturally charged figures of witch and woman-warrior” in the context of the 1590 witch-hunt of North Berwick, see Ryan, “Shakespeare, Joan,” 71–2.

being arrested.²⁵ Political prophecy was a source of deep anxiety throughout the period, and treated as seditious.²⁶ Joan Pucelle's messianic message and call to arms would therefore have been very resonant for an Elizabethan audience.

The treatment of Joan Pucelle as a Popish scarecrow is perhaps even more evident with her self-characterization in act 1.3 as a mystic inspired by the Virgin Mary. This alone might have been seen as contentious in the contemporary context of the repression of political prophecy and of the protestant reaction against Marian devotion. Her very name, Joan, might have evoked that of her namesake, Joan of the Cross (1481–1534), a Spanish mystic who was celebrated among others by Lope de Vega and venerated by Jesuits; the St Omers English Jesuits published a translation of the narrative of her life a few years later.²⁷ Closer to home, “Joan” might have called to mind Pope Joan, another seditious female figure, who was believed to have existed in the early times of Christianity. Intriguingly, a play recorded in Henslowe's diary as “poope Jone,” which presumably dramatized her life, was performed at the Rose Theatre on 1 March 1591/2 by Lord Strange's Men, only two days before the first performance, on 3 March, of the play Henslowe calls *Harey the vj*, which is largely believed to be *1 Henry VI*.²⁸ Unfortunately, no copy of “poope Jone” has survived. According to John Foxe, Pope Joan was emblematic not only of the waywardness of women, but also of the contemptible nature of Catholics and their idolatry, since they “to the perpetual shame of them [...] elected a whore indeed to minister sacraments, to say masses, to give orders.”²⁹ Like Joan Pucelle in *1 Henry VI*, Pope Joan was infamously betrayed by her body, since she allegedly gave birth in public. Pope Joan features as an antimodel in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*—which, although often reprinted, was not translated into English. The shocking scene of Pope Joan, whom Boccaccio thought English, giving birth in public was even represented in one the illustrations of the early printed versions.³⁰ The play which Henslowe calls “Poope Jone” does not seem to have been performed again (contrary to *Harey*

²⁵ See Chris Fitter, “Emergent Shakespeare and the Politics of Protest: *2 Henry VI* in Historical Contexts,” *ELH* 72, no. 1 (2005): 129–158.

²⁶ For the association between magic and political treason under Elizabeth I, see Young, *Magic*, 87–119, and Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2006) 14–52.

²⁷ Antonio Daza, *The Historie, Life and Miracles, Extasies and Revelations of the Blessed Virgin, Sister Joane, of the Crosse*, trans. James Bell (St Omers, 1625).

²⁸ Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Walter W. Greg (London: A. H. Bullen, 1904), 7.

²⁹ Cited in Carole Levin, ““Murder not the fruit of my womb”: Shakespeare's Joan, Foxe's Guernesey Martyrs, and Women Pleading Pregnancy in Early Modern English History and Culture,” *Quidditas* 20 (1999): 77. John Bale comments ironically: “it was *the* Lordes pleasure, to bewraye *the* whore of *Babilon* in a *Pope* being an whore.” *The Pageant of Popes* (London, 1576), 56.

³⁰ See Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris* (Ulm: 1473), 107v.

the *vj*), which might suggest that it was an older play at the end of its stage life;³¹ but it is intriguing to think that Pucelle thus had a scandalous precedent both in history and on the stage that was a transgressive, cross-dressed heroine who was culturally resonant in the period, and would have been fresh in the minds of the Rose spectators.³²

In her first speech in the play, it might come as a surprise that Joan Pucelle places herself under the exclusive patronage of the Virgin Mary, without the mediation of an angel of instance—as was usually the case with other early-modern Catholic mystics: “Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleas’d / To shine on my contemptible estate.” (1.3.53–54) “Gods mother” has appeared to her: “And in a Vision full of Majestie, / Will’d me to leave my base Vocation / And free my Countrey from Calamitie,” she continues (1.3.57–61). As argued by Gail Orgelfinger, the terms “Our Lady” and “God’s mother” clearly identify Joan with pre-Reformation theology, and point to the Catholic role attributed to Mary as an intercessor with Christ, which was a major bone of contention between the reformed and unreformed churches.³³ In Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*, which was performed in January 1592/3 in the same theatre and by the same company as *I Henry VI*,³⁴ the Catholic Gonzago forces Coligny to pray to “our Ladie” and kiss the cross before killing him—which associates a practice considered as a superstitious and idolatrous with an act of barbarity.³⁵ Joan’s confessional alignment is made worse by her claim to be holding her legitimacy from this intense exclusive relationship with the Virgin Mary: “Her ayde she promis’d, and assur’d successe.” (1.3.61). As she starts astonishing the dauphin by her strength, she insists, again pointing at Mary’s status as a Christ’s mother: “Christs Mother helpes me, else I were too weake” (1.3.85). In the same speech, she describes her first encounter with the Virgin Mary as an experience of conversion, complete with a physical metamorphosis, which is strongly reminiscent of Catholic hagiography:³⁶

In compleat Glory shee reveal’d her selfe:
And whereas I was black and swart before,

³¹ Martin Wiggins, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), vol. 3, entry 894, and Sally-Beth MacLean and Lawrence Manley, *Lord Strange’s Men and their Plays* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2014), 144–7. For more about Pucelle and Pope Joan, see Craig M. Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan: Deploying the Popess Legend in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 62–84.

³² It is possible—although speculative—to suggest that the same actor performed the two parts.

³³ Orgelfinger, *Joan of Arc*, 102; see also David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 245.

³⁴ If it is indeed the same play as that described by Henslowe as “the tragedey of the gvyes.” (*Henslowe’s Diary*, 15).

³⁵ Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris* (London, n.d.) B1r.

³⁶ For a reading of the play as engaging with earlier miracle or saints plays, see Albert H. Tricomi, “Joan Pucelle and the Inverted Saints Play in *I Henry VI*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 25, no. 2 (2001): 5–31.

With those cleare Rayes, which shee infus'd on me,
That beautie am I blest with, which you may see. (1.3.62–66)

In the standard account of Joan of the Cross's mystical conversion, her experience is also described as an illumination that beautifies its recipient.³⁷ As Gillian Woods has argued, the word "infuse" evokes the inward spiritual imparting of grace which mystically fuses the physical and the metaphysical.³⁸ But this physical and metaphysical metamorphosis is ambiguous. Bevington sees the infusion of this grace "on" Joan's body as a "blasphemous type of incarnation."³⁹ The terms used here would have been suspicious to a reformed spectator. This metamorphosis might have chimed in with Paul's warning against the suspicious metamorphosis of "false apostles," in 2 Corinthians (11:13–14), "[that] are deceitful workers, and transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ," like "Satan himself [who] is transformed into an Angel of light."⁴⁰

This instability of the theological terms used to describe Joan testifies to how quickly praise is turned into its opposite in the play. It is obvious too that these insistent references to the Virgin Mary could only be read as suspicious in the context of the English sixteenth-century reaction against Marian devotion. None of the English sources available to the authors mentions the Virgin Mary as the unique source of Joan Pucelle's inspiration. In only two French sources, as far as I know, is the Pucelle associated with Mary, but alongside with two other saints, Saint Katherine and Saint Agnes. These sources are Alain Bouchard's *Grandes Chroniques de Bretagne* (first printed in 1514), and the anonymous *Mirouer des Femmes Vertueuses* (printed in Paris in 1547)—which derives its material on Joan Pucelle almost verbatim from Bouchard.⁴¹ Both were often reprinted in the course of the sixteenth century. In the *Mirouer*, Joan presents herself twice as prompted by God to come to the rescue of the French Dauphin, through the intercession of the "Virgin Mary, His mother, and by Madam Saint Katherine and Madam Saint Agnes."⁴² In a play by the Jesuit Fronton du Duc, *L'histoire tragique de la Pucelle de Dom-Rémy* (Nancy, 1581), the Pucelle is visited by the archangel Saint Michael (1.2), and in her interview with Charles, she recalls being visited

³⁷ "[H]er face was very bright [...]. She was most beautifull and shining in these rapt's" (Antonio Daza, quoted in Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions*, 38).

³⁸ See Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions*, 36–37.

³⁹ David Bevington, "The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 52.

⁴⁰ This was a familiar theme of witchcraft treatises in the period. See Eric Pudney, *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538–1681* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2019), 105.

⁴¹ Anon., *Mirouer des Femmes Vertueuses, ensemble la Patience Griselidis: par laquelle est demonstree l'obedience des femmes vertueuses. L'hystoire admirable de Jeanne Pucelle* (Paris, 1547).

⁴² See Jules Quicherat, ed., *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite La Pucelle* (Paris: Renouard, 1847), vol 4, 268, 270.

also by Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret, and the Virgin Mary (1.3).⁴³ The focus on the exclusive relationship between Pucelle and the Virgin Mary, therefore, seems unique to *Henry VI*.

Marian devotion was of course a highly sensitive issue in England in the period. Frances Dolan comments that while many statues or paintings of male saints survived the period of iconoclasm, the female saints constituted a special target for iconoclasts, in particular the Virgin Mary, whose cult had been particularly lively in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁴ In 1552, Latimer commented specifically on the cult rendered by Catholics to the Virgin Mary, in which he perceived a form of idolatry:

Here is confounded and overthrown the foolish opinion of the papists, which would have us to worship a creature before the Creator; Mary before her Son. These wise men do not so; they worship not Mary; and wherefore? Because God only is to be worshipped: but Mary is not God.⁴⁵

One of the first Homilies to be re-issued, in 1562, after Mary Tudor’s reign, was against “the perils of idolatry,” and especially targeted the images of Mary, denounced as “very idols” recalling ancient pagan cults.⁴⁶ In a famous incident, on one of her progresses, Queen Elizabeth visited Euston Hall, in Suffolk, in 1578, where an image of the Virgin Mary was found, causing much dismay, which led to it being burnt. According to Orgelfinger, the association of Mary Stuart with her namesake the Virgin Mary would have made the reference to Marian devotion even more sensitive, just after her execution in 1587.⁴⁷ In any case, it is clear that Joan Pucelle’s characterization as a virgin and a proto-Catholic mystic defined through her filial relationship with the Virgin Mother serves to undermine her character in the elaborate fiction of desecration deployed in the play. Her body, which is first described as sublimated through her experience of conversion, is defiled on two occasions in act 5, and her claim to virginity overturned in two different contexts. In the scene in which

⁴³ Richard Hillman has identified three possible verbal echoes to the play, performed in 1580 at the University of Pont-à-Mousson, although they could derive from an unidentified source. Richard Hillman, “La Pucelle sur la scène littéraire et politique: le trajet Pont-à-Mousson – Londres,” *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* 22 (2005): 131–50. Hillman argues that the scene between the Dauphin and Pucelle is presented as a dialogue only in one (unspecified) source other than the play. The other must be Bouchard; but it is also the case in the *Mirouer*.

⁴⁴ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 121. The misogynistic aspect of some of the most concrete manifestations of iconoclasm cannot be undermined: Stow’s *Chronicle of London* records in 1601 that a statue of the Virgin and Child was repeatedly the target of vandals, and that it was stabbed in the breast, and mutilated, stripped of its child, and almost beheaded (quoted in Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 14)

⁴⁵ Hugh Latimer, *Sermons and Remains*, ed. George Elwes Corries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845), vol. 2: 153.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Waller, *The Virgin Mary*, 10.

⁴⁷ Orgelfinger suggests that Joan was meant to evoke Mary, Queen of Scots (*Joan of Arc*, 94–126).

she is shown conversing with spirits, she is turned into a perverted mother figure, her body associated with monstrous motherhood. In the conjuration scene, she reveals that the infernal pact implied that she fed her familiar devils, not with milk, but with her blood: “I was wont to feed you with my blood” (5.4.14).⁴⁸ This might be read as a reversal of Christine de Pisan’s famous image of Joan as feeding France with the milk of peace.⁴⁹ While a witch’s suckling of her fiends is consistent with demonology treatises of the period, the image offers a grotesque counterpoint to the maternity of the Virgin Mary, all the more so as, desperate to renew her pact with the devil, Pucelle then offers herself to her familiars, body and soul, in an echo of a Faustian pact: “Then take my soule, my body, soule, and all” (5.4.22). The monstrous metamorphosis is complete, as she is turned into a transgressive mother-cum-strumpet figure.

In the second scene of desecration, two scenes later, a scared Joan pleads for her life, and by claiming she is pregnant, she confirms her enemies’ accusations of being a whore. Joan Pucelle’s pregnancy was a calumny used by English chroniclers to justify the English participation in her capture and death.⁵⁰ The authors of *1 Henry VI* turn this moment of revelation into a public shaming, in which Pucelle appears to be humiliated mainly for being a socially transgressive woman.⁵¹ The scene focusses on Joan’s body as a problematic site of social, gender, and religious transgression. In 1.3, Pucelle had reinvented herself spiritually as the symbolic daughter of God’s mother, which made her both a surrogate Marian figure and a symbolic equivalent of Christ. At the beginning of 5.7 (although this contradicts the scene of conjuring), she first returns to this initial portrait, describing herself again as “chaste, and immaculate” (5.7.51), the latter term sounding much like an echo to the immaculate conception of Christ, which had been debated since the Middle Ages. A few lines down, she rejects her ordinary filiation, denying her fleshly father and mother, which her captors see as the attempt of a social impostor to fraudulently claim a higher status than her own. In response, the shepherd, her father, presents her with a coarse and grotesque version of her “nativity”—a word which strongly evokes the birth of Christ—to wish for an alternative, more macabre version of motherhood, infanticide:

⁴⁸ On Pucelle as an ordinary village witch, see Ladan Niayesh, “Nourrice et nourriture infernales: Représentations de la sorcière dans *1 Henry VI*,” in *Enfers et délices à la Renaissance*, ed. François Laroque and Frank Lessay (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2003), 193–203.

⁴⁹ Pisan, *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc*, Stanza 24.

⁵⁰ See Orgelfinger, *Joan of Arc*, 46; and Levin, ““Murder not.”” The calumny, from a 1460 English source, was taken up in Caxton’s *Cronycles of England* (London: 1480). See W. T. Waugh, “Joan of Arc in English Sources of the Fifteenth Century,” in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards and V. H. Galbraith (Manchester: by subscription, 1933), 394.

⁵¹ According to Eric Pudney, *1 Henry VI* is perhaps “the closest the stage gets to the reality of witchcraft trials.” (Pudney, *Scepticism*, 108)

[...] Now cursed be the time
Of thy nativitie. I would the Milke
Thy mother gave thee when thou suck'st her brest,
Had been a little Rats-bane for thy sake. (5.7.27–29)

Joan Pucelle is not just an idolatrous version of the Virgin Mary imagined by the English: because she has set herself outside of human filiation, she has symbolically become a parodic and distorted Christ-like figure, a version of Antichrist, who must be destroyed.

Joan pays dearly for overreaching. Her pregnancy, even if it is an admittance of promiscuity, she reinterprets as “infirmity”; it should by law offer her a legal protection:

Then, *Jone*, discover thine infirmity,
That warranteth by Law, to be thy privilege.
I am with childe ye bloody Homicides[.] (5.7.60–62)

The custom of “pleading the belly” (*de ventre inspiciendo*) is recorded in English legal records from at least the thirteenth century; any pregnant woman sentenced to death could use this legal recourse to delay the application of the sentence, and she would often get a reprieve. She would be examined by a “jury of matrons,” who had the responsibility to decide whether she was “quick with child.”⁵² In denying Joan Pucelle the right to plead the belly, in breach of English common law, the play blackens York and Warwick, which complicates its ideological perspective, and humanises Joan Pucelle by turning her into a victim of tyranny. York and Warwick treat this hypothetical motherhood simply as the confirmation that she is a strumpet, which justifies her death. Their ironic, choric comments frame the audience’s reception: “Now heaven forfend, the holy Maid with child? [...] And yet forsooth she is a Virgin pure” (5.7.65, 83). In the authors’ sources, including Holinshed, she is given a nine-month reprieve, at the end of which she is proven a liar;⁵³ not so here. There is no source, however, for the scene in which Joan mentions her three putative lovers, which is treated by the English as an aggravating factor: if Charles is her child’s father, “we’ll have no Bastards live” (5.7.70); if Alençon, “that notorious Machevile? / [it] dyes” (5.7.74–75); and if Reignier, “[a] married man, that’s most intollerable” (5.7.79). York and Warwick’s sentence appears to be primarily motivated by a desire to control the female body and its sexuality, through the repressions of bastardy, sexual intercourse between women of the lower orders and their social betters, and adultery. Joan Pucelle is ostensibly punished here because of her

⁵² Sara M. Butler, “Pleading the Belly: A Sparing Plea? Pregnant Convicts and the Courts in Medieval England,” in *Crossing Borders: Boundaries and Margins in Medieval and Early Modern Britain*, ed. Sara M. Butler and K. J. Kesselring (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 131.

⁵³ Orgelfinger, *Joan of Arc*, 46–47.

unruly female body and her social trespassing, and deprived of her right to appeal for a reprieve.

Marian Idolatry and Fraud

If the Marian associations are thoroughly overwritten by the demonic interlude, the undermining of Joan starts almost from the beginning: even as they praise Joan, her followers themselves reveal the contamination of Marian devotion with idolatry and fraud. They associate her, for instance, with problematic Pagan female figures, which can only cast doubt on her alleged sanctity and suggests idolatry and heresy. She is for instance likened to an Amazon (1.3.83) and, later, “*Astrea’s Daughter*” (1.8.4). Amazons were ambivalent figures in the early modern imagination.⁵⁴ While there was a vogue for Amazons in fiction and on the stage, they also generated anxiety, not least because of their cross-dressing. Hall calls Joan a “manly woman,” and in *I Henry VI* Talbot initially questions the gender of Pucelle: “Devil, or devils Dam” (1.7.5).⁵⁵ In Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the Amazon queen Radigund is a figure of iniquity and wantonness.⁵⁶ As for Astrea, given that she is supposed to have been a virgin, presenting Joan as her daughter might sound somewhat tongue-in-cheek, and once again suggests a form of problematic filiation and motherhood. The irony might be confirmed by the reference to Adonis’s garden which follows; Charles sees Pucelle’s beneficial action as promising immediate success, like the harvest of Adonis’s garden: “Thy promises are like *Adonis Garden* / That one day bloom’d and fruitfull were the next” (1.8. 5–6). An image of transience in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (276b), the garden of Adonis was presented by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* as an earthly paradise, pitted against the sensual Bower of Bliss.⁵⁷ In fact the Dauphin collapses the figures of Venus and Astrea, since Adonis is traditionally associated not with Astrea but with Venus. Venus, as the goddess of love, is a highly problematic figure to juxtapose with the Virgin Mary, because she was traditionally associated with fertility, paganism and idolatrous cults. Yet Joan Pucelle is explicitly compared to Venus: “Bright Starre of *Venus*, fallne down on the Earth” (1.3.123). In Isaiah 12:14, however, it is Lucifer who is said to fall from heaven, like a shooting star: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O

⁵⁴ On the ambivalence of amazons in the Henriads, see Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 79–108. For the paradoxical association of Elizabeth I with the figure of the amazon, see in particular Jackson, “Topical Ideology,” 55–56, and Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, 60–66. Tricomi argues that the cult of Elizabeth “offered the populace a secularized displacement for the Virgin Mary (“Joan la Pucelle,” 7).

⁵⁵ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), C13v.

⁵⁶ Jackson, “Topical Ideology,” 51, 55–56.

⁵⁷ Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene* (London, 1590), Book III, Canto VI, stanzas 29–50.

Lucifer, son of the morning?” This possible allusion to Lucifer introduces the idea of the satanic nature of Joan early on in the play. If Joan Pucelle is compared to Venus, she is a fallen Venus (“fallen down”).⁵⁸ And indeed, on first meeting the Dauphin, Pucelle inspires him with instant lust: “Impatiently I burne with thy desire” (1.3.87), and she is accused of making of the French lords her “lustfull Paramours” (3.5.13).

The devotion that Joan Pucelle inspires in her followers is therefore tainted from the start with both idolatry and sensuality. Even their abrupt embracing of her as a miraculous, messianic figure in 1.3 appears superstitious and shallow, all the more so as the French just as suddenly turn away from her in 2.1 to squabble over who is responsible for their military disaster, when the city of Orléans appears to be lost. The angry Charles is as quick to turn against her as he had been in electing her as his champion in 1.3, a scene in which he expressed his absolute faith in her with the zeal of a new convert—only to denounce her as an impostor in 2.1: “Is this thy cunning, thou deceitfull Dame?” (2.1.50). Joan Pucelle, who stands within and without the frame of the representational world of the play,⁵⁹ ironically comments on this shallow, changing nature of the French, in what sounds very much like a metadramatic remark, as well as an anti-French snipe. Commenting on Burgundy in 3.7—whom Shakespeare and his fellow authors (unhistorically) treat as a Frenchman—she rails: “Done like a Frenchman: turne and turne againe” (3.7.85).⁶⁰

The issue of idolatry comes to the fore in the superstitious credit the French give Joan’s visions and “prophecies” in 1.3, and the interpretations of her feats as “miracles.” In 5.7 she claims the faculty of “work[ing] exceeding myracles on earth” or of “compass[ing] Wonders” through the “inspiration of Celestiall Grace” (5.7.41, 48, 40). In post-Reformation England, Protestant divines generally agreed that miracles had ceased with the coming of Christ,⁶¹ which might account for the scepticism of the English warriors in the face of what the French celebrate as divinely-ordained miracles. Hearing about Joan’s pregnancy, Warwick mocks this notion of “miracle”: “The greatest miracle that ere ye wrought. / Is all your strict precisenesse come to this?” (5.7.66–67). The word “precisenesse” is sarcastic here: denoting a strictness in behaviour or morals, it targets Joan Pucelle’s insistence on her

⁵⁸ This is perhaps an allusion to the earthly Venus, who rouses impure desire, as opposed to the heavenly Venus of Plato’s *Symposium*.

⁵⁹ Stapleton calls Joan “relentlessly self-referential.” See M. L. Stapleton, “‘Shine it Like a Comet of Revenge’: Seneca, John Studley, and Shakespeare’s Joan la Pucelle,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 31 (1994): 244.

⁶⁰ It has been argued that this might be a snipe at the upcoming conversion of Henri de Navarre to Catholicism. See Woods, *Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions*, 44, and Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe*, 131.

⁶¹ Alexandra Walsham, “Miracles in Post-Reformation England,” *Studies in Church History*, 41 (2005): 273–306. doi:10.1017/S0424208400000267.

chastity, implicitly reversed here into lubricity. As is well-known, Protestants saw the Catholic emphasis on chastity with suspicion as a reflection of hypocrisy and deceit. If Pucelle is dangerous, it is because she is a liar, and as such a symbolic offspring of Satan, the father of lies: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: [...] for he is a liar, and the father thereof” (John 8: 44).

Similarly, the play targets the Popish idolatry inherent in the cult of saints, especially of non-Biblical saints. Pucelle is compared to “S. *Philips* daughters” (1.3.122), and the Dauphin predicts that she will be celebrated in future ages as “France’s Saint” (1.8.28), instead of Saint Denis, the patron saint of France. He imagines the posthumous cult that will be rendered to her ashes after her death, when they are “transported” (i.e. “carried” or “conveyed,” *OED*) in processions:

And all the Priests and Fryers in my Realme,
Shall in procession sing her endlesse prayse.
[...]
Her Ashes, in an Urn more precious
Then the rich-jewel’d Coffe of *Darius*,
Transported, shall be at high Festivals
Before the Kings and Queens of France. (1.8.18–19, 23–26)

After her death, Joan Pucelle, he claims, will be celebrated as a martyr or a saint in seasonal processions. Her ashes will be treated as relics to be worshipped in communal rituals.⁶² The play seems to target the Catholic cult of relics which reformers saw as idolatrous. In 1559, Elizabeth had issued a proclamation which stipulated that priests should “take away, utterly extinct, and destroy all shrines [...], pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and superstition, so that there remain no memory of the same in [...] their churches and houses.”⁶³ The morbid emphasis on the posthumous, ritualistic cult of Joan Pucelle’s ashes also evokes the contemporary creation and cult of Catholic martyrs. In December 1591, just a few months before the first performance of *1 Henry VI*, seven Catholic “martyrs” were executed together in London with Edmund Geninges, a priest whose execution was so sensationally bloody and cruel that it shocked all present: his death was subsequently remembered in a series of hagiographic narratives.⁶⁴ English Catholic priests arrested in England were hanged, drawn, and quartered, and their gruesome executions often

⁶² The sheer extravagance of the praise is reminiscent of Marlowe mocking the processions of Catholic priests in *Doctor Faustus*. See Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen, 1962), 8.89.

⁶³ Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 2: 123.

⁶⁴ [Edmund Geninges], *The Life and Death of Mr. Edmund Geninges, Priest* (St Omers, 1614).

led to their co-religionists’ desperate attempts at collecting body parts and ashes to serve as relics.

The idolatry of the French is made even more blatant with the emphasis on the excessive richness of the ashes’ coffer, an allusion to the Catholics’ use of precious reliquaries: Joan Pucelle’s reliquary will thus be more precious than “the rich-jewel’d Coffe of *Darius*,” a king of Persia in the 5th century BC who was famous for his fabulous wealth. Here the collapsing of the image of a hearse with that of a magnificent coffer—a word which could refer both to a coffin and a chest—containing the rich treasure of a Pagan king, suggests the reformed rejection of Popish rituals and the Catholic emphasis on the richness of ornaments. Finally, the suspicion of heresy is explicit in the Dauphin’s comparison of Pucelle’s shrine with a splendid pyramid: “A statelyer Pyramis to her Ile reare, / Then *Rhodophe*’s or *Memphis* ever was” (1.8.20–21).⁶⁵ The stateliness of the shrine suggests the Catholic emphasis on the excessive richness of ornaments; it also alludes to the pride and wealth of the Roman church—emblemized in contemporary polemic by the much reviled splendour of churches like St Peter’s Basilica. The image of the pyramid, a towering building which could also be an obelisk, is culturally resonant in the period, although not expressly associated with heresy; but in reformed polemic, Catholicism was commonly associated with all forms of paganism.⁶⁶ Moreover, the decadence of the Roman church was often symbolized by proud and opulent buildings which, like the tower of Babel or Babylon, were used to suggest both pagan heresy and the transience of worldly glory. A 1547 Christmas Revels thus included a giant tower “resembling [sic] the Tower of babylon,” to represent the heresy of the Roman Church. The tower was paraded through the City of London, and eventually destroyed during the Revels to signify the victory of the true faith over heresy.⁶⁷ John Bale chastises the “Babilonicall buildinges” of the Papists in *The Pageant of Popes*.⁶⁸ In Sonnet 7 of *Complaints*, Spenser, echoing du Bellay, fustigates Rome’s “Triumphant arcks, spyres neighbours to the skie.”⁶⁹ In *Antonius*, published in 1592, Mary Sidney Herbert

⁶⁵ Emendation “of” for “or” not retained.

⁶⁶ See Robert Greene: “Papisme is flat Paganisme.” Quoted in Gillian Woods, “Marlowe and Religion,” in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 223.

⁶⁷ Alfred Feuillerat, *Documents relating to the Revels at Court in the time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary: the Loseley Manuscripts* (Vaduz: Kraus Reprints, 1965), 26. Towers of Babylon were used in several revels (*ibid.*, 269). See Adam Morton, “Anti-Catholicism: Catholics, Protestants, and the ‘Popery’ Problem,” in *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Robert E. Scully (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 410–48.

⁶⁸ John Bale, *The pageant of Popes* (London: 1574), sig. B4r.

⁶⁹ Edmund Spenser, *Complaints* (London: 1591).

amplifies Robert Garnier's prophecy of Rome's downfall to the Egyptians to introduce echoes of contemporary anti-Catholic polemic, describing Rome again as a proud, rich and imposing city, characterized by its "proud wealth and rich attire," whose turrets "pierce skies."⁷⁰ Tall buildings which represent the heyday of past civilizations also frequently suggest mutability and the passing of time, and therefore vanity. In Sonnet 123, Shakespeare mentions a pyramid as a symbol of vanity; and in Sonnet 55, he mourns the mutability of "marble" or "gilded monuments / Of Princes," or any "worke of masonry."⁷¹ Joan Pucelle's Egyptian pyramid, as a towering building evoking paganism, is thus associated with heresy, idolatry, and transience. Besides, it is a monument to human vanity, described as more beautiful than "*Rhodope's* or *Memphis*." The reference to Rhodope, a mountain range in Thrace, seems to be a mistake for Rhodopis, who was a Greek courtesan mentioned in Herodotus.⁷² The reference is self-damning, all the more so as Rhodopis was (in)famous for building a magnificent funereal monument to herself.⁷³

Pucelle, who herself seduces a king's son, is thus assimilated, and by her own followers themselves, to a proud courtesan who seduced a Pagan king.⁷⁴ Just as the Dauphin seems to be referring to Catholic rites which would celebrate Pucelle as a national "saint" and icon, he turns her into a symbolic equivalent of a famous courtesan—for whom he claims to be feeling burning desire (1.3.87). The figure of the holy maid inspired by the Virgin Mary is thus obscured with that of Venus, just as in 5.7 the "prophetess" is mocked as an "Inchantresse," a new "*Circe*" (5.5.23, 6) of many lovers. Joan Pucelle must be seen, therefore, as the focus of a multifaceted satire of Catholicism in the play, to be read against the context of contemporary polemic and anti-French sentiment. As for the scene of conjuration which demonizes her, it has been argued that it might have been inspired by the contemporary Berwick witch-hunt, in which the young James VI of Scotland had himself participated.⁷⁵ Joan's holy body is finally exposed as all too human and defiled, before being suppressed by fire. The play's ideological frame of reference proves unstable, however, as the

⁷⁰ See Mary Sidney Herbert, *Antonius*, II. 446–57, in *Robert Garnier in Elizabethan England*, ed. Marie-Alice Belle and Line Cottagnies (London: MHRA Publications, 2017).

⁷¹ *NOS Critical Editions*, I: 54. Square brackets ([monuments]) not retained.

⁷² 2.134–5. Herodotus also describes the Memphis pyramid (2.8). In Strabo she is said to have become a queen of Egypt, after seducing a king who had received her sandal in his lap. Strabo, *Geography*, Book XVII, 808. The story has been identified as the blueprint of the Cinderella story.

⁷³ See Burns, *King Henry VI Part I*, note, 161.

⁷⁴ It is perhaps not accidental that the Catholic villain Guise in *The Massacre at Paris* should be associated with a similar overweening pride, when sees his political ascent to conquer the throne of France as equivalent to climbing "high Peramides" (A5).

⁷⁵ Ryan, "Shakespeare, Joan," 71.

ideological polarities on which it ostensibly relies are blurred and undone. The play is, after all, a reformed play about the history of a pre-reformed England. As Woods argues, “the interpretative order offered by the association of the play’s French fighters with papistry and English nobles with reformed rationality is disrupted by the anachronism of the distinction.”⁷⁶ The anti-Catholic rhetoric is not consistently deployed in the service of the anti-French sentiment, but it is made to serve other dramatic uses in a play that is mostly concerned about the divisions between the English aristocracy which were to lead to the War of the Roses. When Gloucester calls his rival Winchester a “scarlet hypocrite” as early as in 1.3 (56), he is reminding the spectators of the corrupt Winchester’s allegiance to the Pope—but also, incidentally, of the English affiliation to medieval Catholicism. As the final scenes of *I Henry VI* show the English making their peace with the French through the marriage with Margaret of Anjou, the ideological antinomies on which the play was built become obsolete and the focus shifts to the inner divisions foreshadowing the impending civil war.

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⁷⁶ Woods argues that with “both Joan and Talbot erased from the historical script,” the play eventually reveals unsustainable binaries. *Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions*, 55.

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