2023

Margaret of Anjou: Passionate Mother

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Published in: Later Plantagenet and the Wars of the Roses Consorts, ed. Aidan Norrie et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023) Queenship and Power series, pp. 195-213.

CHAPTER 12

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Margaret of Anjou, who married Henry VI of England in 1445 when she was fifteen years old, was the mother of one son. This child became the most important factor in Margaret's life. Born in 1430, Margaret's parents were René, Duke of Anjou, and Isabelle, daughter and heir of Charles II, Duke of Lorraine. She was the niece of Charles VII of France's wife, Marie of Anjou. Her father's unsuccessful efforts to expand his holdings meant he was away for much of Margaret's childhood. As a result, she spent much time with her mother Isabelle and her grandmother, the formidable Yolande of Aragon.[1] The influence of these women was an important inspiration for Margaret as she became a powerful woman who headed the Lancastrian cause during the Wars of the Roses, supporting the rights of her dearly beloved son. Had she not been a mother her history would have been very different. The Lancastrians were eventually defeated, leading to the death of her husband and son and her own lonely death. Her enemies,

[1] Zita Eva Rohr, *Yolande of Aragon (1381–1442) Family and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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A. Norrie et al. (eds.), *Later Plantagenet and the Wars of the Roses Consorts*, Queenship and Power,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-94886-3_12

Edward IV and his Yorkist supporters, did all they could to demonise Margaret's reputation. Shakespeare's portrayal of Margaret cemented this view of Margaret as a monstrous queen, which would have strong influence for centuries in terms of how Margaret was presented. More recently, some scholars have re-evaluated Margaret more positively, though as early as the 1640s Thomas Heywood described her as a woman "of a brave and Heroicke Spirit."[2] Margaret's role in the Wars of the Roses has made her a contested figure for centuries.[3]

Marriage

From the time when she was a small child there were discussions of potential marriages for Margaret. Starting in 1439, these discussions focused on Henry VI of England as one way to end—or at least pause—an expensive war that had been going on for a very long time: the Hundred Years' War. In 1444, William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, came to France to meet with Charles VII and René of Anjou. The truce they negotiated led to a solemn betrothal between Margaret and Henry. A proxy wedding was celebrated on 24 March and a twenty-month truce between the two countries was agreed. Many in England were upset by the meagre dowry Margaret brought to the marriage—20,000 francs. In subsequent years, with Margaret's failure to become pregnant and her role in the battles between Lancastrians and Yorkists, English people complained that Margaret had come with no dowry at all.

After the proxy wedding, Margaret started the move to England. As J.L. Laynesmith points out, "the process emphasized her symbolic severance" from her country and her family: "At Pontoise almost all of her French companions departed and responsibility for her party was assumed by Richard, Duke of York."[4] This meant that one of the first significant

[2] Thomas Heywood, *Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine: The Most Worthy Women of the World: Three Jewes, Three Gentiles, Three Christians* (London, 1640), 156.

[3] Scholars who have taken a traditionally negative view of Margaret include: Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981); and Anne Crawford, "The King's Burden? The Consequences of Royal Marriage in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England*, ed. Ralph A. Griffiths (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1981), 33–56.

[4] J.L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship, 1445–1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76.

English courtiers she met, after Suffolk, was the man who would become her most powerful enemy.

William Aiscough, Bishop of Salisbury and the King's confessor, performed the marriage ceremony of Henry and Margaret at Titchfield Abbey on 23 April 1445. They then travelled to London and Margaret spent the night before her coronation at the Tower of London. She was gorgeous in her procession through the streets of London the next day, wearing a circlet around her head made of gold with pearls and other precious gems. Her dress was white damask powdered with gold. On 30 May she was crowned queen at Westminster.[5]

The specific reason for the marriage was to bring peace between England and France and more generally, the reason for a king to marry was so his wife could provide an heir. Soon after the marriage, attempts at negotiating a long-term peace were falling apart. Henry was a poor negotiator, and he came into conflict with his own advisors for his leniency towards the French. War broke out again in July 1449, and anger at Margaret intensified, especially as, despite years of marriage, there was still no pregnancy. This was especially a problem as none of Henry VI's uncles had had legitimate sons either. In 1447, Thomas Hunt, one of the Duke of Gloucester's servants, is said to have angrily stated that he would be a happy man if Margaret drowned, as no good had come from her since she arrived in England.[6]

In the early years of their marriage there appeared clear affection between the King and Queen. Margaret was a dutiful wife who dedicated herself to her husband. She skilfully managed her household and was devoted to her servants, effectively distributing patronage. She had a close relationship with her lady-in-waiting Lady Katherine Vaux. Katherine Panizzone, in England called Penison, came with Margaret to England as a small child. She was about ten years younger than the Queen. Around 1456, she married Sir William Vaux. The relationship of the Queen and her lady gives us an insight into Margaret that she inspired such loyalty. Katherine's loyalty to Margaret continued for the rest of the Queen's life.

Margaret's closest allies were Suffolk and Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, and she encouraged the King to listen to them. Suffolk was one

[5] *The Brut, or The Chronicles of England*, ed. Friedrich W.D. Brie (London: Early English Text Society, 1906), 489.

[6] TNA, KB 9/256/12, quoted in Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422–1461* (London: Ernest Benn, 1981), 255.

of the leaders of Henry VI's government, but he was blamed for the losses in France, and in 1450 he was banished for five years. On his way to the Low Countries he was captured by privateers, and on 2 May was beheaded as a traitor, much to Margaret's sorrow, as he had been her friend and ally since she came to England. Tudor writers suggested that Margaret and Suffolk were lovers, but there was no evidence that Margaret was ever unfaithful to her husband.[7] The crisis after Suffolk's death led to Jack Cade's rebellion against the King and upper classes. In the late 1440s Somerset became more and more powerful. In December 1447 he was governor-general of France and the duchies of Normandy and Guyenne. After Suffolk's fall, Somerset and York, cousins both descended from Edward III, were the two most powerful men in the country. They also became bitter enemies. While Somerset had the trust of both King and Queen, like Suffolk, he was very unpopular because of his role in the loss of Normandy.

As the years passed the English people were more and more upset that there was no heir. In the premodern period infertility was usually blamed on the wife, but in this case some thought that the problem was Henry's. Thomas Gate claimed that Margaret was not able to be truly queen—by having a son—because Henry was weak. Alison Basil has carefully described how Henry's weakness led to a belief in sexual dysfunction.[8] There was also gossip that the Bishop of Salisbury wanted to keep Henry from Margaret's bed.[9] Salisbury would almost certainly have wanted an heir, but he apparently strongly encouraged Henry to strictly observe all days forbidden by the Church for sexual relations. These included Christmas and other feast days. This prohibition also included fast and processional days. Devout Catholics also fasted and abstained from sex during Lent and Advent, as well as all Fridays and Sundays, and on days that a person was performing penance. Husband and wife were also told to abstain from marital relations between three and seven days before taking the sacrament of the Eucharist. Adding these various days up mean that at least 150 days

[7] *Hall's Chronicle*, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1809), 219.

[8] Alison Basil, "Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou: Madness, Gender Dysfunction and Perceptions of Dis-ease in the Royal Body," in *The Image and Perception of Monarchy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sean McGlynn and Elena Woodacre (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 177.

[9] Lauren Johnson, *Shadow King: The Life and Death of Henry VI* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2019), 242.

out of the year devout married couples would have been barred from intercourse.[10]

Another pressure on Margaret came from Henry's cousin, Richard, Duke of York, whom some believed had a better claim to the throne than Henry himself. York wished to be formally named as the King's heir. If Henry was childless this could be a good solution, but Margaret still hoped to have a son of her own. Though Margaret had been married for years without a pregnancy, it was not all that unusual for couples to have been married for years before the wife became pregnant. Finally, in early 1453, after having been married for eight years, Margaret was pregnant. In April 1453 Margaret visited the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham and left as a gift a gold plaque of an angel holding a cross; it was decorated with pearls, sapphires, and rubies and was the most expensive item of jewellery for Margaret that year.[11] This pilgrimage and gift may as much have been prayer for the safe delivery of a son as gratitude for finally becoming pregnant.

In July 1453, the last major battle of the Hundred Years' War was the failure of the English to relieve the siege at Castillon and resulted in a complete rout of the English army. Within a few months all of Gascony was lost. After the great victories of his father Henry V, all his son was left with was the port city of Calais and the surrounding County of Guines. For Henry, these losses were so devastating that he suffered a complete mental collapse, which has been called a form of hysterical catatonia, acute catatonic schizophrenia, or depressive stupor.[12] Most of the time he just stared into space and appeared not to recognise anyone. When Margaret gave birth to their son on 13 October 1453, the feast day of Edward the Confessor for whom the baby was named, the King gave no response. Now, at the age of 23, Margaret was finally a mother.

[10] Robert Obach, *The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse: From St. Paul to Pope John Paul II* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), 70; Joelle Mellon, *The Virgin Mary in the Perceptions of Women: Mother, Protector and Queen Since the Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 86.

[11] A.R. Myers, *Crown, Household and Parliament in Fifteenth Century England*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (London: Hambledon, 1985), 215.

[12] Peter Burley, Michael Elliott, and Harvey Watson, *The Battles of St Albans* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013), 13; Diana Dunn, "The Queen at War: The Role of Margaret of Anjou in the War of the Roses," in *War and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Britain*, ed. Diana Dunn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 149; Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 270.

Particularly because of the length of time before Margaret's pregnancy, and Henry's perilous health, almost immediately there were rumours about the baby. At first, people whispered that Margaret had not really been pregnant at all, but a base child had been smuggled in. Later, encouraged by the supporters of the Duke of York, many argued that the child was Margaret's but the father was not Henry.[13]

The birth of her child gave Margaret a very different perspective of her role as queen, especially with her husband incapacitated indefinitely. As Helen Castor has suggested, Margaret came "to stand on the political stage as a player in her own right, acting under her own independent agency."[14] She asked in January that she be made regent, but the Council refused. The following March Parliament named York, as a close relation to Henry and powerful noble, as Protector and Defender of the Realm. Perhaps as a way to placate Margaret, at the same time her five-month-old son Edward was created Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester. Thus, even though York was in charge, Margaret's son was publicly confirmed as heir to the throne. At the same time, however, York did all he could to strengthen his own position.

But then, as suddenly as the King's illness had come, Henry recovered in the Christmas season 1454 and was delighted to learn of the birth of his son. He thanked York and accepted his resignation. Henry had Somerset released from the Tower: no formal charges had ever been brought against him and he was again a close advisor to the King and ally of the Queen. For York and his allies this was disturbing. They had not only lost power but also feared what the Queen and her supporters would convince the king to do in retaliation.

By May 1455 York and his allies, especially his nephew by marriage Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, were ready to fight against the Queen and her allies, convinced that Somerset was poisoning Henry's mind against York. Both sides met at St. Albans. Margaret and her young son went to Greenwich to keep safe. When Henry became aware of the closeness of the Yorkist army, he and his advisors had to decide if they would negotiate to achieve a compromise without fighting or to prepare

[13] Kristen Geaman, "A Bastard and a Changeling? England's Edward of Westminster and Delayed Childbirth," in *Unexpected Heirs in Early Modern Europe: Potential Kings and Queens*, ed. Valerie Schutte (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 11–33.

[14] Helen Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (New York: Harper, 2011), 347.

for battle. Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, strongly wanted Henry to proceed to St. Albans and negotiate, while Somerset wanted to fight. Had Margaret been with them she might have convinced her husband to agree with Somerset. Instead, the King appointed Buckingham Constable of England and put him in charge of negotiations. The negotiations then failed, as the King refused to turn Somerset over to his enemies. The ensuing battle was not on Lancastrian terms, and in the resulting violence Somerset was killed. His eldest son Henry became the new Duke of Somerset. Because he too was greatly loyal to Margaret there were later unfounded rumours that he was Margaret's lover.

Henry made his peace with York, who accompanied the King back to London. With his increased power, in November 1455, York was again Protector, quite possibly because Henry was again not able to rule. There were some whispers that the King needed to sleep most of the time after St. Albans.[15] By the end of February 1456, however, York had lost the position in part due to his inability to deal well with the factionalism at court. A weak King, a child heir, and an adult Plantagenet alternate ruler caused great anxiety and uncertainty. Also in February, John Helton, who had been an apprentice at Grey's Inn, was hanged, drawn, and quartered for stating and publicising the statement that Prince Edward was not Queen Margaret's son.[16] Helen Maurer argues that though there is no direct link between the Duke of York and Helton, the charges were part of a dynamic to push York forward. There was also an inquiry into the slanders of John Wode "against the persons and honour of queen Margaret and prince Edward."[17] Despite the earlier anger over Margaret's childlessness, had Margaret not had a child, many felt, having someone ruling for the weak King and dealing with the succession would have been so much easier.

For Margaret, the Duke of York posed an enormous threat to her son. Looking for an area where she would have more support, Margaret brought her son to Kenilworth Castle, a royal residence near Coventry in the midst of her dower estates. More and more, Margaret was becoming the leader of the Lancastrian faction. Not only was Margaret at Kenilworth, but in 1456–1457 the Great Council was called to meet at Coventry, and

[15] Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 305.

[16] *John Benet's Chronicle, 1399–1462: An English Translation with New Introduction*, ed. Alison Hanham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 216–217.

[17] Helen E. Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), 46.

the members knew they were expected to show Queen Margaret the same deference they showed King Henry.

On 14 September 1457, for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the King and Queen entered into Coventry. It was a triumphant entry for Margaret. There were pageants in her honour depicting prophets, patron saints, and cardinal virtues. Nine conquerors were depicted including Alexander, David, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Julius Caesar. After them was St. Margaret miraculously slaying a dragon. While Queen Margaret was feted, Henry "went silent and unnoticed," as Bertram Wolffe has remarked.[18]

The conflicts between the Queen and her allies and the Duke of York and his continued. Margaret and her supporters were still very angry about those who died at the battle of St. Albans. Fearing a French attack on Calais and deeply desiring harmony, Henry VI wanted to bring the warring factions back to together. After a number of contentious council meetings, there was finally an agreement. Henry VI made it very clear that those who were to blame were the Yorkists. Their behaviour at St. Albans was an "execrabill and moost detestable dede," and they acted because of "the moost diabolique unkyndnesse and wrecched envye in theym, and moost unresonable appetite of such estate as of reason ought not to be desired nor had by noon of theym."[19] The Duke of York and his allies had to take full responsibility for the battle of St. Albans and make payments to the widows and children of the dead lords. They also had to pay for masses for the souls of those who had died. Henry's government, however, owed these lords funds so the Yorkist lords forgave the loans and the government was in fact responsible for the payment. The King then recognised the Duke of York, the Earl of Salisbury, and Salisbury's son the Earl of Warwick his true lieges.

The King attempted to end this long conflict with the ritualistic reconciliation, the Loveday of 1458, on 25 March—the feast of the Annunciation—at St. Paul's Cathedral. Though called "Loveday," this was intended to last much longer than a day. A whole group walked in pairs from Westminster to St. Paul's hand in hand. Each pair were enemies

[18] Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 306.

[19] "Henry VI: November 1459," in *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson, Paul Brand, Seymour Phillips, Mark Ormrod, Geoffrey Martin, Anne Curry, and Rosemary Horrox (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/november-1459.

now walking as friends. The sons of the dead Lancastrian lords marched in their fathers' memory. Leading the procession was the Earl of Salisbury with the young Duke of Somerset, representing his dead father. The young Duke had fought at St. Albans beside his father, and in addition to his father had being killed, he had been seriously wounded. In the midst of the procession King Henry, gloriously attired, walked alone. The final pair was the most significant—and most divisive. Queen Margaret and her most bitter enemy the Duke of York walked hand in hand. In a procession of powerful men, Margaret was the only woman. St. Paul's was filled with people glad to be at a service where God was thanked for bringing peace to England. There was further celebration with tournaments. Henry had wanted a lasting peace, but some scholars see the Loveday as a major step towards war. John Sadler argues that "Loveday may in fact mark the point at which the continuation or development of the existing factional discord slid into the abyss of civil war. The ceremony, however hollow, clearly recognised that two separate factions existed and that one could not prevail without encompassing the destruction of the other."[20]

The failure of the Loveday demonstrated Henry VI's lack of competence and understanding. In the spring of 1459 the situation was so strained that Henry and Margaret again moved the court to Coventry. A chronicle that was clearly sympathetic to the Yorkist cause stated of Margaret "the queen with such as were of her affynte rewled the realm as her liked, goderyng riches innumerable."[21] Pope Pius II described Henry as "more timorous than a woman, utterly devoid of wit or spirit, who left everything in his wife's hands."[22]

At the great council meeting in late June, attended by the Queen and her young son, the Duke of York and his close followers were in absentia indicted for treason at Margaret's insistence. This was followed up by a parliament held in Coventry in November, later referred to by the Yorkists as "the Parliament of Devils," given its attacks on them.[23] Parliament had been summoned the month before because there had already been armed violence. In September, the Earl of Salisbury, with his troops, was heading

[20] John Sadler, *The Red Rose and the White: The Wars of the Roses, 1453–1487* (London: Routledge, 2014), 71.

[21] *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI,* ed. J.S. Davies (London, 1856), 79.

[22] Constance Head, "Pope Pius II and the Wars of the Roses," *Archivum Historiae Pontiface* 8 (1970): 145.

[23] "Henry VI: November 1459," in *PROME.*

to join the Duke of York at Ludlow. James Tuchet, Lord Audley, and his Lancastrian supporters intercepted them at Bloreheath and they were defeated by Salisbury's forces and Lord Audley died in the battle.

The royal army, led by both the King and Queen, went to meet the Yorkists at Ludlow. The King offered a pardon to anyone who deserted the Yorkists. Six hundred soldiers who had come from Calais went to join the King, as did their commander Sir Andrew Trollope, who brought with him the Yorkist battle plans. The Yorkists were hopelessly outnumbered and their leaders decided they had no chance of victory, so that night they slipped away. The Earl of Salisbury and his son Warwick escaped to Calais with York's eldest son Edward, Earl of March. York and his next son Edmund, Earl of Rutland, headed to Ireland, where he had been the lieutenant, abandoning not only his men but also his wife and younger children. So all the Yorkist leaders were out of England by the time parliament met and condemned them. York, however, found great support in Ireland and the others found the same in Calais.

The Earls in Calais planned to invade England to capture Henry VI with the claim that he had to be rescued from the control of his evil advisors. They did capture Henry at the battle of Northampton in July 1460, with Warwick ordering the slaughter of a number of Henry's loyal lords. For the next seven months, Henry ruled by doing whatever he was told. Margaret fled with her son. They first went to Harlech Castle in Wales and eventually took refuge with the Scottish dowager queen Mary of Gueldres, who was regent for her young son, James III.

In September, parliament was called for October to meet at Westminster. This parliament repealed all the acts passed by the previous parliament at Coventry, claiming that that parliament had been made up of men who were seditious and covetous. In the first days of parliament, York arrived from Ireland and made his claim that he had the right to be king. This caused great consternation even with York's allies, who had pledged allegiance to Henry VI, and eventually a compromise was worked out. Henry would remain king but after him the next king would be York, not his own son Edward. Henry, who was utterly isolated, agreed, thus disinheriting his own son. The Duke of York and his sons then swore their allegiance to Henry, who in turn bound himself to keep the agreement. Though Henry was still king, York would be the ruler. Then all royal officers were ordered to give the same obedience to the new heir as they gave to the King himself.

Margaret, not surprisingly, was furious, as were a number of her allies, including the Duke of Somerset and the Duke of Exeter. In looking for support she strongly mentioned her son and described him not only as the King's son but also associated herself with him, even though he was only seven years old. She argued that the Yorkists were spreading "divers untrewe and feyned surmises, and in especiall that wee and my lords said sone and our shoulde newly draw toward you with an unsen power of straungeres disposed to robbe and to dispoile you of your goodes and haveurs."[24]

York must have aware that he would have to immediately face the Queen's forces. In December, York and his forces marched north. A large Lancastrian force met him; the Battle of Wakefield on 30 December was a disaster for York. Despite the widely held belief of her presence, Margaret, still in Scotland, was not at the battle. Nor did the captured York have a confrontation with Margaret where, in Shakespeare's words, he called her a "she-wolf."[25] She did not derisively crown the executed York with a paper crown. York and his son Rutland were killed in battle. But his head was taken from his dead body and displayed on the walls of York with a paper crown.

As soon as Margaret heard of the Lancastrian victory, she gathered her supporters to start a march to London. Under the Earl of Warwick the Yorkists intercepted the Lancastrians at St. Albans. Unlike the first battle back in 1455, on 17 February there was a decisive victory for the Queen's party and Margaret was able to take control of the "puppet of a king," as George Neville, Bishop of Exeter, described Henry VI to Francesco Coppini, Bishop of Terni.[26] The Yorkist propaganda became ever more intense about Prince Edward being the son of the Queen's lover not the King, and the attacks on her chastity were a way to destroy her power. As Maurer points out, "allegations of adultery were potentially damning to Margaret; insinuations of disorderly sexuality suggested that other aspects

[24] *The Letters of Margaret of Anjou*, ed. Helen Maurer and B.M. Cron (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2019), 225.

[25] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3*, https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/henry-vi-part-3/ (1.4.112).

[26] "Venice: 1461–1470," in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 1, 1202–1509*, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: HMSO, 1864), 92–126. *British History Online,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol1/pp92-126.

of her conduct and activities were disorderly as well. The label of sexual transgression effectively defined her as a woman out of place."[27]

In mid-March, Prospero di Camulio, the Milanese ambassador in France, wrote to Cicho Symonete, the secretary of the Duke of Milan, that Margaret had convinced Henry VI to abdicate in favour of his young son and she then poisoned him, so that she and Somerset could rule. Of the King dying he stated, "At least he has known how to die if he did not know what to do else."[28] But when Margaret and the troops reached London they were refused admission, as her army was seen as dangerous and out of control. Margaret retreated northward as York's son, Edward, Earl of March, was approaching. The Lancastrians were disastrously defeated at Towton on 29 March 1461. Margaret, Henry, and their son again fled to Scotland. Edward, on his return to the capital, declared absent Henry VI unfit to rule, and he was crowned king of England 28 June 1461. *Brut's Chronicle*, which had noted how lovely Margaret looked when she came to England, had a very different perspective about what happened fifteen years later: "For marriage of Quene Margaret, what losse hath the realme of Englond had, by losyng of Normandy and Guyan, by division of the realme, by rebelling … So many, a man hath lost his life."[29]

The Duke of Somerset joined the royal family in Scotland. In July 1461, Margaret sent the Duke to France to negotiate with Charles VII. But when Somerset arrived he learned that Charles had died, and his son Louis XI supported the Yorkists. The French King ordered Somerset be imprisoned for some months. Eventually, he was allowed to leave France but stayed on the continent for months. He eventually returned to Scotland, and by the end of 1462 had come to terms with the new king Edward IV and was restored to favour. But by 1464 he was again fighting for the Lancastrians. After a defeat at Hexham in May of that year he was executed.

Figuring that the only way to gain support from her cousin Louis was to see him personally, in August 1463 Margaret and her son left for France, leaving Henry behind. She was never to see her husband again. Though she would not know it at the time, she would be in France for more than

[27] Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou*, 178.

[28] "Milan: 1461," in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan, 1385–1618*, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London: HMSO, 1912), 37–106. *British History Online,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/milan/1385-1618/pp37-106.

[29] *The Brut*, 512.

seven years. Katherine Vaux came with her, leaving her two small children to be raised in the household of Margaret Beaufort, then married to Sir Henry Stafford. Louis XI was unwilling to help Margaret, but she travelled around the country trying to gain support. By 1464 Margaret was then settled at her father's château of Koeur at St. Mihiel with a pension of 6000 crowns from him. Though many of the Lancastrian nobility had already died in the struggle, a number of those who survived went to Koeur to pledge support to Margaret, including the Duke of Somerset's younger brother Edmund, who, despite the Parliamentary attainder after his brother's death, styled himself Duke of Somerset. Margaret would have been kept abreast of news in England. At the end of 1463 Scotland signed a truce with Edward IV and Henry had to leave Scotland for Northern England; he was captured in July 1465 and was taken to the Tower of London.

It must have been terrifying to Margaret when her son became ill, as he did at least twice during the time she was living at Koeur. In 1464 it was serious enough that her father's physician came to attend him, and when Edward recovered, Margaret went on pilgrimage to St. Nicholas de Port to give thanks. The shrine was not quite fifty miles away, and one that was often used by royalty. A number of French kings made their way there on pilgrimage for centuries. In 1467 Edward was seriously ill again, either with measles or smallpox, but again luckily recovered. Though the restoration of Henry VI was theoretically the goal of the Lancastrians, for Margaret by this time, all her hopes centred on her son, and he shared her goals. The Milanese ambassador in France, Giovanni Pietro Panicharolla, wrote to the Duke and Duchess of Milan in February 1467, "This boy, though only thirteen years of age, already talks of nothing but of cutting off heads or making war, as if he had everything in his hands or was the god of battle or the peaceful occupant of that throne."[30]

That same year Louis XI was very upset to learn about the planned marriage of Edward IV's sister Margaret to Charles, Duke of Burgundy, seeing the alliance as strengthening his two enemies. Despite doing all he could to prevent it, the two married in July 1468, and Louis became much more supportive of Margaret of Anjou's goals to regain the rule of England.

[30] "Milan: 1467," in *CSP Milan*, 117–122. *British History Online*, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/milan/1385-1618/pp117-122.

What had also greatly shifted the landscape was the falling out between the Earl of Warwick and the King, which had begun with Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville and continued as the King increasingly marginalised him. Warwick also had Edward's brother George, Duke of Clarence, on his side. Edward was opposed to George marrying Warwick's elder daughter Isabel, but Warwick arranged their marriage in Calais 12 July 1469. Struggles between the King and the Earl continued as the situation became more chaotic, and eventually Warwick and Clarence with their wives and Warwick's younger daughter Anne fled to France where they became the guests of Louis XI.

Louis immediately began to attempt to reconcile Margaret to one of her worst enemies. She finally agreed to meet with Warwick at Angers. The ambassador Sforza de Bettini wrote to the Duke of Milan, describing Louis's presentation of Warwick to Margaret: "With great reverence Warwick went on his knees and asked her pardon," and Margaret "graciously forgave him and he afterwards did homage and fealty there, swearing to be a faithful and loyal subject of the king, queen, and prince as his liege lords unto death."[31] But as Maurer and Cron point out, Margaret did not trust Warwick, especially with the care of her son. A contemporary account, the *Manner and Guiding of the Earl of Warwick at Angers*, was most probably planned by Warwick to convince his friends and allies how fine he was doing in France that summer. Michael Hicks argues that this piece of propaganda "depicted [Warwick] as persuading the queen to do his will whilst conceding to her only essentials."[32] It actually took about two weeks for Margaret to agree that her son, then seventeen, would marry Warwick's younger daughter Anne, who was fourteen. But she insisted that Warwick must take over England and restore Henry VI, and at that point Prince Edward would be regent and governor of the country.[33] To add more prestige to Prince Edward, Louis asked him to be the godfather for his son Charles, who was born on 30 June. Once Warwick had agreed to these terms, however much he might or might not intend to keep them, Prince Edward and Anne Neville were formally betrothed at Angers Cathedral on 25 July. For Louis, what was most

[31] *Letters of Margaret of Anjou*, 276.

[32] Michael Hicks, *Anne Neville: Queen to Richard III* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), 82.

[33] Cora Louise Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth, King of England and France and Lord of Ireland*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, 1923), 1:531; Johnson, *Shadow King,* 512.

important was Warwick's commitment to an alliance against Burgundy. Warwick returned to England with an army and much of the country rose in support as he promised to restore Henry VI, the true king. Edward IV, his brother Richard, and a small party of the faithful abandoned their troops and fled to the Netherlands.

Henry VI was released from the Tower in October 1470. He was installed at the Bishop of London's Palace and on 13 October he was led in procession to St. Paul's for a crown-wearing ceremony. During the five months of his restoration it does not appear that Henry exercised any royal power. Warwick served as king's lieutenant, and, as Wolffe suggests, "uneasily shared" power with his son-in-law Clarence.[34]

In France, on 14 October, Louis publicly announced an alliance with Henry VI and ordered three days of thanksgiving for Henry's restoration. Margaret and Prince Edward came to Paris to participate in the celebration, but she did not want to return to England until she was sure that it would be safe for Edward. There was a small private wedding performed between Prince Edward and Anne Neville on 13 December 1470. When Margaret had finally decided to return to England, bad weather further delayed her. She was held up on the coast of Normandy from February until April because on a number of occasions when they tried to set sail the head-winds forced them back. With Margaret was her son as well as the Countess of Warwick and her two daughters.

The situation in England had become far more perilous. Edward IV returned to England in March. Warwick was convinced that he could easily defeat him, but at the last moment, encouraged by his siblings, Clarence betrayed Warwick, whose army faced Edward's in the fog on the morning of Easter Sunday 14 April. Edward prevailed. Warwick was killed fleeing after the battle. Margaret landed at Weymouth the same day. She and her party were immediately taken to Cerne Abbey, fifteen miles away, to meet with Edmund, Duke of Somerset, and John Courtenay, who styled himself Earl of Devon. They informed her of the terrible news of the Lancastrian defeat and the death of Warwick. But though the Queen was "right hevy and sory," Somerset and Devon also convinced Margaret "that for that los, theyr partye was nevar the febler, but rathar strongar," and they should prepare for another battle.[35] They strongly encouraged

[34] Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 342.

[35] *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV in England and the Finall Recoverye of his Kingdomes from Henry VI*, ed. John Bruce (London, 1838), 23.

her to fight Edward IV's army as soon as possible. Somerset was able to raise troops in Cornwall, while the Earl found many men in Devon. Somerset was at the head of Margaret's troops as they decided on their battle plan at Tewkesbury on 4 May. Queen Margaret and her daughter-in-law Anne Neville, along with Laura Bourchier, Countess of Devon and her devoted lady-in-waiting Lady Katherine Vaux took shelter in a close by religious house—we do not know its exact location—during the battle.

Tragically for the Lancastrians, Somerset did not have the support he needed from his army, as the captains were fighting with each other, and it was a devastating loss. Devon was killed in battle as was Sir William Vaux. Somerset managed to get to Tewkesbury Abbey after the battle and took sanctuary. Shockingly, Edward IV ordered some men to drag him out. On 6 May Somerset was executed at the marketplace. For Margaret, the greatest tragedy of the debacle at Tewkesbury was the death of her seventeen-year-old son Edward. Since his birth the most important factor in Margaret's life was protecting her son and advancing his interests. Now that that was over, her life seemed to have little meaning. While contemporary accounts note that Edward was killed in battle, later anti-Yorkist and early Tudor propaganda had the young prince brought a prisoner to the king and his brothers, who taunt him and murder him with the killing blow coming from Richard, Duke of Gloucester.[36]

In Shakespeare's version Margaret is a witness, who when she sees the murder of her child cries "O, kill me too"[37] (Fig. 12.1). It took three days for King Edward's men to find Margaret and her widowed companions but Margaret did not try to flee, as truly, she had no place to go, and no motive to keep on fighting. She was brought to Coventry, where earlier she had been feted, in grief and in humiliation. Several days later she was part of Edward IV's triumphant procession into London, sitting in a carriage as a prisoner. That very night Henry VI was murdered in the Tower. Now Margaret had neither son nor husband. Her political importance was finished. At the age of 41 her life was essentially over.

Though there were rumours in France in the months after Tewkesbury that Edward had had Margaret killed also, she was no longer important enough for him to bother with her. Margaret was kept at Windsor Castle

[36] Robert Fabyan, *Fabyans Cronycle Newly Printed* (London, 1533), ccxx; *Hall's Chronicle*, 301; *Polydore Vergil's English History*, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1846), 152; Lisa Hilton, *Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010), 375.

[37] Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, 5.5.41.

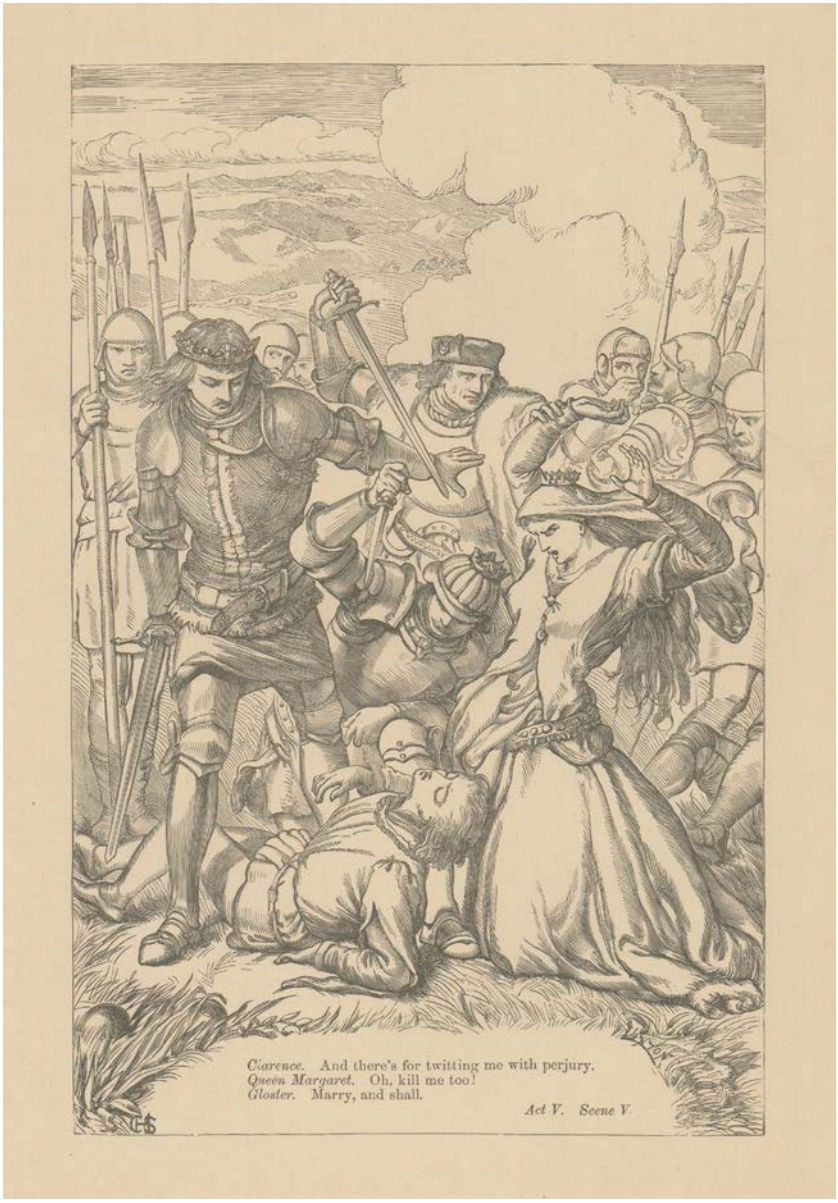

Fig. 12.1 Shakespeare's Margaret of Anjou at her son's death. Henry Courtney Selous, *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare*, 1874. (Public domain)

and then in the Tower of London. Her most faithful servant Lady Katherine Vaux was with her. She was finally placed in the custody of her old friend Alice, Dowager Duchess of Suffolk, at Wallingford Castle. In 1475, Edward and Louis made an agreement to send her back to France. Margaret had to agree to renounce all title to the crown of England, to her dower lands, and to any other claim she might have considered she had to any land in England. The French king paid the English king £10,000 in ransom. But Louis was hardly generous to Margaret either and her father, who married his mistress after his wife's death, had no interest in aiding in his daughter. Louis insisted that Margaret renounce all claims of inheritance from both her father and her mother, saying he deserved it after the expenses he had incurred supporting her. He provided her with a small pension of 6000 crowns (£1200) and she was housed at the château of Reculée until her father's death in 1480, when she moved to the château of Dampierre.

Broken in health, but still clear in mind, Margaret made her will on 2 August 1482. In her will Margaret stated that "however weak and feeble" she was of body, she was still "sound of mind, reason, and thought." She asked that King Louis "if it pleases him" allow her to be interred at Angers Cathedral, where her parents were buried. She asked that the few goods given to her by God and the French King be used to pay for her funeral and for paying her debts to her servants. Once her servants had received what they were owed, the Queen also wanted to pay her other creditors. In a plea, but also perhaps a nudge at his conscience, she stated that "I implore the said lord, the King, to meet and pay the outstanding debts as the sole heir of the wealth which I inherited through my father and my mother and my other relations and ancestors."[38] Had Louis not taken everything, Margaret might have been able to take care of her servants and others herself. Her devoted Lady Vaux was one of those who signed the will, and Margaret's concern about her servants no doubt included her. Only three weeks later Margaret was dead, and she was indeed interred at Angers Cathedral.

Edward Hall, writing in the mid sixteenth century, and certainly not one to praise Margaret's deeds, said that towards the end of her life what she experienced was "more lyke a death then a lyfe, languishyng and morning in continuall sorrowe, not so much for her selfe and her husbande, … but for the losse of prince Edward her sonne … to whome

[38] J.J. Bagley, *Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England* (London: H. Jenkins, 1948), 240.

in this lyfe nothing coulde be either more displeasant or grievous."[39] Margaret of Anjou was the strong queen of a weak king. She was a French woman in an England that considered France its enemy. For many of her contemporaries, Margaret's actions transgressed the traditional role of queen and wife. During her lifetime, as a strong woman in a time of conflict, Margaret was vilified, and there were many damaging rumours about her. It became worse after her enemy became king, and in the century after her death the view of Margaret as "she-wolf," as Shakespeare called her, greatly intensified. But the wolf is also the fierce mother of her cubs, and for Margaret motherhood was the most important aspect of her life. Despite the rumours and slander that Margaret had taken lovers, she was a faithful wife, and unlike many royal premodern mothers, she kept her son with her and did all she could to protect him and his rights. That she could not do so was her greatest tragedy.

[39] *Hall's Chronicle*, 301.