Shakespeare wrote many of his plays under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and enjoyed great success in her time. Understanding Shakespeare, and certainly understanding Shakespeare’s female characters, necessarily means trying to understand the complexities of his monarch. In particular, it is noteworthy that Shakespeare rarely wrote directly about his queen writing but that contributed heavily to the Tudor myth, particularly through Richard III. While scholarship has largely looked to Richard’s villainy, it has paid only passing attention to the way that the women of the histories play into the creation of the Tudor myth.

While there are many characters that go into creating the mythology, the female characters of the most interest are the ones with the most power. They are the ones with the clearest link to Queen Elizabeth. It is interesting, then, that Shakespeare largely paints female ambition as dangerous, subversive. The only exception is when courtly behavior is expressed.

My thesis functions in four parts, analyzing the representation of Joan of Arc, Elizabeth Woodville, and Margaret of Anjou. The first part will look to an analysis of the creation of Tudor Myth and how it traditionally relates to Queen Elizabeth’s rule. The second traces Joan of Arc’s representation from chaste maid to raving madwoman. The third piece follows Margaret of Anjou as she transforms from a marriage piece into a wicked warrior and later into a crone. The fourth and final part will look to Queen Elizabeth’s great grandmother, Elizabeth Woodville, and analyze her success as a political manipulator. In each of these pieces, I will address how the women’s portrayal reinforces the rule of both the Tudors and, if applicable, Elizabeth herself.