# 20  'Make My Image but an Alehouse Sign': The Poetry of Women in Shakespeare's Dramatic Verse  `Get access >`

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## Abstract

Queen Margaret's words 'Make my image but an alehouse sign' in *2 Henry VI* (III. ii. 81) offer an appropriate metaphor for the female voice in Shakespeare's texts because they advertise the ways female characters strive to speak out within a discursive environment that silences them as images. The chapter explores how women in Shakespeare's plays negotiate a space to speak within a poetic discourse that repeatedly objectifies them as signs, focusing on Catherine's role in *Henry V* and the blason, and the Jailer's Daughter's self-inscription into a ballad tradition in *Two Noble Kinsmen.* A second section uses the analytic tools provided by corpus-linguistics to explore the poetic voices of tragic female characters: Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, and the women of *Richard III.* The essay concludes by tracing the growth of an independent, poetic female voice in the role of Queen Margaret who offers an ironic commentary on Shakespeare's growing sense of his own identity as national bard.

**Keywords:**   women, blason, ballad, image, metaphor, performance poetry, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Queen Margaret, bard

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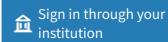# Sign in                                          ⓘ Get help with access

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