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**THE SEA AND WOMEN IN
SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST TETRALOGY**

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***Abstract:** The garden is a powerful imagery in Shakespeare history plays, yet the sea also plays an important role. By discussing episodes and metaphors related to the sea in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, this paper aims to demonstrate Shakespeare's macro-spatial perspective of England as an island, whose history is influenced by elements on and across the sea. The paper also examines Shakespeare's dramatization of women's interconnections with the sea. It attempts to contextualize Shakespeare's dramatic representation of the sea and of women within English Renaissance maritime culture.*

***Keywords:** history plays, maritime culture, sea, Shakespeare, women*

The Wars of the Roses, a series of civil wars in English history, is the subject of four of Shakespeare's history plays, the first tetralogy. Shakespeare gives us a scene in which supporters of Richard Plantagenet and of Somerset pluck white and red roses as their respective emblems in the Temple Garden (Act 2 Scene 4 of *1 Henry VI*) after Richard Plantagenet has plucked a white

rose and asked those who stand by him to follow suit, while Somerset has done the same with a red rose. This Temple Garden scene, as scholars generally agree, is Shakespeare's own contribution and an addition to his reference material (Baker 1997: 626, Dillon 2012:33). Because of the powerful dramatic appeal of this fictitious scene, when most people who know Shakespeare think of the Wars of the Roses, they relate to it as the origin of the name of the civil war and even as the origin of the war itself. The garden hence becomes a significant piece of imagery, and as Janette Dillon writes, it "functions emblematically, as an image of the commonwealth, as well as literally (since the opponents will pluck two roses)" (2012:33). There are, in fact, numerous metaphorical references to England as a garden in Shakespeare's history plays, such as the "garden of Eden" in *2 Henry VI*, a symbolic parallel of the state, which would not tolerate the rebel Jack Cade; John of Gaunt's reference to England as "This other Eden, demi-paradise" in *Richard II* (2.2.43); and Queen Margaret's comparison of the country to a garden in her advice to Henry VI, "Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted; / Suffer them now, and they'll o'ergrow the garden" (*2H6* 3.1.31-32). In contrast to the *garden*, the theme of the *sea* in Shakespeare's history plays is often overlooked, even though references to it abound. John of Gaunt, for instance, also refers to England as "This precious stone set in the silver sea / which serves it in the office of a wall" (*R2* 2.1.46-47), and Warwick says, "[the] island was girt in with the ocean" (*3H6* 4.8.20). "We don't ordinarily place the ocean at the heart of Shakespeare's plays," as Steve Mentz comments, "[b]ut the dramatist's engagement with the sea was neither casual nor metaphoric" (2009:x).

We have not paid much attention to the sea in the history plays for the reason that in contrast to such plays as *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and

Pericles, Prince of Tyre, which all have plots that are directly related to seafaring, the history plays are usually seen as being focused on power struggles at Court and wars on battlefields. In fact, however, the sea is an important element in Shakespeare's history plays, as many incidents that are of great consequence for the course of English history happen on the sea or are related to the sea. There is not one of Shakespeare's ten history plays that does not contain the word "sea." The sea is "a principal ingredient," as Sebastian I. Sobecki correctly observes, "in a culture's macrospatial imagination, which in turn, forms that inventive reservoir from which myths spring" (2008: 6). The sea is, I argue, a crucial ingredient in Shakespeare's dramatization of English history.

This paper will take the exacerbation *on the sea* of the conflict that starts in Temple Garden as a point of departure to discuss the significance with which Shakespeare endows the sea in his dramatization of the War of the Roses. A further point is that since the sea is traditionally a male domain, women's involvement with the sea is usually conceptualized as very limited. But a close reading of the history plays suggests that Shakespeare in fact presents women and the sea as interconnected. Hence, the paper will also attempt to probe into Shakespeare's presentation of women's relation to the sea in the first tetralogy. By placing two usually marginalized constituents of the history plays together - the sea and women - the paper aims to draw attention to the larger picture Shakespeare presents of England as a garden whose history is interrelated with the sea and with women.

The opening of *1 Henry VI* - the entry of three messengers in a row during Henry V's funeral, each with reports about more and more grievous situations in France - develops the notion that England is influenced by incidents across the sea. These messengers interrupt the king's funeral. What

had been expected to be a solemn ceremony with the king's body returning to the soil of the island is disturbed by the news from overseas. England has not been a self-contained island, as she has extended her power across the sea and has involved herself in a long-running political and military conflict with France. After hearing the first messenger's report about the loss of several major towns in France, Bedford replies, "What say'st thou, man! Before dead Henry's corse / Speak softly, or the loss of those great towns / Will make him burst his lead and rise from death" (*IH6* 1.1. 62-64). This image of Henry V bursting from his coffin, an enclosed space, metaphorically manifests the English involvement with matters beyond her sea-bounded territory.

Sea-crossing becomes necessary with this involvement in a power struggle across the English Channel. Gloucester, the Lord Protector, offers his counsel that Henry VI should be crowned in France: "Now will it best avail your majesty / To cross the seas and to be crown'd in France" (*IH6* 3.1.179-80). Gloucester's reason sounds overtly optimistic: "The presence of a king engenders love / Amongst his subjects and his loyal friends, / As it disanimates his enemies" (*IH6* 3.1.181-83). Clearly, the Lord Protector is unable to foresee the dangers and complications of a sea-crossing which in the event becomes fateful. Moreover, it is noteworthy that immediately after Henry has responded to his advice, "When Gloucester says the word, King Henry goes; / For friendly counsel cuts off many foes," Gloucester says: "Your ships already are in readiness" (*IH6* 3.1.184-186). Gloucester's prompt reply reveals the readiness of the English at that time to cross the sea. This may also be interpreted as reflective of the situation in Shakespeare's own time, when sea-crossing was quite an everyday matter for the English and fantasies of sea-crossing were common even among those who did not actually engage in it.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in this very scene, the one in which Henry VI agrees to be crowned in France, he also makes another mistake - he recreates Richard Plantagenet Duke of York. It is this York who soon afterwards threatens his throne. Since Richard is already in conflict with Somerset, as revealed earlier in the Temple Garden scene, by taking along the two conflicting factions with him on the sea to Paris, Henry VI creates trouble for himself.

Despite the readiness of the ships, sea-crossing was no easy task, given the lack of modern equipment that we have today to help reduce risk and increase comfort. The bad conditions on ships and the lack of personal space could easily engender conflicts, especially when men of different factions were crowded together in the same ship. This is supposedly what happens in *1 Henry VI*. Even though the sea-crossing is not presented on stage, what happens during the trip is revealed in a quarrel between Vernon of the white rose faction and Basset of the red rose faction. The quarrel is placed immediately after Henry VI has greeted and rewarded Talbot in the palace in Paris in Act 3 Scene 4. After everyone else exits the stage, Vernon and Basset stay behind. Vernon says:

Now, sir, to you, that were so hot at sea,
Disgracing of these colours that I wear
In honour of my noble Lord of York:
Dar'st thou maintain the former words thou spak'st? (*IH6* 3.4.28-31)

To this challenge Basset replies: "Yes, sir; as well as you dare patronage / The envious barking of your saucy tongue / Against my lord the Duke of Somerset" (*IH6* 3.4.32-34). Their words reveal that during the sea-crossing these two characters belonging to different factions had been

brewing new conflicts out of the old dispute between York and Somerset. Vernon's description of Basset as having been "so hot at sea" indicates Basset's uncontrolled temper but can also be related to the conditions of their journey, which have worsened their tempers. Had the two men not been forced into the limited space of a ship, their confrontation would not have become so hot.

In addition, had Richard not been recreated Duke of York, Vernon, who is of his faction, might not have continued his conflict with Basset in support of his "Lord of York" after the arrival in Paris. Back in England in the abovementioned Temple Garden scene, when Richard Plantagenet had not yet been recreated Duke of York, the quarrel was hot but there were still some concerns and constraints, as Suffolk's words reveal: "Within the Temple Hall we were too loud; / The garden here is more convenient" (*IH6* 2.4.3-4). Moreover, there is a lawyer in the scene, who also expresses his desire to wear a white rose. The presence of the lawyer seemingly suggests Richard's rightful claim, but it also creates an impression of law and order, especially as it resonates with Suffolk's concern that they were too loud. The symbolic meaning of the lawyer figure in the scene can be inferred when it is placed alongside the rebel Jack Cade's orders (in *2 Henry VI*) for all the lawyers to be killed when he invaded London.

The general conceptualization of the sea as a space free from constraints or outside order and rule explains why a new conflict arises there. The Englishmen's journey to France puts a greater distance between these quarrelsome men and the king's rule, even though the English king is with them. By leaving England for France, where English soldiers are losing their power as the French strike back, the king's subjects are made to witness the dwindling power of the English king.

It is interesting to note that in between the scene in which the king agrees to be crowned in Paris (Act 3 Scene 1) and the one in which he appears in Paris (Act 3 Scene 4) there are two other scenes, both set in France (Act 3 Scene 2 and Scene 3). It would have been possible to place the departure and arrival scenes one after the other, considering how theatrical presentations generally stretch or condense time and space. Yet the decision to insert these two scenes set in France creates an interesting effect - it seemingly implies that the sea-crossing takes quite a long time. Thus, in the interval between the English king's departure and his arrival, the French make further moves aimed at striking back. Notably, a woman leads the mission. Joan La Pucelle, disguised along with four soldiers as market traders selling corn, deceives a guard of Rouen into opening the gates, after which the Dauphin's force seizes its chance to attack. This disguise of La Pucelle's creates a Trojan horse image. Even though Talbot subsequently retakes Rouen, La Pucelle eventually (in the next scene) persuades the Duke of Burgundy, who is known from history to have alternated his support between England and France, to forsake the English for the French with her moving words:

Look on thy country, look on fertile France,
And see the cities and the towns defac'd
By wasting ruin of the cruel foe;
As looks the mother on her lowly babe
When death doth close his tender dying eyes. (*IH6* 3.3.44-48)

This feminine appeal to Burgundy to assume the perspective of a mother creates an image of women's connection with land. Janet Adelman suggests that Joan gives France the image of a "maternal body" when she says that Burgundy has given France wounds on "her woeful breast" (*IH6*

3.3.51) (1992:8). Thus the land becomes feminine, while the sea, bringing forth invaders, appears as masculine. At this point, sea-crossing may appear to be men's exclusive activity, yet in the larger picture, women are also involved in this activity indirectly as they have to confront sea-crossers who have impacted their lives on land. As a result, the land, as a garden, is not disconnected from the vast expanse of water surrounding it, for what happens on the water can have consequences for those on the land.

The conflict between Vernon and Basset on the sea is indeed of great consequence for those on the land. They quarrelled, as mentioned above, in Act 3 Scene 3 (1H6) after the king had greeted Talbot in Paris, and do so again in Act 4 Scene 5, after the king has been crowned. Gloucester had advised a coronation in France for the purpose of "engender[ing] love amongst [the king's] subjects and his royal friends" (1H6 3.1.181-82), but what actually happens is the exact opposite. Immediately after the king is crowned, bad things start to happen. First, Sir John Falstaff enters, and the King has to banish him because, according to Talbot, he had run away from a battle at Patay. Second, Henry VI learns from a letter produced by Falstaff that Burgundy, his uncle, has forsaken the English to join the French. After this, Vernon and Basset enter to ask the king to grant them the right to a duel, as both feel that they have been wronged. Upon hearing their requests, York says to the king, referring to Vernon: "This is my servant: hear him, noble Prince," after which Somerset also makes a parallel plea for Basset: "And this is mine: sweet Henry, favour him" (1H6 4.1.80-81). To Henry VI's demand to know the cause, Basset replies first:

Crossing the sea from England into France,
This fellow here, with envious carping tongue,
Upbraided me about the rose I wear,

...

When stubbornly he did repugn the truth
About a certain question in the law,
Argu'd betwixt the Duke of York and him. (*IH6* 4.1.89-96)

Vernon follows suit with his complaint: "For though he seem with forged quaint conceit / To set a gloss upon his bold intent, / Yet know, my lord, I was provok'd by him" (*IH6* 4.1.102-104). It is important to note that "a certain question in the law" is a continuation of the disagreement in the Temple Garden scene, and what it really is is still obscure at this point. Yet it has brewed resentment while they were crossing the sea.

After hearing these two men's dispute, York involves himself by saying to Somerset: "Will not this malice, Somerset, be left?" (*IH6* 4.1.107). Somerset replies: "Your private grudge, my Lord of York, will out, / Though ne'er so cunningly you smother it" (*IH6* 4.1.109-110). Even though Henry says, "Good cousins both, of York and Somerset / Quiet yourselves, I pray, and be at peace" (*IH6* 4.1.115), the two dukes continue to quarrel, and both Vernon and Basset join in. Henry VI, as the newly crowned king, proves himself completely powerless to command his subjects, and this powerlessness is manifested by his words. Instead of giving them strict orders, he uses, as above quoted, the term "I pray." Eventually, it is Gloucester who uses harsh words:

Confirm it so! Confounded be your strife!
And perish ye, with your audacious prate!
Presumptuous vassals, are you not ashamed
With this immodest clamorous outrage
To trouble and disturb the King and us? (*IH6* 4.1.123-27)

Exeter also tries to stop the two factions from continuing their strife, commenting that “It grieves his highness” (*IH6* 4.1.133). This comment forcefully demonstrates Henry VI’s incapacity to deal with his own subjects, especially when we compare this image of the newly crowned Henry VI, who is grieved by a petty quarrel the cause of which is obscure, to the image of a strong king embodied in Henry V, who, immediately after being crowned, denounces Falstaff when he approaches him in spite of whatever friendship they have previously shared.

While dealing with the Basset and Vernon quarrel, Henry VI makes his most serious mistake, which involves him in the conflict of the roses - he puts on a red rose without thinking twice about it, saying:

I see no reason if I wear this rose,
That any one should therefore be suspicious
I more incline to Somerset than York:
Both are my kinsmen, and I love them both. (*IH6* 4.1.152-55)

This naivete of wearing a red rose without a second thought renders Henry VI personally involved in the conflict between York and Somerset, because it provokes discontent in York which eventually leads to his rebellion against the King. As soon as the King and the others exit, York remarks to Warwick that “I like it not, / In that he wears the badge of Somerset” (*IH6* 4.1.176-77). From this point of view, even though the Temple Garden is where the factions of Somerset and York pick red and white roses, it is the subsequent quarrel *on the sea* between Vernon and Basset that has led to Henry VI’s picking a red rose. Gloucester’s counsel to the young king to cross the English Channel to be crowned in France is therefore not good advice at all, because he is insufficiently aware of what may brew up among the

different English factions when they are forced to spend time together in close proximity aboard a vessel on the sea. Thus seen, the sea plays a critical role in the exacerbation of England's internal conflict.

The schism in the English army between Somerset and York reaches France with the arrival of Henry VI and works its detrimental effect on Talbot, the most important figure in the English forces already stationed in France. In an expedition with York during which Somerset refuses to send in his reinforcements, Talbot and his son both die in action. Shakespeare shows us the refusal of the young Talbot to flee from his father's side, and the sorrow of the dying Talbot when he says: "in the sea of blood my boy did drench / His over-mounting spirit; and there died / My Icarus, my blossom, in his pride" (*IH6* 4.7. 16-18). Talbot's allusion to Icarus is even more sensationally appealing than the original myth because of the powerful imagery of "the sea of blood." The allusion to the Greek myth is further strengthened when Talbot sees the body of his son being borne to him by soldiers:

Thou antic Death, which laugh'st us here to scorn,
Anon, from thy insulting tyranny,
Coupled in bonds of perpetuity,
Two Talbots winged through the lither sky,
In thy despite shall scape mortality. (*IH6* 4.7.17-22)

The appealing Daedalus-Icarus allusion creates a metaphorical parallel between Crete, a island from which the two original Greek mythological figures attempt to escape, and England, which is surrounded by the sea. "The sea of blood" in Talbot's mouth can be related to the sea that the English cross in their ambition to conquer France. Had the English stayed on their island, the Talbots would not be like Daedalus and Icarus - aspiring

beyond their limits - and the sea-crossing to France would hence be unnecessary. It is, after all, the crossing of the sea that has led to this eventual “sea of blood,” which, metaphorically speaking, drowns the Talbots.

Talbot’s powerful Daedalus-Icarus allusion reminds one of the absence of a mother. Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* series begins with the funeral of Henry V, yet it does not include Katharine of Valois, widow to Henry V and mother to Henry VI. Historically, Henry V died in 1422 and his queen dowager, Katharine, lived until 1437 (Saccio 1977: 87, 180). It is said that she remarried Owen Tudor secretly and that the marriage was revealed only at her death (Saccio 1977:180). Her grandson from this second marriage became Henry VII, who founded the Tudor dynasty. Henry VII’s claim to the throne could also be traced via his mother, Margaret Beaufort. According to Saccio, Katharine’s son Edmund by her second marriage married Margaret Beaufort, daughter of John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, “who was in turn son to the eldest of John of Gaunt’s bastard offspring (later legitimated)” (1977:180). Even though Henry VII was generally called, as Jo McMurtry writes, “a great-great-grandson of the duke of Lancaster [John of Gaunt]” (1989:25), his lineage followed the female line. This means that women were not absent from this power struggle in English history. In fact, Katharine of Valois has an important part in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, where she orders a laughter-provoking English-learning scene. Furthermore, in the final wooing scene, this French princess shares the spotlight with the English king as we watch their comical interactions. Her role as an agent through whom Henry V makes himself heir to the French throne is apparent when the English king says: “Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine” (*H5* 5.2.180-82). But then this woman disappears from the stage in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* plays.

In the original Greek Daedalus-Icarus myth, even though the stress is usually placed on the father and son, women are not absent from the story. The wife and daughter of King Minos of Crete are both crucial to the final tragedy, for Daedalus is asked to build a labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur, a monster born of Minos's wife, and he is imprisoned because he gives Minos's daughter a clue with which to solve the mystery of the labyrinth (Powell 2009: 426-29). Just like this Greek myth that Talbot refers to, the larger picture of English history that incorporates the part of "Two Talbots winged through the lither sky" (*IH6* 4.7.21) involves women, too. Shakespeare dramatizes this involvement in *Henry V* when he makes the English king ask whether the Salic Law in France can prevent the English from claiming the French throne, after which Canterbury gives a long explanation of sixty-three lines to argue that the Law cannot be used to bar the English. This explanation brings women's inheritance rights into the centre of attention. According to Canterbury, the Salic Law does bar women when it states that "No woman shall succeed in Salique land" (*H5* 1.2.39), but he explains that Salic land is not France but Germany. Furthermore, he gives examples of kings who claimed their right through women, including, first, King Pepin, who was descended from Blithild, daughter to King Clothair, second, Hugh Capet, who presented himself as heir to the lady Lingare, daughter to Charlemagne, and finally, King Lewis the Tenth, who claimed his right through his grandmother, Queen Isabel, who was lineal of the Lady Ermengare, daughter to Charles, Duke of Lorraine (*H5* 1.2.65-85). Canterbury concludes after all these examples: "So that, as clear as is the summer's sun [. . .] / Howbeit they would hold up this Salic law / To bar your highness claiming from the female." (*H5* 1.2.86-92)

Canterbury's historical explanation involving French kings and their

foremothers may or may not appear obscure to Shakespeare's audience, but the main point he makes about women's involvement in the right to inherit is, to appropriate his own words, "as clear as is the summer's sun." Canterbury explains further that "in the book of Numbers is it writ: / "When the man dies, let the inheritance / Descend unto the daughter" (*H5* 1.2.98-100). This point must have been highly topical in Shakespeare's time as a woman, Queen Elizabeth, was on the throne, and it was generally known that her grandfather, Henry VII, had claimed his right to rule through the female line.

Despite the absence of Queen Katharine from the *Henry VI* plays, Shakespeare includes two female figures, Joan La Pucelle, who asks Burgundy to look at France through the eyes of a mother looking at a babe, and Margaret of Anjou, who can be considered Joan's successor. As soon as Joan is captured by York and exits the stage, Margaret enters. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin point out that there is an immediate link between these two French women in the audience's eyes, because at the same time as Joan is led off the stage, Margaret is introduced (1997:62). Charney also discerns that this non-historical scene sets Margaret up as a "successor to Joan" (1993: 122). The link between the two French women is strengthened by their shared Trojan horse image - Joan, by disguising herself as a corn merchant, gains access to Rouen; Margaret, by her charming looks, gains access to England.

Charmed by Margaret's beauty, Suffolk craves her for himself but quickly comes up with an alternative plan: he proposes to marry Margaret to Henry VI and negotiates this with Reignier, Margaret's father. In a soliloquy following the marriage negotiations, Suffolk reflects on his own desire: "O, wert thou for myself! But Suffolk, stay; / Thou may'st not wander in that labyrinth: There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk" (*IH6* 5.3.187-89). This allusion to the labyrinth of King Minos sounds a resonance with Talbot's

Daedalus-Icarus imagery. Interestingly, whereas the Talbots metaphorically drown in “the sea of blood,” Suffolk is eventually killed on the sea. Just as in the original Daedalus-Icarus myth, women play critical roles in these misfortunes. Had Daedalus not given Minos’s daughter the clue to solve the mystery of the labyrinth, he would not have been imprisoned or have made wings for his son and himself to fly away with. By the same token, had the Talbots not been too ambitious in a mission inspired by women’s inheritance rights, they would not have died on the battlefield. Similarly, had Suffolk not craved Margaret, he would not have been banished in the first place and then killed on the sea by pirates who hated him for his licentious relationship with the English queen.

Yet long before Suffolk meets his death on the sea, he makes good use of the sea as a space where he can practise his skills to charm his king. In the abovementioned soliloquy after the marriage negotiations with Reignier, Suffolk says that he will “solicit Henry with her [Margaret’s] wondrous praise [...] Repeat their semblance often on the seas,” so that when he sees the English king, he may “bereave him of his wits with wonder” (*IH6* 5.3.190-198). The fact that the sea is a space usually conceptualized as free from constraints allows Suffolk to make use of the time that he is going to spend on the sea to practise his evil skills, and to make preparations for his evil plan. As mentioned, the sea is the site where the conflict that began in the Temple Garden is exacerbated, causing Henry VI to be implicated in it. Viewed in this way, for Henry VI, the sea is not a lucky place. Neither is the sea lucky for Suffolk, for he finally dies on it.

In *2 Henry VI*, spirits conjured up by the Duchess of Gloucester predict that “By water shall he [Suffolk] die, and take his end” (*2H6* 1.4.33). This prediction by spirits conjured up by a woman eventually proves to be

true. Shakespeare makes an interesting play on words when he names one of the pirates that capture Suffolk Walter Whitmore. After hearing the name Walter, Suffolk says, “Thy name affrights me, in whose sound is death” (2*H6* 4.1.33). This imagery of water is further stressed when the lieutenant who is Walter’s commander puns on Suffolk’s name, William de la Pole [pool] - “Ay, kennel, puddle, sink; whose filth / Troubles the silver spring where England drinks” (2*H6* 4.1.70-71). With all these puns and plays on words, water is undoubtedly a source of powerful imagery in the play. When Walter Whitmore has finally killed Suffolk, he says “There let his head and lifeless body lie, / Until the queen his mistress bury it” (2*H6* 4.1.142-43). These words show that it is not just the sea or water that has caused Suffolk’s death, but also his suspect liaison with a woman.

Even though women do not seem to have a place on the sea, the death of Suffolk proves that women can have an impact on happenings at sea. The pirates would rather kill Suffolk than extract a large ransom from him because they hate him for his liaison with the English queen. In fact, the Salic Law that Henry V inquires about, which deprives women of their inheritance rights, can be considered the main cause of the conflict between England and France. Therefore, even though the sea does not seem to be a place frequently visited by women, the “wafting” of soldiers overseas to conquer France, and the voyage Henry VI takes to be crowned in France, all have causes that are linked to women.

When Margaret marries Henry VI, she crosses the sea to England. The outbreak of England’s civil war forces Queen Margaret to cross the sea once again to France, seeking French aid to support her son’s right to the English throne. At first it seems quite unlikely that she will secure French support because Warwick has gone there too, in his case to negotiate a

marriage between the newly crowned English King Edward and Lady Bona, the French king's sister. When news of King Edward's marriage to Lady Grey arrives, Warwick angrily renounces his support for Edward, while Lady Bona says to King Lewis: "Dear brother, how shall Bona be reveng'd / But by thy help to this distressed queen?" (*3H6* 3.3.212-13). Once again, women are the determining factors affecting the relationship between England and France. Had King Edward married Lady Bona, the French would not have helped Queen Margaret, and the civil war in England might have ended at this point, for Margaret would not have been able to strike back without French aid. Since King Edward has Warwick propose in his place to Lady Bona but then hastily marries an Englishwoman, the French are humiliated. Craving revenge, Lady Bona asks France to help Margaret. The French king agrees to send "five thousand men" to "cross the sea and bid false Edward battle" (*3H6* 3.3. 234-35). But he asks Warwick for a pledge of his loyalty, at which point Warwick suggests marrying his eldest daughter to Margaret's son, Prince Edward. Though Warwick's daughter is absent from the play, she is critical to the newly formed political alliance, which will bring five thousand French soldiers across the sea to England.

When Margaret next appears in England, she makes an extremely heroic speech to boost the morale of her followers. Even though the scene is not set on the sea but on a plain near Tewkesbury, as the stage direction informs us, Margaret's speech is filled with metaphors of sea and sailing:

What though the mast be now blown overboard,
The cable broke, the holding anchor lost,
And half our sailors swallow'd in the flood;
Yet lives our pilot still: is't meet that he
Should leave the helm and, like a fearful lad,

With tearful eyes add water to the sea
And give more strength to that which hath too much;
Whiles, in his moan, the ship splits on the rock,
Which industry and courage might have sav'd? (*3H6* 5.4.3-11)

Interestingly, in between the above-mentioned scene set in France, in which Queen Margaret finally secures French aid (Act 3 Scene 3), and her reappearance in England (Act 5 Scene 4), we have Act 4 with its eight scenes, and three other scenes in Act 5 preceding this one. This long interval creates the impression that the sea-crossing takes up a long time, during which the situation changes and worsens in England.

Moreover, near the end of Act 3 Scene 3, by saying, "Why stay we now? These soldiers shall be levied, / And thou, Lord Bourbon, our High Admiral, / Shalt waft them over with our royal fleet" (*3H6* 3.3.251-53), King Lewis leads us to think that the "wafting" of five thousand soldiers is an easy matter. However, with Margaret's words about the mast being blown overboard, the loss or destruction of the cable and anchor, and sailors swallowed, which are usually taken as a "storm-ship simile" according to Cairncross's annotation, but which can also be considered as related to her recent sea-crossing experience, we are reminded of the dangers of sea-crossing. Margaret develops the metaphor fully when she compares the newly crowned Edward to "a ruthless sea," Clarence to "a quicksand," and Richard to "a ragged fatal rock" and comments that they are all enemies to "our poor bark" (*3H6* 5.4.25-28). She concludes her speech by saying that the three York brothers offer less hope for mercy than the waves, sands and rocks, hence, "Why, courage then! What cannot be avoided / 'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear" (*3H6* 5.4.35-38). This long ship-storm metaphor

of over thirty lines stimulates our imagination about the journey across the sea that she has just undertaken.

In fact, in *2 Henry VI*, Margaret has already referred figuratively to her sea voyage to England when complaining about her ill fate in being badly treated by Henry VI, who is angry and upset over Gloucester's death:

Was I for this nigh wreck'd upon the sea
And twice by awkward wind from England's bank
Drove back again unto my native clime?
...
The pretty-vaulting sea refused to drown me,
Knowing that thou wouldst have me drown'd on shore,
With tears as salt as sea, through thy unkindness:
The splitting rocks cower'd in the sinking sands
And would not dash me with their ragged sides,
Because thy flinty heart, more hard than they,
Might in thy palace perish Margaret. (*2H6* 3.2.81-99)

This figurative twist probably comes from her experience of sea travel, which is not without peril. Thus seen, Margaret can be considered an exceptional female character in the history plays for her understanding of the dangers of the sea and her powerful verbal mastery of sea-crossing images.

In Renaissance England, it was common to regard the sea as a male space because those who involved themselves in sea-crossing were usually male. Even though many people were thrilled by the idea of sea-crossing, as there was constant news of the discovery of new lands and new trade routes, and there were taverns in London where seamen talked about their adventures, not everyone could or would travel across the sea. It is generally believed that Shakespeare did not. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, for example, writes that "my

own impression, after carefully studying all his [Shakespeare's] sea images, is that he had little, if any, direct experience of being on the sea, and that his knowledge of the sea and ships might well have been gained from books . . . from talks and from living in a great seaport" (1935:48). During Shakespeare's time, women in general were excluded from sea adventures, but they must have been just as fascinated by the sea as men were. One of the reasons why women were excluded from sea adventures was the superstitious belief that women's presence on board a vessel was unlucky or would lead to disaster (Bicknell 2004: viii; Chambers, Murray and Wheelwright 1995:11). A superstition held by seafarers could have a great impact, as Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* demonstrates. In this drama, which is said to deal with "the sea more than any other Shakespearean play" (White 1970:97), the Prince is forced to comply with the sailors' demand: "Sir, your queen must overboard; the sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be clear'd of the dead" (*Pericles* 3.1.47-49). Even though Pericles chides them: "That's your superstition" (*Pericles* 3.1.50), he eventually has his queen put overboard. Although it is the presence of the corpse, not of a woman's corpse in particular, that the sailors refuse to tolerate, the scene shows how, on the sea, the sailors' superstition can overrule a prince's opinion.

Marcus Rediker, who studies Anglo-American maritime culture in the eighteenth century, writes that "seafaring was an occupation sharply segregated by sex" and that women did not ordinarily go seafaring (1987: 155). In her study of naval wives and mistresses in eighteenth-century England, Margaret Lincoln also argues that "seafaring is a predominantly male profession" (2007:16). Dorothy Snow Bicknell wrote in her foreword to *Women of the Sea*, a work on maritime women, that in 1962, when the book was published, "women still were very limited in many of their roles on the

sea and opportunities were few” (2004:viii). If this was so in the eighteenth century and even in the twentieth, women must have been even more excluded from roles on the sea back in Renaissance times, when there was an even stronger expectation that they would be stay-at-homes. Nevertheless, England’s queens of foreign origin, just like Queen Margaret, must all have crossed the sea to be married in England. So this group of highly-born women forms an exception to the norm.

In the imaginative space Shakespeare creates on his stage, he dramatizes the fascination with sea-crossing that prevailed in his time. Even though women were not allowed to be stage players then, they were allowed into theatres as part of the audience. To appeal to them, Shakespeare dramatizes heroines’ sea-crossings and women’s involvement with the sea in one way or another. Famously, he creates in *Twelfth Night* an appealing heroine, Viola, who has a stirring adventure after a shipwreck. In Shakespeare’s imagining of the sea for the stage, he invites women, who constitute a large portion of his audience, to join him. Even the history plays, which until recent decades have usually been regarded as plays focusing on male heroic endeavors, dramatize women’s interconnections with the sea. Though these plays do not create figures such as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, whose shipwreck gives her the liberty to assume a new identity, when we examine many episodes that appear to be exclusively male endeavours, such as the war in France commanded by Talbot, which results in Talbot’s alluding to the Daedalus-Icarus endeavour, we find that women are there with their influence in one way or another. Joan La Pucelle may serve as an example. While Henry VI is supposedly crossing the sea from England to France, La Pucelle leads the French in their fight against Talbot. Even though she does not fight wars on the sea, she fends off invaders from across the sea. In fact,

the Wars of the Roses, as is generally understood, resulted from a long-running conflict between England and France, which weakened English power and created many internal problems. Yet at the bottom of the Anglo-French conflict lies a dispute over women's right to inherit, as Henry V's concern about the Salic Law reveals.

Shakespeare's dramatization of Queen Margaret, who masters the ship-storm metaphor, links women with the sea on his stage. When we consider the general exclusion of women from seafaring in Renaissance England, we might find that this link resonates with a "supreme irony" of the time, which, to borrow Carol Hansen's words, is that "a woman, Elizabeth I, was running the whole show, or to be more precise, the whole country" (1993: 4). One of Queen Elizabeth's most famous achievements was her triumph over the Spanish Armada. This achievement on the sea, regardless of the fact that it was the result of a tempest (Kay 1992:104), demonstrates that the sea was not altogether alien to this female monarch. As Queen of England, Elizabeth is renowned for having commanded not only the Navy but also privateers, her sea dogs, who helped her weaken the threatening Spanish power on the sea. The image of a courageous Margaret commanding the appealing ship-storm metaphor sounds a resonance with that of Queen Elizabeth, who was also involved with the sea. After all, the sea that surrounds the island or the garden of England is fundamentally connected to men just as it is to women.

In Margaret's appealing ship-storm metaphor, England is a "poor bark" endangered by the three York brothers (3*H6* 5.4.28). Earlier, in 2 *Henry VI*, as mentioned, Margaret has used the image of a garden to refer to England. By shifting from her earlier garden metaphor to the bark metaphor, Margaret reveals not only her great sensitivity to the dangers threatening the country,

but also her widened perspective of England as a ship under the influence of elements on the sea and beyond the sea. Hence, even though most women did not engage in seafaring during Shakespeare's time, this vivid metaphor Shakespeare puts into Margaret's mouth suggests women's ability to imagine their connection with the sea. This metaphor, to our amazement, finds a parallel in the stage, a "wooden O" that has to survive the rough waters of censorship and closedown. In a certain sense, the world of sea travellers is rather similar to the world of players, as the sea travellers make expeditions via the ship's "wooden world" (as Isaac Land calls it, 2009: 16), while the players stage imaginative expeditions in their "wooden O." On the stage of the "wooden O," Shakespeare invites women to participate in imaginary adventures on the sea with his female characters and dramatizes women's interconnections with the sea.

In conclusion, Shakespeare endows the sea with emblematic significance and literal functions in his dramatization of English history. The Wars of the Roses, as we have discussed, are interconnected with the sea and with women. There is no doubt that the Temple Garden conflict is dramatically fascinating, but the subsequent exacerbation of the conflict on the sea during Henry VI's voyage to France also plays a critical role in the play. Moreover, the military forces crossing the sea are interconnected with women. Though, on the surface, women seem to have little to do with the sea, they are seen fending off invaders from across the sea, and they are the causes, both direct and indirect, of soldiers being "wafted" across the sea. Shakespeare's overall picture of England is not one in which "the silver sea" around the country, as John of Gaunt idealistically puts it, "serves it in the office of a wall" (*R2* 2.1.46-47). Neither is Shakespeare's portrayal of the sea an exclusive domain for men, as maritime tradition might have it, for the

character who masters the most appealing ship-storm metaphor is a woman.

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