

"Shine It like a Comet of Revenge": Seneca, John Studley, and Shakespeare's Joan la Pucelle

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“Shine it like a comet of revenge”:
Seneca, John Studley, and Shakespeare’s
Joan la Pucelle

M. L. STAPLETON

Wherein found, though a virgin, yet first, shamefully
rejecting her sex abominably in acts and apparel, to have
counterfeited mankind, and then, all damnably faithless,
to be a pernicious instrument to hostility and bloodshed
in devilish witchcraft and sorcery, sentence accordingly
was pronounced against her.

—Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587)

I prithee give me leave to curse awhile.

—*1 Henry VI* (c. 1589–90)¹

Critics have long been horrified by young Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*, no doubt preferring Shaw’s *Saint Joan* (or the misty eyes of Ingrid Bergman) as the more “faithful” likeness of the historical person. They have disdained Shakespeare’s spirited denigration of the French saint into Joan la Pucelle, “witch, ‘dame,’ strumpet, and trull,” part of “an ageless antifeminist tradition,” and have scolded the playwright for bad verse.² They hoped that she was not Shakespeare’s creation at all, but the work of hack collaborators.

More recent and less dismissive commentators who view Joan from a historicist or feminist perspective suggest instead that Shakespeare’s Pucelle is a significant artifact of Elizabethan culture. She may be an

emblem of Shakespeare's droll awareness of this culture seething around him, even a parody of Elizabeth exhorting the troops at Tilbury in 1588, the Armada en route. Or she may exemplify xenophobia and bellicosity on the playwright's part, evidence of Stephen Greenblatt's theory of "self-fashioning" by Renaissance authors, "achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile." Joan has become, in the words of Lavatch in *All's Well That Ends Well*, "like a barber's chair that fits all buttocks" (2.2.17).³

Whether analyzed as cultural artifact or dismissed as an aborted dramatic entity, Joan is presumed to be a product of Shakespeare's primary source, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Wales* (1587).⁴ Indeed, the Pucelle of *1 Henry VI* was spawned in part by a Tudor demonology that the playwright, a man of his age as well as for all time, hatched. Yet this explanation does not account sufficiently for Shakespeare's amplification of Joan's "negative" qualities nor her vibrancy and vitality as theatre.

I will suggest a different explanation for these phenomena: the plays of Seneca and their rendition into English by John Studley, Jasper Heywood, Alexander Neville, and (editor) Thomas Newton, *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* (1581), all of which Shakespeare consulted in his apprentice phase. The works with particular resonance for *1 Henry VI* are Seneca's *Medea* and Studley's 1566 translation,⁵ both of which Shakespeare echoes, parodies, and imitates. Though he was doubtless a devoted reader of Holinshed and other texts of cultural history, he was also a dramatist who knew his classical and Tudor literary predecessors and depended upon them as foundation early in his career. To some extent, Joan la Pucelle represents a "transposition" or "reanimation" of the Senecan and Studlean *Medea*, but she is uniquely Shakespearean.⁶

I

In the sixteenth century, English imitations or "reanimations" of Seneca abounded, most of them in fourteeners. Plays such as Thomas Preston's popular *Cambyses* (1569–70) signify that the cumbersome seven-foot line was considered an appropriate medium for tragedy. Seneca himself was highly regarded as well. Newton's preface to the *Tenne Tragedies* commends "ech one" of the plays as an instrument that "sensibly, pithily, and bytingly layeth down the guerdon of filthy lust, cloaked dissimulation, and odious

treachery." Hence, this "Heathen" writer, armed with "gravity of Philosophicall sentences,"⁷ required translation for the sake of moral edification. Such an encomium suggests how thoroughly Renaissance England had institutionalized Seneca. The Latin *Medea* was performed at Cambridge in 1563.⁸ This tradition of Tudor Senecanism strongly influenced the subsequent generation of Elizabethan playwrights, the newer academic blank verse of the Sackville-Norton *Gorboduc* (c. 1562) notwithstanding.

It is generally acknowledged that Shakespeare knew Newton's *Tenne Tragedies* and had enough Latin to read Seneca. There is also some consensus that he was a bemused reader of the undergraduate John Studley's contributions to the collection: *Hippolytus*, *Agamemnon*, *Hercules Oetaeus*, and the *Medea*, all rendered into florid fourteeners.⁹ The *Tenne Tragedies* was probably Shakespeare's crib for his Latin, and its poetic form was one that Shakespeare both revered and lampooned throughout his career, from *Love's Labour's Lost* (5.2) to Hamlet's waggish "Come, the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge" (3.2.253). Laugh as he might, Shakespeare learned the *ars tragoediae* and the efficacy of strong and unconventional women characters from these writers, as he hints through Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*: "I am Revenge, sent from below" (5.2.3). Seneca Latinizes Sophocles' *Medea*; Studley inflates her. In turn, Shakespeare deflates the Tudor incarnation and reanimates *Medea* as Joan la Pucelle.

Shakespeare, like Marlowe, Kyd, and others, appreciates the blend of high rhetoric, onstage gore, and stichomythic dialogue that his Roman forebear made famous and Tudor translators attempted to emulate. At the beginning of Seneca's play, the jilted *Medea* vows to subvert Jason's intended marriage to *Creusa*:

parta iam, parta ultio est:
peperi . . .
non ibo in hostes? manibus excutiam faces
caeloque lucem.

(ME 25–28)¹⁰

Her notorious sorcery enables her to darken the sky and annex that male symbol of the power to wed, the *fax*, in pursuit of her revenge. She will channel her humiliation and rage by empowering herself. Yet *Medea*'s style is terse and supple in spite of her histrionics, absolute in its distilled

ferocity. Her verb *excitiam* [remove, extinguish], hints ominously at what will ensue. Studley's version of this passage:

Now, now, I have, I have the full reveng of all my woe, I have
 dispatcht . . .
 What shall not I with vyolence get up agaynst my foes?
 And wring out of theyr wrested hands the wedding torch so bryght?
 Shall I not force the firmament to lose his shrinking lyght?
 (TT 56)¹¹

He is moderately accurate and authentically florid in tone, although his fourteeners dissipate the syntactic and metrical tension of the Latin. Shakespeare reduces Studley and reanimates the Senecan character. In the center of his first English history play, he alludes directly to the *Medea*:

Enter [LA] PUCELLE on the top, thrusting out a torch burning

PUCELLE:

Behold, this is the happy wedding-torch
 That joineth Rouen to her countrymen,
 But burning fatal to the Talbonites.

BURGUNDY:

See, noble Charles, the beacon of our friend;
 The burning torch in yonder turret stands.

CHARLES:

Now shine it like a comet of revenge,
 A prophet to the fall of all our foes!

(1H6 3.2.26–32)

Shakespeare appropriates a Senecan emblem of phallogentric power, the wedding-torch, and transfers it to Joan by making this abstract image a physical stage prop. We can see Joan "*thrusting [it] out*" in a priapic way as she leaves the midget men gasping in her wake. She then solidifies her leadership by investing the torch with political symbolism, transforming *Medea's fax* into a guiding light for the siege of Rouen, where the French

will wed themselves to their captive countrymen. It is indeed a comet, not of revenge—but, in true Senecan fashion, of Revenge.

Shakespeare gives Joan the traditionally masculine power to (re)name, here in her own political interest. Thus she can wage war in her role as *virago*, as Senecan *monstrum* (ME 191), or perhaps as *hic mulier* or *haec vir* of misrule.¹² Her allegory of imminent political retribution complements Seneca's blood-freezing image: *parta iam, parta ultio est: / peperit* (ME 25–26): “now born, revenge is born: I have birthed it.” Both women view revenge in the metaphorical parlance of their gender, marriage, and children. Yet the images that usually reflect women's subordination actually signify power for Medea and Joan. Far from passive recipients of male seed and masculine marital hegemony, these women bring birth and marriage about. Their active verbs say no less. Furthermore, Joan's supernaturalism, arguably her most Medean attribute, foments her destructiveness and rhetorical power.¹³

II

Surely a Greco-Roman literary character notorious for sorcery, rant, and infanticide would seem to share very little indeed with a creature of Elizabethan propaganda. However, Joan's heavily stylized rhetorical posturing partakes of Medea and her sixteenth-century imitations so that her character is “a general category to be illustrated by behavior,”¹⁴ not a sophisticated entity gradually unfolding itself to us. One might even say that Shakespeare overburdens his *pucele* with Senecan conventions that border on the cliché, modify them as he might.

While Shakespeare never preserves Seneca's strict Aristotelian unity of action, he uses Joan's ten scenes to fuse the continuous clash of *1 Henry VI* into a comprehensible whole.¹⁵ The texture, then, is “classical,” with fast-paced interludes marked by frequent and frenetic exits and entrances:

A holy maid hither with me I bring,
Which, by a vision sent to her from heaven,
Ordainèd is to raise this tedious siege
And drive the English forth the bounds of France.
The spirit of deep prophecy she hath,
Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome:
What's past and what's to come she can descry.
(*IH6* 1.2.50–57)

Classical and neo-classical dramatists, from Sophocles to Addison, introduce an entering character with a descriptive set speech. The Bastard of Orleans prepares us for Joan in the same way that the *nutrix* presages the arrival of her conjuring mistress:

addit uenenis uerba non illis minus
metuenda.—Sonuit ecce uesano gradu
canitque. mundus uocibus primis tremit.
(ME 737–39)

Shee chaunts on those the magicke verse, that
workes no lesser harme,
With bustling frantickely shee stampes, and
ceaseth not to charme.

(TT 87)

Typically, Studley expands Seneca to fill his ballooning fourteeners and excises the most salient detail, here Medea's hair-raising ability to make the earth tremble with her curses. Yet Shakespeare negotiates the terrain between the master and his translating apprentice. He transfers the scrupulous nurse's wonder to an unscrupulous French count. Both characters exhibit primal fear at the supernatural powers of a woman independent enough to demonstrate her anger. Shakespeare envelops Joan in magic, mystery, and peril by allowing the nervous and bemused Bastard to couch her holiness in the language of necromancy. Even if her powers are holy enough to exceed "the nine sibyls of old Rome," such gifts are sibylline and daemonic nonetheless.

Joan's capacity for violence is Medean, and the response that such violence can elicit from an audience is necessarily vexed. One is invited to sympathize with the troubles of both characters and to decry the injustices perpetrated against them. Yet one is never allowed to ignore their occasional baldfaced evil. In *Medea*, this quality is cartoonish, and surfaces in the language of gore:

iuuat, iuuat rapuisse fraternum caput,
artus iuuat secuisse.
(ME 910–11)

O so I joy, I joy, that I smote off] my brothers head,
And slashed his members off].
(TT 94)

This is fairly rank, even for Seneca (though not unexpected of Studley), and represents the stylistic excrescence for which he was condemned. Like Euripides, he tempers empathy with the grotesque, so that the reader/audience is constantly, and usefully, off-balance. Shakespeare's Joan is possessed of the same quality:

Where I was wont to feed you with my blood
I'll lop a member off and give it you
In earnest of further benefit
So you do condescend to help me now.
(IH6 5.3.14–17)

Poor Joan barter (perhaps comically) with her friends in order to defeat the English and save herself. Yet she has had some trouble conjuring them, and these uncooperative and sulky demons take no interest in her "member[s]." Joan's image of self-mutilation seems most allusive to Medea's horrific triumph in recounting the castration of her brother: *artus . . . secuisse* (and the Studlean "lop off") creeps into Joan's despairing attempt at self-preservation: "I'll lop a member off." Again, Shakespeare usefully modifies, even parodies, his precursor. Whereas Medea gleefully recounts the emasculation of her *frater* that will assure her victory, Joan offers to sacrifice part of her body in a losing cause.

Medea lies and dissembles in several stichomythic exchanges with the men who torment her. Although her position appears oddly supine, she has the satisfaction of knowing that her falsehoods, aided by sorcery, will be believed:

C: *Fraudibus tempus petis.*
M: *Quae fraus timeri tempore exiguo potest?*
C: *Nullum ad nocendum tempus angustum est malis.*
M: *Parumne miserae temporis lacrimis negas?*
(ME 290–93; my emphasis)

Here, in the rhetorical figure known as *tradio*, Seneca declines the noun *tempus* (time) through four of its five cases. He will often allow his characters to bat a single word back and forth as part of their verbal

warplay, a favored ornament within the highly ornamental form of stichomythia. He emphasizes that time is at issue, and that Medea controls it. In an unexpected display of virtuosity, Studley imitates Seneca, but heightens the effect with another device:

CREON:

With *craft* entending some deceit thou cravst this *delay*.

MEDEA:

What *falshode* for so litle *time* be cause of terrour *may*?

CREON:

No *jot* of *time* is short ynough displeasure to *prevent*.

MEDEA:

Can not one *jot* to weeping Eyes, and trilling teares be *lent*?

(TT 68; my emphasis)

He links synonyms (“craft” and “falshode”), repeats words (“jot” and “time”), but most significantly, rhymes. Creon knows that his female prey is lying. Yet his fear of her supernaturalism and the effect of her rhetoric overmasters him into granting her request, so that he becomes prey to her. Studley succinctly demonstrates this phenomenon by mimesis: Medea rhymes her lines with Creon’s, which signifies her spell over him.

In *1 Henry VI* 5.4, Joan participates in exchanges that border on the stichomythic. She lies, we think, about her pregnancy to save her life¹⁶ as she spits words at her blustering English tormentors:

YORK:

She and the dauphin have been *juggling*.

I did imagine what would be her refuge.

WARWICK:

Well, go to; we’ll have no *bastards* live,

Especially since Charles must *father* it.

PUCELLE:

You are *deceived*; my *child* is none of his:

It was *Alençon* that *enjoyed* my love.

YORK:

Alençon, that notorious *Machiavel*?
It dies, and if it had a thousand lives.

PUCELLE:

O, give me leave, I have *deluded* you:
'Twas neither Charles nor yet the duke I named,
But Reignier, King of Naples, that *prevailed*.
(*IH6* 5.4.68–78; my emphasis)

Brief passages of iambic pentameter create the effect of short, angry verbal bursts. Shakespeare imitates Senecan technique, without *tradductio*, and without Studley's accompanying heavy repetition and rhyme. Instead, his characters are literally "juggling" groups of related words. In fact, Joan uses verbal acrobatics to encircle the powerful men who surround her. The English coarsely discuss the "father" of what they depersonalize as a "bastard," the thrice-named "it." Yet, to Joan, the "it" is a "child," and the "father," with whom she "enjoyed" sexual pleasure or who fought for her hand and "prevailed" as if she were the sought-after *midons* in a troubadour *canço*, has a name (*Alençon*, among others). Victimized as *Medea* is not, Joan nevertheless rewrites the text of her enemies, encompassing their symbol of deception ("Machiavel") with her own terminology ("deceived"; "deluded"), attempting to subvert their truth with her rhetorical spell.

Again, Joan's necromancy shows her most obvious debt to *Medea*. Michael Hattaway argues that Joan "turns to witchcraft only in despair, and there is no evidence earlier in the text to support the English view that her victories were through supernatural agency."¹⁷ Indeed, Shakespeare's ambiguity regarding this matter may suggest that the English use their accusations as mere propaganda. Talbot refers to Joan as *Hecate* (*IH6* 3.2.64) and as "that witch, that damnèd sorceress" (38); even Burgundy contributes "vile fiend" (45). Men find a forceful woman intimidating, with or without witchcraft. However, the denigrating "network of sexual and distasteful images"¹⁸ that points to witchcraft early in the first four-and-a-half acts of *1 Henry VI* may also be powerful indicators of Joan's "supernatural agency" that we find in 5.3:

Now help, ye charming spells and periapts,
And ye choice spirits that admonish me,

And give me signs of future accidents.

Thunder

You speedy helpers, that are substitutes
Under the lordly monarch of the north,
Appear, and aid me in this enterprise!

Enter Fiends

(2-7)

Like Faustus, Joan can certainly conjure. Yet even though the appearance of her "helpers" argues their "accustomed diligence" to her (9), the recalcitrance suggested in Shakespeare's stage direction, "*They walk, and speak not*" (12), also implies that since Joan's demons refuse to brave the English, they will desert her. She may even serve as a parody of Medea, whose steadfast helpers we never see.

Joan shares some of Medea's sibylline characteristics. If she deigns to submit, she does so in her familiar imperative mood:

Then lead me hence, with whom I leave my curse:
May never glorious sun reflex his beams
Upon the country where you make abode;
But darkness and the gloomy shade of death
Environ you, till mischief and despair
Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves!

(5.4.86-91)

Far from the simple rant and frustration of a "little woman," Joan presides magnificently over the end of her play, accurately fortelling that the Wars of the Roses will environ England in darkness and the gloomy shade of death. In this way, her presence and curses are Medean:

Rise up yee hiddeous divelish Feendes, as dreadfull as yee weare,
When unto me in wedlocke state yee did sometime appeare.
Worke yee, worke yee, the dolefull death of this new wedded Wyfe,
And martir yee this Father in lawe: depryve of breath and lyfe
King Creons ruthfull family:

(*TT* 55-56)

Joan's cry to the "choice spirits" echoes Studley's invocation to the "divelish Feendes." Her curse represents a similar death of patriarchal structures, of "Creons ruthfull family." What Joan and Medea cannot keep, they must destroy, be it family, stereotypical feminine dread (*pelle femineos metus* [ME 42]), or gender itself, like Lady Macbeth: "unsex me here" (*Mac.* 1.4.41). In this, the utterances of both women shine like comets of Revenge. With her torch, Joan becomes its "prophet" (*IH6* 3.2.32).

III

Critics in the first half of the twentieth century routinely disparaged Shakespeare's early rhetorical style as trope-encrusted and superfluous. Yet revisionists who would resuscitate the first plays seek to be less prescriptive. They simply attempt to account for the functions of the early speech modes, Joan's rhetoric not excepted. Her chief power, as John Blaupied says, is "pre-eminently a superior use of language."¹⁹ We can say the same thing about Medea. Her rhetoric is at least as important as her witchcraft. She mocks Jason and his language of imprecation (the very mode she has been speaking in to press for time) as she kills their second son before his eyes: "*Misereri iubes. / bene est, peractum est*" (ME 1018–19). Or, as Studley colloquially translates:

In craving this thou speakst, that I should shew thee some releefe,
Well goodinough, all this is done.

(TT 98)

I think of Joan at the recovery of Rouen, exulting over the (hungry) English, whose food stores she has just appropriated for her side: "Good morrow, gallants; want ye corn for bread?" (*IH6* 3.2.41). She counts coup, mocking them as they have mocked her. She displays Medean verbal power when she waxes grandiloquent over the corpse of Talbot—to demolish Lucy's very magnification of him:

Here's a silly stately style indeed:
The Turk, that two-and-fifty kingdoms hath,
Writes not so tedious a style as this.

Him that thou magnifi'st with all these titles
 Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet.
 (4.2.72–76)

Indeed she “reject[s] the masculine historical ideals and significance that Lucy’s glorious names invoke”²⁰ and imitates in words what Medea performs in killing Jason’s patrilineal future, his sons. E. F. Watling’s description of Euripides’s Medea, “the woman rebellious against the mastery of man or pitifully bruised and bereaved by the cruelties of man’s world,”²¹ can apply to Shakespeare’s Joan as well as to Seneca’s reincarnation. Both characters rebel against a patriarchy whose “cruelties” have “bruised” them and viciously discount the vanquished men whom they have felt to be oppressive.

Approximately a quarter century of Elizabethan drama elapses between Studley’s *Medea* and *1 Henry VI* (c. 1566–90). Dramatic verse compresses itself into iambic pentameter, and its practitioners become less tolerant of stylistic excrement. It improves. Still, the playwrights often pay homage to Seneca by adorning their lines with the flowers of rhetoric, even if the Latin Seneca is actually sparer with these or integrated them more than a reading of Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* would indicate:

O false Lorenzo, are these thy flattering looks?
 Is this the honor that thou didst my son?
 And Balthazar, bane to thy soul and me,
 Was this the ransom he reserved thee for?
 Woe to the cause of these constrained wars,
 Woe to thy baseness and captivity,
 Woe to thy birth, thy body, and thy soul,
 Thy cursèd father, and thy conquered self!
 (3.7.58–65)²²

Suffice it to say that this passage is an encyclopedia of tropes and figures. To imitate in English a language where compression is the norm simply demands expansion and exaggeration of effect, as Studley demonstrates.

Yet Shakespeare achieves his Senecan reanimation by poetic compression. Joan’s adornments are minimal, but integral to the verbal power of her plain, blunt style, because they help convert her onstage auditors to her viewpoint:

Care is no cure, but rather corrosive
 For things that are not to be remedied.
 (1H6 3.3.3–4)

Here she must convince the French that the English recoup of Rouen is less fatal than despairing its loss. If her “methods are reprehensible, her motives are laudable and correct.”²³ Her species of alliteration, which the Elizabethan rhetorician George Puttenham calls “*Parimion*, or the figure of like letter,” expresses this idea: care is actually corrosive. Similarly, her appeal to the renegade Burgundy later in the scene, “Strike those that hurt and hurt not those that help” (3.3.53), a mixture of *parimion* and “*Antimetabole*, or the Counterchange,”²⁴ a type of inverse repetition, helps fulfill Charles’s directive that Joan “enchant [Burgundy] with thy words” (3.3.40). She conflates *hurt* and *help* in the mind of her quarry, and the French reclaim him. Joan understands her power—and what she cannot do. When York mocks her as a transforming Circe, her retort, “Changed to a worser shape thou canst not be” (5.3.35), functions as both succinct insult and a recognition of her own necromantic limits. Rhetoric serves as Joan’s most potent witchcraft.

Seneca textures his lean and hungry style with *sententiae*, or maxims. He relies heavily upon these rhetorical figures, which rhetoricians and scholars have classified extensively according to form and subject.²⁵ Most of Medea’s maxims occupy a single line and help form dialogues that “proceed with a spare and concentrated ferocity.”²⁶ Here Studley habitually forgoes accurate translation; the ungainly fourteeners swallow the Senecan diamond:

Fortuna fortes metuit, ignauos premit . . .
 Numquam potest non esse uirtuti locus.

(ME 159; 161)

The valiaunt heart dame Fortune yet durst never harme with wrong,
 But dreading dastards down she drives. . . .
 The show of study valiant heart, at any time doth shyne.

(TT 62)

Medea uses maxims in verbal combat. She enunciates her own bravery to the nurse without explaining how she will demonstrate it. She begs the

question because of her introspective nature and the formidable task ahead. There is no other way to trick her auditors into listening; there is no better way to disguise her intentions.

Joan is similarly fueled by maxims. "Of all base passions, fear is most accursed" (*IH6* 5.2.18). Such sayings confer status and authority upon their bearer, even if the bearer has had neither:

Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till, by broad spreading, it disperse to nought.
(1.2.133–35)

This illustrates an important function of the maxim: to serve as a rhetorical trick to convince one's audience of something it is not prepared to believe. In a speech central to her play,²⁷ Joan's *omnia uanitas* homily effectively spurs her disheartened peers.

Joan and Medea are masterful orators with the dangerous power to persuade. They inform their public speaking with two combined modes of declamation: imprecation and exhortation (which Shakespeare will use for greater effect in *Henry V*, especially the King's "Once more unto the breach," 3.1). Joan uses both in the conversion of Burgundy:

Look on thy country, look on fertile France,
And see the cities and the towns defaced
By wasting ruin of the cruel foe
As looks the mother on her lowly babe
When death doth close his tender-dying eyes.
See, see the pining malady of France;
Behold the wounds, the most unnatural wounds
Which thou thyself hast given her woeful breast.
O turn thy edgèd sword another way:
Strike those that hurt and hurt not those that help.
(*IH6* 3.3.44–53)

She appeals to his patriotism, playing upon his guilt for turning renegade, personifying death and France herself, comparing him to a mother and the nation to a child. Her figures of repetition ("look," "see," "wounds," and "hurt"), as well as her alliteration, link the ideas in Burgundy's mind

that Joan wants him to remember. As Catherine Belsey notes, Joan “puts heart into” her compatriots.²⁸ Her appeal is no less deceitful than Medea’s is to Creon:

talem sciebas esse, cum genua attigi
fidemque supplex praesidis dextra peti;
terra hac miseris angulum et sedem rogo
latebrasque uiles.

(ME 247–50)

Thou knowst that I was such an one when couring low I lay,
Before thy feete in humble wise and did entreating pray,
They gracious goodnes mee to graunt some succour at thy hand.
For me a wretch and wretched Babes I aske within this lande
Some cotage base.

(TT 66–67)

Medea is simultaneously submissive and aggressive as she plays forcefully upon her tormentor’s emotions. Her imprecation is a type of exhortation; she exhorts as she entreats. Whereas Joan’s mother and child are metaphorical, Medea’s pairing is literal. Yet both use this archetypal image for personal and political ends to manipulate their powerful male auditors: Joan for France and her greater glory, Medea for her alien status and her private revenge.

IV

Joan’s primary use of rhetoric is to forge an identity among those who would deny her one. She literally invents herself with lies and the truth. Likewise, Medea—witch, Other, and alien—uses her verbal power in her war against patriarchy to fashion a self. Of all Senecan women she is the most likely to use the first person, which demonstrates her “introspection and prideful revelation of self.”²⁹

Seneca outlines Medea’s process of self-discovery and creation in small verbal increments. When the *nutrix* initially advises her mistress to accept her banishment quietly, her retort is *Medea superest* (ME 166), which establishes her pride of spirit and self-confidence. Studley’s rendition, “Medea yet is left (to much)” (TT 62), would be better translated, “Medea

overcomes”—as she will. A few lines later, Seneca heightens this conflict between being and becoming, or actuality and potentiality, in a distilled stichomythic exchange:

N[UTRIX]: Medea—M[EDEA]: Fiam.
(ME 171)

Studley does not translate this, but Seneca seems to mean “I will become Medea.” The darkness of this utterance is unfathomable, but Medea clearly equates identity with deeds. Her problem: if the deeds she wishes to perpetrate are horrible, what, then, will she be?

perge, nunc aude, incipe
quidquid potest Medea, quidquid non potest.
(ME 566–67)

March forth, now venture on, fall to, both what lyeth in thy myght,
And also what doth passe thy power.
(TT 80)

Like Macbeth, who dares “do all that may become a man” (*Mac.* 1.7), Medea must confront “what doth passe [her] power.” She rewrites the definition of herself and explodes the usual boundaries of such a process. The logical conclusion to this rhetorical progression arrives at play’s end, when she hovers on the cusp of her revenge:

Medea nunc sum; creuit ingenium malis.
(ME 910)

Still conversant with wicked feates Medea am I made.
(TT 94)

As she has warned us, and now demonstrates, this is her essence: to accomplish her revenge, to violate the taboos of her society, to be evil.

Joan, the *paysanne* surrounded by doubting, imperious, aristocratic men, must also create herself with words. Like Medea, she is relentlessly self-referential, as her first speech exemplifies. Its nineteen lines, studded with seventeen personal pronouns, ends with a boast:

My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st,
 And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex;
 Resolve on this: thou shalt be fortunate
 If thou receive me for thy warlike mate.
 (1H6 1.2.89–92)

Although her rhetoric smacks of the *miles gloriosus*, she actually takes up her own challenge. Indeed, she “deflates male boasts and engages in a validating duel with a would-be lover”³⁰ as she amazes the French, who doubt her, and triumphs over Talbot and the English: “Come, come, ’tis *only I* that must disgrace thee” (1.5.8); and, “O’ertake *me* if thou canst: *I* scorn thy strength” (15). When she helps recover Orléans, she takes full credit in epic third-person style: “Joan la Pucelle hath performed *her* word” (1.6.3; emphasis mine throughout). In *1 Henry VI*, she creates, then advertises herself: *I, me, mine*.

Virago, hic mulier, independent woman: Joan makes herself heroic in the same masculine aristocratic way that her enemies do. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson suggests that Joan “offers relief from idealistic codes of behavior—and thus from the need to mourn their demise,”³¹ as if Joan did not indulge in her own brand of idealism or as if idealism were something one needed “relief” from. Phyllis Rackin, in a similar new historicist vein, sees Joan as a “nominalist,” one who places “life above patriarchal lineage and personal honor.”³² Why, then, does she constantly insist on her value and build up her pedigree? Joan actually appropriates (or “co-opts”) male militaristic behavior. The important symbol of her armor says no less. She insists on her lineage at the last:

First let me tell you whom you have condemned:
 Not one begotten of a shepherd swain
 But issued from the progeny of kings;
 Virtuous and holy, chosen from above
 By inspiration of celestial grace
 To work exceeding miracles on earth.
 (1H6 5.4.36–41)

Many literary heroes account for themselves in a fashion that suggests the *miles gloriosus*; few women characters indulge themselves in this practice. Aside from gender reversal, Shakespeare’s amusing improvisation upon

this convention features Joan's claim for religious status without the requisite Christian humility. She is regal and royal, from the "progeny of kings," and, for that matter, inspired by celestial grace. Ultimately, her claim for heavenly genesis is as false as Medea's corresponding boast is true, but their rhetorical posturing is similar:

quondam nobili fulsi patre
 auoque clarum Sole deduxi genus . . .
 generosa, felix, decore regali potens
 fulsi.

(ME 209–10; 217–18)

By high and noble parentage my bryght renowne doth shyne.
 From Phoebus eake my Graundsire great deryved in my ligne. . . .
 I being thus of noble Race, and in an happy plyght,
 With glorious glosse of pryncely pomp in honour shining bright.
 (TT 65)

Medea uses her lineage to make herself superior to the men who torment her and treat her below her station. Joan's same stance (again, perhaps parodic) may simply represent "the subversive female voice" that "is never allowed to prevail for more than a moment."³³ Yet her subversion of male authority prevails long enough to confound the men at court and in battle, and she makes her boasts true while she can: "This day is ours, as many more shall be" (*IH6* 1.5.18). Even Talbot, her chief detractor, gapes at her accomplishments: "I know not where I am or what I do" (20); "A woman clad in armor chaseth men" (3). Like Medea, Joan must vanquish men in order to claim, *I am*.

Joan births no children and kills no one; if Medea is a woman warrior, she is of a different species than the Pucelle. Joan, a political performer, literally "all action" as her stage directions attest, lacks the introspection necessary for a soliloquy. Seneca distills Medea's action into one horrifying gesture, and her "politics" are fiercely personal and almost entirely introspective. Yet Joan and Medea share similar gender politics: they invent themselves with rhetoric in order to empower themselves against the hostile male world. They possess a fierce economy of statement, and their voices are weapons. When Jason, swollen with sarcasm, asks Medea if she blames him for the failure of their love, her reply is succinct: "Et

caedem et dolos" (ME 496). The murder and grief to come is Jason's own fault. Equally blunt, Joan hisses to York as she proceeds to the scaffold: "I prithee give me leave to curse awhile" (IH6 5.3.43). It is not a request, but a command, and a kind of triumph. Since men accord Medea and Joan neither status nor dignity, both women forge a necessary self-fashioning rhetoric, one that makes them shine like comets of Revenge.

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For R. A. F.:

His part is play'd, and though it were too short,
He did it well.

(*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 5.4.102–03).

NOTES

1. My edition of *1 Henry VI* is the revised *New Cambridge* version ed. Michael Hat-taway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990). All other Shakespeare: the *Riverside* edition of G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). The quotation from the *Chronicles* follows *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, ed. Richard Hosley (New York: Capricorn, 1968) 157.

2. These responses belong to (respectively) Andrew Cairncross, *The First Part of Henry VI* (London: Methuen, 1962) xl, and David Bevington, "The Domineering Female in *1 Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 53. In the same spirit, A. L. French: "God may have 'assigned' her to be 'the English scourge' but, if so, He made a bad choice." See "Joan of Arc and *Henry VI*," *English Studies* 49 (1968): 427. M. Mincoff characterizes the style of Act I as "flat, absurd, tautological," marked by unnecessary inversion of word order and "staccato abruptness of transition from line to line or phrase to phrase." See "The Composition of *Henry VI, Part I*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16 (1965): 281.

3. Feminists and new historicists have shown an interest in Joan, writing about her with sensitivity and grace. Phyllis Rackin argues that Joan's crossdressing signified supernaturalism to Shakespeare's audience. See *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 200. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson reminds us that a *virago* was, to the Elizabethans, "a woman strong beyond the conventional expectations for her sex," and speculates that Joan in armor may have been seen as a parody of Elizabeth at Tilbury. See "Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988): 49 and 55–56.

Quotations from Greenblatt: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 9. Although he does not write about *1 Henry VI*, many of his arguments could be applied to Shakespeare's composition of this play: "Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch . . . must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (9–10). The first critic to argue extensively that Joan exemplifies the alien

and hostile Other: Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).

Other recent work on the play worth perusing: Marilyn Williamson's "When Men Are Rul'd by Women: Shakespeare's First Tetralogy," *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 41–59, is a spirited and thorough feminist reading of the women in the first four history plays, including Joan. Roger Warren, in "An Aspect of Dramatic Technique in *Henry VI*," *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 75–84, judges Joan to be "a varied, interesting dramatic character" blessed with "clear-eyed peasant directness" (77). In Michael Hattaway's introduction to the aforementioned *New Cambridge* edition of *1 Henry VI*, he suggests that "Joan may, in fact, be the tragic figure in this play" (27). For an excellent summary of twentieth-century theatre history of Joan as a sympathetic figure, see Richard F. Hardin, "Chronicles and Mythmaking in Shakespeare's *Joan of Arc*," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 35 ff.

4. Yet see Hardin on Shakespeare's "denigration" of Joan: "far from 'following his sources,' as Shakespeare's defenders sometimes say, the playwright enthusiastically compounded the felony" (30). He also argues (25–29) that Shakespeare used the 1587 (second) edition of Holinshed, the work of collaborators, which is considerably more negative in its portrait of the Pucelle than the 1578 (first) edition.

5. This is E. F. Watling's date for the play. See *Seneca: Four Tragedies and Octavia* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1966) 302.

6. I take the term "transposition" from Julia Kristeva, who, in attempting to account for the phenomenology and psychology of literary composition, prefers this term to "intertextuality" as she disdains the notion of "sources" in general: "If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated." *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Walker (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 60.

For "reanimation," see Thomas M. Greene's *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982): "[E]ach imitative literary work contains by definition what might be called a revivalist initiative, a gesture that signals the intent of reanimating an earlier text or texts situated on the far side of a rupture" (37).

7. *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English* (London, 1581; Rpt. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1964) 5.

8. H. B. Charlton, *The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1921) cxli.

9. The general uncertainty on the matter of Shakespeare's debt to Seneca is evidence enough that the question of influence can never be definitively answered. A starting point: T. S. Eliot's seminal essays, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" and "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," both in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950) 51–90 and 107–20. On the relationship between *Medea* and *Macbeth*, see E. E. Kellett, "Shakspere as a Borrower," *Suggestions: Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1923) 33–56; Robert R. Reed, "The Fatal Elizabethan Sisters in *Macbeth*," *Notes and Queries* 200 (1955): 425–27; and, Kenneth Muir, "Seneca and Shakespeare," *Notes and Queries* 201 (1956): 243–44. For a parallel between *Medea* and the *Henry VI* plays, see Karl Schmidt, "Margareta von Anjou und bei Shakespeare," *Palaestra* 54 (1906) 36. For speculations on the issue of general Senecan influence, see T. W. Baldwin's *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1944); Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1954); and R. F. Hill, "Shakespeare's Early Tragic Mode," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958): 455–69. For an exhaustive

bibliography on the same topic, see John W. Velz, *Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition: A Critical Guide to Commentary 1660–1960* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1968).

On Shakespeare's knowledge of Studley, there seems to be more agreement. E. M. Spearing's early edition of and commentary upon Studley laid the foundation. See *The Elizabethan Translators of Seneca* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1912) and *Studley's Translations of Seneca's Agamemnon and Medea, Materialien zur Kunde des älteren englischen Dramas* 38, ed. W. Bang (Louvain, 1913). Also: Cornell M. Dowlin, "Two Shakspeare Parallels in Studley's Translation of Seneca's Agamemnon," *Shakespeare Association Bulletin* 14 (1939): 256; Ernest Schanzer, "Hercules Oetaeus and King John," *Notes and Queries* 201 (1956): 509–10; Anthony B. Taylor, "Echoes of Golding's Ovid in Studley's Translations of Seneca," and "The Elizabethan Seneca and Two Notes on Shakespeare and Seneca," *Notes and Queries* ns 34 (1987): 185–88 and 193–95. In the monumental *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1975), Geoffrey Bullough lists Studley's *Agamemnon* as a possible source for *Hamlet* (7: 159 f). Shakespeare's mockery of (rather than admiration for) Studley is generally taken for granted. See E. Koppel, "Bottoms 'Ercles' und Studleys Übersetzung von Senecas *Hercules Oetaeus*," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 47 (1911): 190–91.

10. My edition of Seneca's tragedies is Otto Zwielerin's (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986); I use his line numbers. My acronym for *Medea* is ME.

11. All references to Studley's translation are taken from the Indiana UP reprint mentioned in note 7. My acronym for this text is TT. Since this edition has no line numbers, Arabic numerals in these citations refer to page numbers. Each play is individually paginated.

12. Two recent critics apply the term *virago* to Joan and discuss its implications for her play and for the role of women in sixteenth-century England. See Jackson (49), and Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 105. For the *Haec Vir* and *Hic Mulier* pamphlet controversy of 1620, see *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*, eds. Katherine U. Henderson and Barbara F. McManus (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1985).

13. Hattaway classifies Joan's rhetoric as "Marlovian" (24).

14. Robert Y. Turner, "Characterization in Shakespeare's Early History Plays," *English Literary History* 31 (1964): 245.

15. On the speed and fury of the first tetralogy, see Warren, *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 75–76, and Joseph Candido, "Getting Loose in the *Henry VI* Plays," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984): 392–406.

16. Williamson 44.

17. *The First Part of King Henry VI* 24.

18. Carol McGinnis Kay, "Traps, Slaughter, and Chaos: A Study of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Plays," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 5 (1972): 3.

19. John Blanpied, "'Art and Baleful Sorcery': The Counterconsciousness of *Henry VI, Part I*," *Studies in English Literature* 15 (1975): 223.

20. Rackin 153.

21. *Seneca* 20.

22. The text is taken from *Drama of the English Renaissance, Volume I: The Tudor Period*, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976) 187.

23. Paul Dean, "Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Trilogy and Elizabethan 'Romance' Histories: The Origins of a Genre," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (1982): 38.

24. See *The Arte of English Poesie*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols., ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904) 2: 168 and 170.

25. Howard Canter categorizes Seneca's maxims: conduct, worth, base deeds, rulers and despots, war, sorrow / anger, kinship, *amor*, *fortuna*, *aurea mediocritas*, *fatum*, death, deception, mutability. See *Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca* (1925; rpt. New York: Johnson, 1970) 93 ff.

26. Thomas Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 44.

27. See Mincoff (285) and Jackson (41) for opposite analyses of this speech.

28. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985) 183.

29. Rosenmeyer 187.

30. Jackson 53.

31. Jackson 59.

32. Rackin 155–56. Rackin sees Joan's "earthy, skeptical speech" as the antithesis of the "patriarchal historiographic tradition" (209).

33. Rackin 159.