

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



European Unions: The Spanish Wife and the Scottish Widow in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* and Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*

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The aphoristic notion that early modern royal marriage alliances served to strengthen diplomatic ties and add to the prestige of ruling dynasties by forging links with the great royal houses of neighbouring countries has long held considerable currency, particularly amongst historians. Yet we might ask whether this historiographic assumption finds cultural ratification in the history plays which spanned the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries: the early modern period in which monarchs were the centre of political power and their actions – and marriages – interrogated (albeit, perforce, retroactively) in the public forum of the stage. Certainly, Cissie C. Fairchilds has warned that the possibility of divided loyalties was of persistent concern in a period which saw the birth of the nation state.¹ Thus, the pride felt by citizens in having a ‘great royal princess’ on their nation’s throne was tempered by the potential of her father’s country coming into conflict with that of her husband.²

Furthermore, recent scholarship has taken into account the rise of English nationalism and identity in the early seventeenth century, as a confident, Protestant nation began to celebrate not only its statehood, but the comparative virtues of native women. As a concomitant, Jardine has recognised that the unpopularity of foreign marriages – at least in royal circles – had developed in the late sixteenth century; she cites, for example, the almost universal disapproval amongst the English populace of Elizabeth I’s proposed French marriage.³ However, the diplomatic role of queen consorts as opposed to kings

¹ Cissie C. Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), pp. 268-9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³ Lisa Jardine and John Watkins, *Shakespeare’s Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 78.

was of a different complexion. It is thus necessary to revise our understanding of the ways in which marriage alliances to European princesses were considered, debated and problematized in the period. Indeed, when looking at depictions of marriages with European princesses on the early modern stage, it is striking that playwrights such as Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Ford were apt to adapt histories in which European alliances were either failing or doomed, whilst native alliances bore celebrated fruit. In the late-sixteenth century, indeed, one can find the seeds of distrust of foreign marriages; even whilst the gentle Catherine de Valois is used to promote Anglo-French peace in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599), one can find a subversive Queen Isabella conspiring against her husband in Marlowe's *Edward II* (1593).⁴ It is later, however, that native marriages are presented as positive alternatives, and consequently we might consider the contrasting marriages of Queen Katherine of Aragon and her successor, Anne Bullen, in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* (1623) and the plethora of marriages (including a looming alliance between Arthur Tudor and Princess Katherine) in Ford's late entry in the historical canon, *Perkin Warbeck* (published 1634).⁵

The collaborative *Henry VIII*, which marked the final Shakespearean history play, depicts the fading star of the Spanish Queen Katherine and the triumphant ascendancy of Queen Anne. Katherine's eventual eclipse notwithstanding, the period of her marriage covered in the play presents a complicated figure, and so simplistic, binary oppositions between the failed and the successful queens must be resisted.⁶ Katherine, at the outset, is Queen of England and in that role she provides a counterbalance to the machinations of the

⁴ Though beyond the scope of the present discussion, a cursory look at the history plays of the late-sixteenth century certainly suggests that the views on foreign marriage alliances invited are ambivalent and mixed.

⁵ Alternatively titled *All is True*, *Henry VIII* was first published in the First Folio of 1623 as a history play. Nevertheless, Gordon McMullan provides compelling evidence that the play was performed as early as 1613, and engages with the parlous state of the English Reformation: an ongoing and contentious process at that time. McMullan also provides useful background on modern versus Jacobean attitudes towards categorisation of dramatic modes. See Gordon McMullan (ed.), 'Introduction', *King Henry VIII* (London: Arden, 2007), pp. 60-3; 111. Although *Perkin Warbeck* was first published in quarto in 1634, the play's date of composition has long been an area of scholarly discussion; see Brian W. Schneider, *The Framing Text in Early Modern English Drama: 'Whining' Prologues and 'Armed' Epilogues* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 226. Schneider gives a generous potential period of composition, between 1629 and 1634. In tracing the history of the play, Peter Ure posits a dating of 1633; Lisa Hopkins agrees, citing the play's echoes of a contemporary succession crisis, in addition to an irresistible topical scandal in the affair of the Earl of Straithern, as providing the drama's backdrop. This makes 1633 the likely date. See Peter Ure, (ed.) 'Introduction', *Perkin Warbeck* (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. xxviii-xxxv; Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 138-9.

⁶ Whilst it might seem odd to consider Anne Boleyn's marriage a success, it must be noted that, in the post-Elizabethan period, her reputation had been revised in light of the long and much-vaunted reign of her daughter. Indeed, it had become polarised between martyr to Protestants and schismatic to Catholics.

corrupt Wolsey. She is undoubtedly a political figure, temperately appealing to Henry as she attempts to play a role in ‘attending to sickness in the body politic’ (1.2).⁷ Yet, as Gordon McMullan notes, Katherine remains inescapably Roman Catholic.⁸ Indeed, she appeals directly ‘unto the Pope’ when her role as an influential member of the royal family is compromised (2.4.117). However, the text casts no particular judgement on Katherine’s eagerness to help steer the ship of state. This may be due to what McMullan recognises as her posthumous popularity and the fact that she was spared the vituperation aimed at other Catholic figures of the period.

Nevertheless, as a European princess, her interference in English politics at least offers an interesting contrast to Anne’s timid passivity. The sole contribution of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Anne Bullen* to the formation of a new, stable and perdurable political landscape is her fecundity. Indeed, it is as her marriage enters stormy waters that the divisions in Katherine’s loyalties come to the fore; not only does she resist the King’s will under cloak of loyalty, but she appeals to her foreign, spiritual father. Katherine’s divided loyalties become a matter of her own political survival: an expedience which ultimately makes her position as an English queen untenable. Although it is, partly, her Catholicism which ultimately marks Katherine out as an outsider, it is impossible to ignore the inextricable link between religion and politics in the period, nor Katherine’s own plaintive appeal at her trial, in which she actively invokes her foreignness:

I am a most poor woman and a stranger,
Born out of your dominions, having here
No judge indifferent nor no more assurance
Of equal friendship and proceeding.
(2.4.13-16)

Pitiable as her pleas might be, it is not difficult to read in them a significant rejection of her adopted nation’s laws and judicial processes. It is a rejection which can only further serve to divide her from both Henry and her royal estate. Emphatically underscoring her resolve, Katherine’s trenchant appeal to an authority higher than that of her husband and her country, coupled with her refusal to respond to cries recognising her as Queen of England and recalling her to the court (2.4.123) dramatically represent the ultimate failure of the match between Spain and England. Contemplating her reduced state and looming death, it is telling that a reflective Katherine laments, ‘Would I had never trod this English

⁷ William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *King Henry VIII*, ed. by Gordon McMullan (London: Arden, 2007). All quotations are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically.

⁸ McMullan, pp. 60-63; 122.

earth' (3.1.143). It is interesting to note that, whilst the historical Katherine was in fact granted the title of Princess Dowager (as Henry's elder brother's widow), the play's Katherine quips that she has adopted the role of a housewife (3.1.24) following her estrangement from Henry. Lisa Jardine has argued that early modern women were 'increasingly constrained by an ideology of duty and obedience which removed from them the most elementary possibilities for rebellion against traditional serving roles'.⁹ *Henry VIII's* Katherine, having been stripped of her status as a queen and compelled to accept an even greater diminution than her historical counterpart, masterfully turns it into a means of rejecting it. Even as her marriage is nullified she becomes ever more eager to acknowledge her status as a subservient married woman. Being a housewife without a husband, the blame for her situation is turned on Henry; further, audiences are invited to consider just who such a housewife might serve.

As a result of Katherine's wish never to have set foot in England and her self-proclaimed status as a housewife (short of a husband and master), thorny questions arise as to whether an imported European royal bride's national allegiance might be diminished by the failure of her marriage, or whether her foreignness and links with European potentates represent a latent threat which could rise to the fore at any moment of political crisis. In her subsequent invocation of the authoritative, historic basis for her marriage, Katherine inadvertently harms her cause in the misguided belief that she is defending it:

My father, King of Spain, was reckoned one
The wisest prince that there had reigned by many
A year before. It is not to be questioned
That they had gathered a wise council to them
Of every realm, that did debate this business,
Who deemed our marriage lawful
(3.1.46-51)

To Ivo Kamps, Katherine's grasp of 'Tudor law, culture, and decorum' is unimpeachable; she 'has the authority of history and custom on her side'.¹⁰ That may well be the case (and it might account for the sympathy Katherine is likely to elicit from audiences), but it must also be noted that, in drawing attention to her Spanish father, Katherine unconsciously underscores her foreignness and calls into question her allegiance. Further, by implicating

⁹ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping On Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 68.

¹⁰ Ivo Kamps, 'Historiography and Legitimation in *Henry VIII*', *College English* 58:2 (1996), 192-215 (p. 203).

the pan-European negotiations which led to her (now displeasing) marriage, she invites a dim view of the international marriage market. Whilst claiming the authority she feels to be inherent in the council 'of every realm', she implicitly reveals a stark conclusion: the wise councils of Europe, in brokering royal marriage alliances, are apt to act in ways which result in disharmony within England. This questioning of international royal marriage-brokering represents, therefore, a break with the tradition which saw England require continental influence in domestic governance and dynastic prestige in the form of European royal blood. Such a tradition, the play suggests, has proven to have harmed the natural strength and ability of an emergent English nation.

Yet Katherine's stalwart belief in the righteousness of her cause and its political foundations is understandable. In their study of the diplomatic function of royal wives, Sluga and James note that 'during the pre-modern centuries [...] royal marriages defined the political map of Europe [and] it was inevitable that royal wives and their ladies in waiting were recognised by their contemporaries as major diplomatic actors'.¹¹ Nevertheless, as Karen Robertson has noted, despite the fact of masculine writers engaging often with 'women's function as linkage and connection [...] the connections formed did not necessarily guarantee that affines would demonstrate loyalty to their new kin'.¹² Avowing loyalty according to the perception of her station as Queen of England, Katherine is simultaneously loyal to a fading system of international political intrigue and disloyal to her husband's emerging Anglophile desires.

If one accepts that Katherine represents the potential of European brides to appeal to external forces, in addition to their propensity to self-identify as 'strangers', the play's presentation of Englishness is noteworthy. In addition to the fading Queen's exasperation with England and its denizens, the product of Henry's rapid remarriage to the English Anne Bullen is celebrated with a pun, as Henry thanks Cranmer for his voluble panegyrics to the infant Elizabeth, remarking, 'thank ye heartily; so shall this lady, / When she has so much English' (5.4.13-14): a reference to her future mastery of her native tongue, the double-dose of English blood inherited from her parents, and an allusion to the breadth of support across the realm which contemporary audiences knew Elizabeth was to enjoy. Certainly, this was not a concept which escaped the notice of the historical Elizabeth, who

¹¹ Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James, *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics Since 1500* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 3.

¹² Karen Robertson, 'Tracing Women's Connections in a Letter from Elizabeth Raleigh', in S. Fry and K. Robertson (eds.) *Maids, Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 160.

used it to her rhetorical advantage, declaring, ‘I am the most English woman of the kingdom. Was I not born in this realm? Were my parents born in any foreign country?’¹³

As Katherine’s foreignness, deployed in her own rhetorical strategy, becomes bound up in her downfall, the dramatic foundation for an English alternative is laid. The play’s celebration of Englishness as a counterpoint to foreignness, however, requires further investigation. The literal meaning of Henry’s comment is, of course, that Elizabeth will come to speak her native language. Yet the play, which shows a preoccupation with the spoken word, draws a sharp distinction between linguistic fluency and separate, innate Englishness. Katherine, a fluent English-speaker, uses the language performatively; it is a political prop which she believes she can turn to her advantage. As she advises Wolsey:

I am not such a truant since my coming
As not to know the language I have lived in.
A strange cause makes my cause more strange, suspicious.
Pray speak in English.
(3.1.43-6)

It is in Katherine’s interest that her exchanges take place in English, not only for the purposes of playing the role of an Englishwoman, but so that her attendants will understand the political ramifications of her dealings with Wolsey and Campeius. Given her earlier self-identification as a foreigner, and her rejection of English legal processes, the strategy is transparent. What the text suggests is that use of the English language (and Katherine is a masterful rhetorician, eager to make her case in her adopted tongue) is an unreliable indicator of a separate, quantifiable Englishness. Although Katherine abjures the use of Latin by foregrounding her expertise in English (recognising as she does that speaking a foreign language would make her and her cause seem foreign), it is clear that her use of English is cynical, intended in the main to allow her servants to follow the exchange. Hence, we can better understand Henry’s pun: Elizabeth will ‘have so much English’ not only by tongue, but by power and blood. As a language, English can be a weapon wielded by foreigners who might learn it, whilst royal authority by virtue of English blood, as enjoyed by Elizabeth, is intrinsic – it cannot be performed.

Kristen Post Walton has recognised that the sixteenth century witnessed a growth in scholarly discussion concerning the relative virtues of English women compared to their

¹³ Simon Schama, *A History of Britain - Volume 1: At the Edge of the World? 3000 BC-AD 1603* (London: The Bodley Head, 2009), p. 304.

European counterparts.¹⁴ Most appositely, the pens of writers such as Edward More were engaged in stressing that the difference ‘between English women and those on the continent [...] that his [More’s] countrywomen were better than others’.¹⁵ It is difficult not to recognize here problems with what Philip Schwyzer has suggested was a discomfort (if not outright scepticism) surrounding English nationalism in the Tudor period.¹⁶ Whilst Schwyzer builds a convincing case that sixteenth-century poets were more interested in British national identity than English, it is clear that at least some theorists during Elizabeth’s reign – undoubtedly as a result of the problems posed by the Scottish Mary Stuart’s potential succession – were interested in wholly English identity. At any rate, *Henry VIII* itself provides evidence that, by the early seventeenth century, Englishness had become a recognised nationality worthy of celebration and apt to be placed, positively, in contradistinction to disruptive, politically intrusive foreignness.

It may be argued that Katherine’s foreignness provides more in dramaturgical terms than simply allowing the baby Elizabeth’s Englishness to be strengthened; after all, in a patriarchal world, her mother’s heritage is largely irrelevant given her father’s undisputed claim to English denizenship. A variety of possibilities present themselves. For one, it is possible that the play sought to underscore the (always somewhat shaky) Tudor succession, thus legitimizing the almost-equally questionable Stuart succession (debates about the rights of Scots to succeed had faded following Mary Stuart’s death, but they cast a lingering shadow over political discourse).¹⁷ Equally convincingly, the play provides us with evidence of what was an upsurge in strident English nationalism in the seventeenth century, as the virtues and innate superiority of English women were enacted theatrically using the familiar historical episode of the Spanish Katherine’s divorce and the subsequent procreative achievement of her successor in providing a woman who, in the early seventeenth century, was already being mythologized as the ruler over a golden age.¹⁸ In short, a somewhat jaundiced view of European alliances provided a useful opportunity for projecting the comparative merits of native women.

¹⁴ Kristen Post Walton, *Catholic Queen, Protestant Patriarchy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 8-10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-13. Post Walton here provides a fascinating discussion of the flurry of tracts which, fuelled in part by political pragmatics, debated the merits of Englishwomen. These include More’s *A lytle and bryefe treatyse, called the defence of women, and especially of Englyshe women, made agaynst the Schole howse of women* (1560).

¹⁶ Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ For a fuller explication of the play’s political function in terms of Stuart dynastic descent, see McMullan, pp. 63-80.

¹⁸ Following the accession of James I, there emerged a vogue for celebrating the life of Elizabeth and the perceived successes of her rule.

If *Henry VIII* presents the rise of a submissive, younger Englishwoman at the expense of the downfall of an aged, politically active, internationally important and outward-looking European queen, Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* (1634) takes a still more nuanced view of the complexities of the early modern royal marriage market. Marking a revival of a dramatic mode which had fallen out of fashion, *Perkin Warbeck* can be read as the story of the King – Henry VII – whose reign Shakespeare neglected to chronicle in his histories (beyond its birth, in his triumphant appearance as Richmond in the final act of *Richard III* [1592]). As a result of the political crises engendered by the charismatic pretender Warbeck's attempt to seize control of England, the play invites consideration of the marriages between Henry and his English Queen, Elizabeth of York, the ill-fated Warbeck and his Scottish bride, and the English Prince Arthur and Princess Katherine of Aragon.¹⁹

In the play's first scene, Daubeney attempts to calm Henry's fears regarding the state of England by asserting the authority vested in the King, which springs from his stabilizing union with 'Edward's daughter' Elizabeth. It is a marriage which marks, further, a 'blessed union, and a lasting blessing / For this poor panting island' (1.1.39-40).²⁰ Elizabeth's loyalty, certainly, is without question; she does not appear in the play, and is thus relegated to the ultimate level of political non-participation. From the beginning, she is set up in contrast to her aunt, Margaret of Burgundy. In a likely nod to the historical figure's characterisation in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Margaret is described in *Perkin Warbeck* as a 'woman-monster [... that] still from the unbottomed mine / Of devilish policies doth vent the ore / Of troubles and sedition' (1.1.49-52). Like Elizabeth, Margaret is unseen; unlike Elizabeth, she represents a pervasive force, blowing 'fresh coals of division' (1.1.44) into England from Europe.

With Margaret castigated as an inveterate anti-English – or, at least, anti-Tudor – conspirator, the distinction between the two women becomes clear; the identity of Elizabeth, a member of the English royal family by blood and marriage, is consumed by that of her husband, whereas Margaret, having decamped to Europe, has become a figure of international intrigue and an active threat to the stability of her native country. Indeed, it is particularly notable that Elizabeth of York is not mentioned by name in the play, but rather by allusion. Her identity is framed entirely in her dynastic function – she is no more

¹⁹ The Methuen edition of the play uses the alternative spelling of Katherine's name: Catherine. For the sake of consistency, I have altered this to the former throughout.

²⁰ John Ford, *Perkin Warbeck*, ed. by Peter Ure (London: Methuen, 1968). All quotations are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically.

or less than ‘Edward’s daughter’. She has become, in contemporary parlance, a *femme covert*, or a woman metaphorically covered by the identity of her husband. Margaret, meanwhile, is not only named for the seat occupied by her late husband, but charged with having lost loyalty to England and fomenting discord using European ‘idols of Yorkish malice’ (1.1.62). In the pervasive, off-stage presence of Margaret, therefore, emerges a curious tension between native and foreign; she has carried her malignity into her European marriage, and has subsequently gained a strategic position from which to strike back at her homeland.

Further, due to her widowhood, she occupies an even more autonomous (and so potentially dangerous) position. Widows, as Tim Stretton recognises, occupied a curious position in early modern society, having ‘shed the restrictive bonds imposed by coverture and regained [their] independent legal status’.²¹ Questions thus arise in *Perkin Warbeck* concerning what the dissolution of coverture might mean for women who find themselves transplanted across national borders, and who are freed by the death of their husbands to choose where to place their loyalties – in their native or in their adopted countries. European royal marriage alliances, it is clear, present not only the dangers of importing those of questionable loyalty, but exporting them.

The England into which Warbeck attempts to ingratiate himself is a paranoid country, beset by threats from Cornish and Kentish rebels, and, to the north, the country’s closest European neighbour, Scotland. Warbeck’s marriage to the Scottish Katherine Gordon thus provides rich loam for the dramatic exploration of an increasingly nationalistic England’s relationship with (in Ford’s time) a foreign country, albeit under the same crown. In studying the play’s presentation of Katherine, Allison Machlis Meyer has argued that the Scottish noblewoman serves as both a replacement dramaturgical figure for the absent Elizabeth of York and, as such, a model example of queenship for Ford’s own Queen, Henrietta Maria.²² Though Meyer’s discussion of Ford’s promotion of a woman’s apolitical role is well-taken (and her historiography excellent), her argument somewhat neglects Katherine’s Scottishness, eliding this mark of foreignness in her reading of the play as substituting Katherine for Elizabethan of York. It must be noted that Scotland, throughout the sixteenth century, remained an independent kingdom with

²¹ Tim Stretton, ‘Widows at Law in Tudor and Stuart England’, in S. Cavallo and L. Warner (eds.) *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 193-4.

²² Allison Machlis Meyer, ‘The Politics of Queenship in Francis Bacon’s *The History and Reign of King Henry VII* and John Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck*’, *Studies in Philology* 111:2 (2014), 312-45. Meyer is right to point out the importance of Henrietta Maria; Ford had a very different queen consort to Shakespeare and Fletcher. However, the plays nevertheless retain a similarity in elevating English consorts – the docile Anne Bullen and the absent Elizabeth of York – as preferable to intrusive foreign queens.

an independent government, and the Scotland presented in the play is a threat precisely because of its independent patronage of England's enemies.

Katherine's status as a member of the Scottish nobility is paramount in the play. Her father's favourite oath involves swearing, 'by good St Andrew' (1.2.13; 43); to her early suitor, Dalyell, she is 'the king's kinswoman [...] / a princess of the blood' (1.2.26-27). The references to her Scottish credentials serve to underscore not only her foreignness, but her high rank. Her subsequent marriage to the pretender Warbeck thus puts her in a dangerous position – she becomes the ostensible Duchess of York, a potential Queen of England despite her Scottish birth, and it is only the failure of her husband's rebellion that forestalls her usurping the place of Elizabeth of York. Yet the character of Katherine is handled sensitively; she is largely sympathetic, despite her nationality and her husband's pretensions.²³ The play – understandably given the era of its performance – is keen not to traduce England's northern-European neighbours; nevertheless, it most certainly engages with the tensions arising from an ambitious English state sharing an island (and, in Ford's time, a crown) with a separate nation.

Corinne Abate argues that, at the play's end, Katherine is left with a considerable degree of political agency. As her husband falls, it becomes incumbent on Henry to bring Katherine to heel. However, as Abate further notes, Henry 'continues not to recognise her autonomy [...] and believes he will] replace and act the part of every male in her life'.²⁴ This is important, as it simultaneously betrays both the English Henry's hubris in believing he can control and subjugate the Scottish Katherine and the self-consciousness of an England not yet at ease with its national identity. In order to feel secure, Henry must feel himself to be in full control. Yet despite the King's best efforts, Katherine embraces the position of widow, and in turn exemplifies 'the ability to survive within a system that may subsume women'.²⁵ It is impossible to ignore the parallels between the newly widowed Katherine and the play's other significant widow, Margaret of Burgundy.

²³ Interestingly, Gilles Monsarrat has argued compellingly for Ford's conviction that, far from being a pretender, Warbeck is presented in the play, via typography, as the legitimate Richard Plantagenet. Naturally, this would have been anathema to Stuart censors, whose monarch was descended from Henry VII, and so Monsarrat raises the possibility that Ford revised his script to efface direct protestations of Warbeck's authenticity. Speculation indeed arises here; if Ford believed wholeheartedly in Warbeck's Plantagenet blood, Katherine Gordon thus becomes a legitimate queen-in-waiting. However, given that the play refrains from making any such definite pronouncements, speculation is idle in the current discussion. See Gilles Monsarrat, 'John Ford's Substantive Accidentals in *Perkin Warbeck*', *Library (Lond)*, 16:4 (2015), 446-57.

²⁴ Corinne Abate, 'Katherine Gordon and the Art of Marriage Brokering in *Perkin Warbeck*', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 53:2 (1999), 11-29 (pp. 19-20).

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 25.

Whilst the former is seemingly absorbed into the English political sphere, the latter has been expelled from it: nevertheless, both women represent a potential danger in that their distinctive, non-English, European profiles ensure that their loyalties remain as slippery as ‘the slippery domain of widowhood’ itself.²⁶ Thus, in tandem with what Schwyzer recognises as a seventeenth-century growth in English (as opposed to British) identity is the persistent instability and questionable security of that identity. In Katherine a prominent Scotswoman is welcomed by an outwardly genial England eager to offer the hand of friendship to foreigners (albeit friendship based on a perceived need to control and absorb); and yet Katherine herself preserves a level of autonomy that encourages ambivalence and prevents any uncomplicated reading of the text as an expression of confident English nationalism. The determinedly independent, widowed Scot at the heart of the English court precludes it.

European royal marriages as interrogated by *Perkin Warbeck* are, undoubtedly, multifaceted, presenting audiences with both the advantages and disadvantages that are thought to arise from these political alliances. Katherine’s namesake, the off-stage Katherine of Aragon, is, for example, used as a vehicle to highlight the pervasive and malign influence of foreign states in domestic policy. As the marriage between Katherine and Prince Arthur is brokered, Urswick is at pains to point out the conditions laid down by her father – in particular, that the marriage ‘should never be consummated as long / As any earl of Warwick lived in England’ (3.3.56-7).²⁷ Meanwhile, James of Scotland continues to entertain the notion that marriage alliances will provide stability, as he rejoices:

A league with Ferdinand, a marriage
With English Margaret, a free release
From restitution for the late affronts,
Cessation from hostility!
(I.3.56-59)

James’s ebullient exhortations are, however, laced with irony. In playing on the well-known failure of his English match in ending Anglo-Scottish hostility, and betraying the duplicity of Ferdinand, whose daughter is betrothed to the English Prince, what once

²⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁷ That Ford incorporates reference to the 1499 execution of the Earl of Warwick is more than just a nod to his study of his sources. It was a Spanish condition of the Anglo-Spanish marriage alliance that Warwick was put to death, and the Spanish ambassador, de Puebla, was particularly exercised by England’s ‘purging’ of doubtful royal blood preparatory to Katherine’s marriage. Ford’s incorporation therefore provides a suitably bloody gloss over the play’s mooted international nuptials. See Thomas Penn, *Winter King: Henry VII and The Dawn of Tudor England* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011), pp. 38-9.

again emerge are the potential problems posed by using royal marriage alliances as a means of ensuring international peace and forging stable pan-European links.

Both *Henry VIII* and *Perkin Warbeck* can be read as potentially subversive plays in that, while extolling the virtues and representing the growth of English national identity (via a considerable amount of contemporary myth-making), they expose its insularity and reveal the apertures caused by what was a traditional and still-popular method of foreign policy. Whilst Shakespeare and Fletcher depict a proud, celebratory England rising from the fall of European influence, Ford presents an unstable England which overcomes European and internecine aggressors and emerges almost anxiously benevolent and curiously imperialistic in its treatment of foreigners. Nevertheless, the vatic enthusiasm for the Spanish match and Katherine Gordon's autonomous role in the English court (and thus Henry's failure to fully bend her to his will) ensure a measure of caution and ambivalence even in this seemingly nationalistic play.

It may therefore be concluded that both plays place a nationalistic emphasis on an England which has eschewed the mediaeval necessity of achieving international success through European royal marriages, and emerged a successful and prosperous nation through the fecundity of English women and the relative success of native royal marriages. As such, the dramatic exploration of European royal marriage alliances thus provided a conduit through which to explore a distinct, nationalistic England's position on the world stage. That England, however, is not without problems. In *Henry VIII* the almost fanatical insularity of 'Englishness' leads not just to an exasperated, but to a sympathetic Queen Katherine. In *Perkin Warbeck* an aggressively proud England can be compromised from within and without, thanks, in part, to the influence of European women. Ultimately, we must therefore reassess the notion that royal marriage alliances with European brides were viewed as a means of inflating English prestige and fostering stable international links. In the burgeoning nationalistic climate of seventeenth century England – and with roots stretching back still further – the plays studied certainly do not promote foreign political matches as guarantors of peace or glory, but instead challenge the political ideals behind them. As a result, these alliances, through the lens of Shakespeare, Fletcher and Ford, are increasingly viewed with scepticism. Ultimately, they are considered to pose more dangers than benefits to an England nurturing its national identity, with native marriages presented as more docile, fruitful alternatives.