

# Women and Boundary Crossing: Foreign Brides in Shakespeare's History Plays

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## ABSTRACT

The conflicting international relations, as depicted in Shakespeare's history plays, make national-boundary crossing a necessary act not only for men who engage themselves in battles overseas, but also for women who marry into foreign countries. These women have not simply crossed boundaries delineated in space. Their marriages involve complicated identity issues. Shakespeare's history plays assign plenty of textual spaces to English queens of foreign origin for them to voice out their difficult alien status. These foreign brides are seldom conceptualized by Englishmen as completely naturalized, and can be easily attacked for their foreign origin and questioned for their loyalty to England. Margaret of Anjou in *Henry VI*, labeled by Englishmen as "she-wolf of France," is a typical example of how such a foreign bride can be readily attacked for being a national alien, despite the fact that she is the mother of an English prince. This paper attempts to delineate the in-betweenness of these foreign brides, and it also discusses how Shakespeare employs them to enhance the dramatic tension of his history plays.

## KEY WORDS

Shakespeare, history plays, women, boundary crossing, foreign bride



Crossing national boundaries to conquer foreign territories, as depicted in Shakespeare's history plays, constitutes a significant opportunity for men to assert their valor and heroism. By conquering French territories and acquiring Princess Katharine of France, Henry V asserts his identity as a potent English king, and this temporary success climaxes Shakespeare's English histories with a comic note. Nevertheless, crossing national boundaries is not men's prerogative; women in Shakespeare's histories also have that opportunity—mainly because of transnational marriages. Even though traditional reading strategies have not highlighted the significance of these female national boundary crossers, Shakespeare's history plays have in fact endowed the female boundary crossers with substantial dramatic spaces.

The foreign brides in Shakespeare's history plays are mostly products of political arrangements or conquests. Their transnational marriages do not simply involve physical boundary crossing. Language and cultural differences also cause complications, and a sense of not belonging where they are married and not being accepted plague these women. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare plays up Princess Katharine's English learning scene to arouse laughter and sympathy. In *Henry VI*, he highlights through her political enemies Queen Margaret's alien origin, and he gives opportunity for Margaret to voice her disappointment with her English court life. Shakespeare also depicts what these foreign brides are capable of: Constance in *King John* and Queen Margaret seek foreign aid against England, making them potent threats to Englishmen. That is why Englishmen seldom conceptualize their queens of foreign origin as completely naturalized. When power conflicts arise and when necessity demands it, they attack these women

for their foreign origins and question their loyalties to England. This paper discusses the in-betweenness of the alien queens and foreign brides in Shakespeare's histories. It also attempts to show that the enormous dramatic spaces occupied by these foreign brides enrich the basic historical plot, and calls attention to Shakespeare's art which allows history to be stretched for more dramatic possibilities.

The most remarkable alien queen in Shakespeare's histories plays is, undoubtedly, Margaret of Anjou, queen to Henry VI, whose matriarchal influence creates political conflicts and great dramatic fascinations. Margaret's notorious label, "She-wolf of France," signifies her foreignness and her unnaturalness in the eyes of Englishmen. Shakespeare's First Tetralogy dramatizes the fierce part in her character, but also brings into focus her valor and her maternal love. The plays assign her enormous textual space to manifest her development in various stages. She is one among the few female characters in this category of Shakespeare's plays whose part has extended beyond the bounds of a single play or two. In the three parts of *Henry VI*, Margaret first appears as a young maid initialized into love and marriage, after which she turns into a disappointed queen because of her powerless husband-king. The plays depict courtly jealousies and power contentions, out of which Margaret must be cunning and rough to survive. Margaret's final ghost-like image in *Richard III* leaves us a strong impression. England's civil war has transformed a young and beautiful French maid into an old and cursing deposed queen.

Critics have mentioned that the first introduction of Margaret is significant: when Joan la Pucelle is finally subdued by the English, Suffolk discovers this French beauty and immediately plans that he should marry her to his king (e.g. Williamson 47). Maurice Charney states that this unhistorical scene sets Margaret up as a "successor to Joan" (122). Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin observe that such an arrangement suggests to the audience an immediate link between these two French women (62). In fact, Margaret is like a scapegoat, especially after Suffolk pronounces his ill intention to use Margaret to control his king.

Before Margaret appears, Gloucester, Henry VI's Lord Protector,

has arranged for the young king to marry the daughter of Armagnac. Even though the king shows little interest in this match, he agrees to it for the sake of his country. However, he changes his mind and decides to marry Margaret instead after he listens to Suffolk's description of Margaret's beauty. The fact that Henry VI pays to marry Margaret by giving Anjou and Maine away to Margaret's father has created great discontent among his lords. They are emotionally attached to these lands as they have fought with their lives to conquer them for England. But the king has given away what they have fought for, simply for what they believe to be a poor, unworthy woman. Gloucester proclaims:

Shall Henry's conquest, Bedford's vigilance,  
 Your deeds of war, and all our counsel die?  
 O peers of England! shameful is this league,  
 Fatal this marriage, cancelling your fame,  
 Blotting your names from books of memory,  
 Razing the characters of your renown,  
 Defacing monuments of conquer'd France,  
 Undoing all, as all had never been! (*2H6*, 1.1.95–102)

In contrast to his glorious father, Henry VI is an embarrassment to his people. His mismatched marriage has hurt the brilliant history of conquest that many Englishmen have given their lives for. The marriage is therefore, according to Gloucester, "fatal," because it unwrites the history they have written. Warwick joins in Gloucester's viewpoint when he announces:

Anjou and Maine! myself did win them both;  
 Those provinces these arms of mine did conquer:  
 And are the cities, that I got with wounds,  
 Deliver'd up again with peaceful words?  
 Mort Dieu! (*2H6*, 1.118–22)

Warwick's exclamation amplifies on these men's feelings. The main reason for the English lords to detest their young king's match so

much is because the late king, Henry V, has made an enormous conquest when he acquires Princess Katharine of France. Through her, Henry V and his heirs will have the right to rule France. In the eyes of English lords who are eager to conquer French territories, Katharine is a symbol of their king's victory. In comparison to what Princess Katharine means to Englishmen, Margaret is completely unacceptable, because she signifies their king's defeat by a French woman. Henry VI turns into a conquered instead of a conqueror when he surrenders land for his bride Margaret.

Henry VI's first encounter with Margaret fortifies his conquered image. He exclaims that the sight of her ravishes him; her words make him weep (2H6, 1.1.32–35). This excessive passion marks him as an "effeminate or womanish man" (Howard and Rackin 67). In contrast with his father's martial image, the young king appears pitiable. Moreover, he has a Lord Protector, Gloucester. Though Gloucester is loyal, his wife is ambitious and this poses a threat to Henry and Margaret. The dramatic world Shakespeare has shaped for *Henry VI* resembles to a certain extent the condition he creates in his *King John*. In both of these plays, there is a lack of powerful father figure. In *King John*, queen mother Eleanor interferes with John's rule, while Prince Arthur's mother, Constance, keeps on pushing her unambitious child to claim the English throne. In *Henry VI*, the Lord Protector's ambitious wife makes him unfit to be a trustworthy father figure. The political condition of England and the king's powerlessness compel his foreign wife, Margaret, to empower herself in order to survive.

Nevertheless, self-empowerment isn't an easy task. The English court that she finds herself in isn't a friendly place. There are highly ambitious and manipulative lords who take advantage of Henry VI's powerlessness for their own interests. When Margaret first attempts to participate in a dispute among the lords, Gloucester, the Protector, stops her bluntly by declaring: "These are no women's matters" (2H6, 1.3.117). This statement represents a dominant male view in the historical world Shakespeare creates: women are not supposed to interfere with politics; they are expected to be "invisible" (Rackin 81) or non-existent (Rose 193). But Shakespeare's history plays apparently

do not cohere with this idea. How can it be when Queen Elizabeth is on the throne? As Carol Hansen notes, “the supreme irony” is that “a woman, Elizabeth I, was running the whole show, or to be more precise, the whole country” (4). The Duke is eventually punished for making such a presumptuous proclamation. He gets his penalty, ironically, from a wife he fails to restrain.

The Duchess of Gloucester is an ambitious and dangerous woman. Her wild extravaganza of wealth in court signifies her haughty mentality, brining attention to the hostility Margaret has to cope with in the English court. The two women hate each other and the play elaborates on their jealousy. Margaret complains to Suffolk that “Not all these lords do vex me half so much/As that proud dame, the Lord Protector’s wife” (2*H6*, 1.3.75–76) because the Duchess’s pompous style, manner and wealth make her “more like an empress than Duke Humphrey’s wife” (2*H6*, 1.3.78). Interestingly, the subsequent development of the play proves that Margaret is not all that incorrect to have felt herself threatened. The Duchess does covet Margaret’s position as England’s queen, and attempts to persuade her husband to get Henry VI’s throne. Remarkably, the jealousy between Margaret and the Duchess of Gloucester is an unhistorical event. The Duchess’s disgrace, as Williamson informs us, happens before Margaret arrives in England (42). Obviously, Shakespeare stretches history to add a new dimension to Margaret’s English court life. He employs the Duchess to manifest how unfriendly the English court is as a whole to England’s foreign queen.

Shakespeare climaxes their womanish jealousy by having Queen Margaret boxing the Duchess on the ear for revenge. She pretends to have mistaken the Duchess for a minion not promptly obeying her order to pick up a dropped fan. The Duchess is terribly offended and openly proclaims her hatred in court by calling the Queen a “proud Frenchwoman” (2*H6*, 1.3.140) —a term indicating that the Queen’s foreign origin can readily be used by an English to attack her.

Besides her foreign origin, the Duchess also draws attention to Margaret’s unnatural female role. She proclaims to King Henry VI: “She’ll hamper thee and dandle thee like a baby: /Though in this place

most master wear no breeches" (2H6, 1.3.145–46). Such an open proclamation in court of King Henry's submission to his French wife is a humiliation not only for the king alone, but also for the English men in general. By calling Queen Margaret "Frenchwoman," the Duchess invokes a deep-rooted mindset of self versus other, or English versus French, prevalent in the English court. Henry VI has already planted a root of discontent among his lords when he marries Margaret on the condition that Anjou and Maine be given to Margaret's father. When the provoked Duchess maliciously points out that Margaret is now the "master" wearing "no breeches" (2H6, 1.3.145), she instigates a general anxiety about this alien queen because of her control over their English king.

Many critics are aware of Margaret's deviation from what she is expected to be in her culture. Angela Pitt calls her "the most relentlessly sustained symbol in Shakespeare of all that is unnatural" (151). Margaret Loftus Ranald names her an "Amazonian woman" and "masculine woman" for her confrontational spirit (174). Nevertheless, when Margaret first appears in 1Henry VI, she is not unnatural. She is but a conventional female, who replies submissively to Suffolk when he proposes to marry her to Henry VI: "And if my father please, I am content" (1H6, 5.3.127). Moreover, when Suffolk pronounces his intention to use Margaret to control the English king, he leads us to see Margaret as an object of exchange between men. Margaret's role at this point resembles that of Princess Katharine in *Henry V*. However, this initial submission to patriarchal authority in the French battlefield cannot continue in an England that lacks a strong patriarchal figure. Margaret finds in England a husband rather different from the heroic English lord she has encountered in France. Henry VI is but a child king with a Lord Protector. He has no ambition and he doesn't know how to exercise his kingly authority. Worse of all, he is environed by ambitious lords. Shakespeare elaborates on the Duchess of Gloucester's ambition for her husband to depose Henry VI, manifesting the imminent threat posed by the king's unruly subjects. Sensitive to this dangerous situation, Margaret seeks her own ally in a court filled with hostile English lords. Suffolk, whom she has first met in France,

becomes her useful resource. She says to Suffolk:

I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours,  
 Thou ran'st a tilt in honour of my love,  
 And stol'st away the ladies' hearts of France,  
 I thought King Henry had resembled thee  
 In courage, courtship, and proportion:  
 But all his mind is bent to holiness,  
 To number Ave-Maries on his beads. (2H6, 1.3.50–56)

This is a shrewd revelation of a woman's affection that few men can resist. By declaring to Suffolk that her own husband-king is no comparison to him "in courage, courtship and proportion," Margaret greatly flatters Suffolk and charms him into serving her own purposes. Suffolk professes to her: "Madam, be patient; as I was cause/ Your Highness came to England, so will I/In England work your Grace's full content" (2H6, 1.3.65–67). With these promising words, Margaret spells out her hatred for the Duchess of Gloucester, after which Suffolk declares he has "lim'd a bush" for her (2H6, 1.3.88). Suffolk even assures her that all her enemies will be wiped out: "And You yourself shall steer the happy helm" (2H6, 1.3.100).

It is remarkable to recall that Shakespeare depicts Suffolk as an ambitious man full of dark conspiracies early in *1 Henry VI*. When he first sets his eyes on Margaret's beauty, he wants her for himself, but he quickly figures out a better way to use her beauty. He says, "Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King; /But I will rule both her, the King, and realm" (1H6, 5.5.107–08). These words prove him a villain. Had Margaret charmed a simple-minded English lord into serving her, the drama would be less fascinating. With his dark intentions, Suffolk is dangerous to Margaret. Equally dangerous is Margaret to him, as she is, to use Howard and Rackin's words, "a sexually mature and erotically powerful figure" (73). Margaret's taming of Suffolk thus constitutes a thrilling dramatic element in *2 Henry VI*.

Shakespeare makes Suffolk pay for his suspicious liaison with Margaret. Instead of really enjoying political influence through the



Queen, Suffolk suffers as he arouses her husband's jealousy. When the Queen pleads for Suffolk against his banishment: "O Henry, let me plead for gentle Suffolk!" (2H6, 3.2.288), the king resentfully answers: "Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk! /No more, I say; if thou dost plead for him/Thou wilt but add increase unto my wrath" (2H6, 3.2.289–91). Suffolk's relation with Margaret even costs him his life. Pirates refuse ransom because they hate him, among other things, for his liaison with the queen: "Thy lips, that kiss'd the Queen, shall sweep the ground" (2H6, 4.1.74). When they kill him, one of them (Walter Whitmore) accentuates: "There let his head and lifeless body lie, /Until the Queen his mistress bury it" (2H6, 4.2.142–43). Suffolk's initial plan to use Margaret turns out, ironically, to be the other way round. When he pronounces to her before his exile, "If I depart from thee I cannot live" (2H6, 3.2.387), "her hold over him," as Janet Adelman remarks, "has been bizarrely redefined" (8). Margaret has indeed skillfully manipulated a dangerous villain.

Even though Margaret mourns for Suffolk's death, and says to herself that "My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceas'd" (2H6, 4.5.55), what happens subsequently is her struggle for survival despite the loss of her only ally in the English court. Love does not belong to a world determined by political reality. Margaret still needs to appease King Henry's jealousy. When the king asks what she will do when he is dead, she cunningly replies: "My love; I should not mourn, but die for thee" (2H6, 4.4.24). The development of the play proves that Margaret would not die for Henry VI or anyone else. Shakespeare makes her live long--much longer than what historical records say--into the time when Richard III reigns.

Margaret's relationship with her husband-king seemingly reveals a bankruptcy of patriarchal authority. Unlike Shakespeare's depiction of angry Othello, who punishes Desdemona, Henry VI only shows petty jealousy when he faces his wife's suspicious relation with Suffolk. His failure to exercise his manly authority over his wife is spectacular when compared to Henry V's authority over Katharine of France in the wooing scene. When we take into account that Margaret's love affair with Suffolk is "entirely fictional," as Marilyn L. Williamson informs

us (47), we can see that the playwright has added by this fiction a dramatic conflict that reveals how untrustworthy Margaret is. Nevertheless, by inventing Suffolk's suspicious relation with Margaret, Shakespeare has not only created important themes such as Suffolk's dark ambition (Williamson 47), he has also provided grounds to substantiate Margaret's disappointment with her husband. She admires Suffolk's hero image when they first meet in France; she arrives in England to find Henry not a hero but a holy man.

Queen Margaret would not have a decisive role in the civil war had her husband been powerful. Henry VI proves himself a most incapable ruler by giving in to the demand of York who turns his force from his Irish expedition back to England. In contrast to her husband's cowardice, Queen Margaret denies York's demand, commands his arrest and actively seeks support from the other lords. This critical moment manifests Queen Margaret's amazonian spirit. When York scolds her: "O blood-bespotted Neapolitan, / Outcast of Naples, England's Bloody scourge!" (2H6, 5.1.117-18), he reminds us of her similarity to Joan la Pucelle, "the English scourge." "In this respect," as the annotation in the Arden edition of the play points out "Margaret is [Joan's] true successor" (144). In the subsequent civil war, the queen takes over the king's commander position. While several other queens in Shakespeare's history plays, such as Queen Isabel in *Richard II*, passively accept their roles as dethroned queens when their husbands' political careers fail, Margaret fights back, manifesting her difference from them.

However, Shakespeare's histories have presented how Margaret is forced by the situation to command both Henry VI's household and his country. By agreeing to disinherit his own son, the Prince of Wales, in parliament under the pressure of York, Henry VI violates a most sacred patriarchal code—birthright. Had he confronted York and died courageously instead, the heroic legacy of the father would not have degenerated to such an embarrassing extent. By preferring infamy to death, Henry VI initiates "a crisis in heroic relationships."<sup>1</sup> The Prince of Wales cannot identify with his father. The kind of opportunity enjoyed by John Talbot—to immortalize his father's name by dying

together with his father—is not opened to the prince. Henry VI, an infamous living father, becomes an obstacle for his son in claim any paternal legacy. “Henry’s weakness in disinheriting his son has created a vacuum,” as Williamson writes, “into which Margaret moves to earn her place in history” (51). Even though Margaret may be a licentious wife, she would not have become a threatening matriarch if not for this heroic crisis. Time has made her the “she-wolf” she is known for.

Shakespeare’s drama elaborates on the bad relationship between Margaret and Henry after Henry has disinherited his own son. Even though it is obvious that Margaret is disappointed with Henry from the very beginning, she is willing to use her words to charm him. But Henry’s cowardice this time jeopardizes their son’s right. Margaret’s only reaction is anger. She scolds him:

Enforc’d thee! Art thou King, and wilt be forc’d?  
I shame to hear thee speak. Ah! timorous wretch,  
Thou hast undone thyself, thy son, and me;  
And given unto the house of York such head  
As thou shalt reign but by their sufferance. (*3H6*, 1.1.237–42)

In the later part of this scene, Queen Margaret voices sound analyses: “To entail him [York] and his heirs unto the crown, /What is it but to make thy sepulchre, /And creep into it far before thy time” (*3H6*, 1.1.242–44)? “And yet shalt thou be safe? Such safety finds/The trembling lamb environed with wolves” (*3H6*, 1.1.248–49). In contrast to her insight, King Henry still believes innocently that he can rule till he dies. Margaret manifests to us her fierce spirit and her desperation when she declares to her husband: “Had I been there, which am a silly woman, /The soldiers should have toss’d me on their pikes/Before I would have granted to that act” (*3H6*, 1.1.250–52). Her fearlessness belittles him. Since he “prefer’st [his] life before [his] honour” (*3H6*, 1.1.253), she declares: “I here divorce myself/Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed” (*3H6*, 1.1.254–55). Her proclamation signifies an ultimate bankruptcy of patriarchal order in her husband’s reign.

Though Linda Bamber maintains that “we are constantly

reminded that Margaret's actions are unnatural because unwomanly" (137), the dramatic circumstances Shakespeare has presented explains Margaret's emotional reaction. Moreover, the play foregrounds paradoxes: Margaret might be unnatural as a woman, but she is a natural mother; Henry VI is a holy man, but he is an unnatural father. In Shakespeare's historical world, men respect claims for birthright. John Talbot claims his father's heroic name, and validates it by death. Bolingbroke defies his exile, returns to England to claim his dukedom from his deceased father. Set against such historical contexts, Henry VI appears undoubtedly unnatural. Queen Margaret retorts when the king asks her to be patient:

Who can be patient in such extremes?  
 Ah! wretched man, would I had died a maid,  
 And never seen thee, never borne thee son,  
 Seeing thou hast prov'd so unnatural a father.  
 Hath he deserv'd to lose his birthright thus?  
 Hadst thou but lov'd him half so well as I,  
 Or felt that pain which I did for him once,  
 Or nourish'd him as I did with my blood,  
 Thou would'st have left thy dearest heart-blood there,  
 Rather than made that savage duke thine heir,  
 And disinherited thine only son. (3H6, 1.1.222–32)

Margaret justifies her attack of this "unnatural" father when she accentuates a mother-son bond through "blood." This mother-son bond refreshes our memory of other significant mothers Shakespeare depicts in his histories: Constance in *King John* uses wars to enforce her son's birthright; the Duchess of York in *Richard II* begs like a beggar to save her treacherous son. These women's extreme methods help to suggest that Margaret is not as "unnatural" as Bamber claims (137).

Shakespeare depicts in a logical way how the deteriorated father-son bond gives occasion to the development of a strong mother-son bond. Not unlike his mother who reacts negatively, the prince openly protests to Henry VI: "Father, you cannot disinherit me:

“If you be king, why should not I succeed?” (3H6, 1.1.233–34) The king is reduced to an apologetic husband and father who can only say: “Pardon me, Margaret; Pardon me, sweet son” (3H6, 1.1. 235), while Margaret, on the contrary, announces her determination to form an army against usurping York. She says to the prince, “Come, son, let’s away; / Our army is ready; come, we’ll after them” (3H6, 1.1. 262–63). When the king asks the prince to stay with him, Margaret says: “Ay, to be murder’d by his enemies” (3H6, 1.1. 267). After hearing this, the young man decides to go with his mother.

Not unlike Margaret’s announcement of her divorce from the king’s table and bed, Prince Edward’s refusal to stay with his father meaningfully signifies a collapse of patriarchal authority fundamental to the state. Coppelia Kahn observes that in the history plays, “a man’s identity is determined by his relationship to his father, son, or brother” (74). However, the prince obviously cannot confirm his identity through his father. Only his mother can help him validate his identity as a king’s son. In the subsequent scenes, the prince’s birthright becomes a potent symbol of legitimacy. Queen Margaret emerges as a matriarch. She suspends the logic of patriarchy to enforce the prince’s birthright. Paradoxically, she is both subversive and supportive to a system based on patriarchal lineage.

However, Margaret can easily be incriminated within a culture dominated by male values. Her foreign origin and her gender status become targets for her political enemies while they blur up her cause to support her son’s birthright. York, her arch-enemy, invents for her all kinds of defiling terms: “She-wolf of France” (3H6, 1.4.111) “Amazonian trull” (3H6, 1.4.114). He claims that her tongue is more poisonous than “the adder’s tooth” (3H6, 1.4.112), her face vizard-like (3H6, 1.4.116). York states:

‘Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;  
 But God he knows thy share thereof is small.  
 ‘Tis virtue that doth make them most admir’d;  
 The contrary doth make thee wonder’d at.  
 ‘Tis government that makes them seem divine;

The want thereof makes thee abominable. (3H6, 1.4.128–33)

York also calls attention to Margaret's father's poverty (3H6, 1.4.111–13). Other English men share this mindset, too. Richard charges Margaret: "Iron of Naples, hid with English gilt, / Whose father bears the title of a king/As if a channel should be call'd the sea" (3H6, 2.2.139–141); Edward calls her "a beggar" the king takes to his bed (3H6, 2.2.154). Margaret's French origin makes her damnable. French men are "wolves," Margaret is hence, a "she-wolf." York plays up this national hatred by using "false French-woman" (3H6, 1.4.149) to conclude his charges. A similar mindset also constitutes the hatred held by the Duchess of Gloucester against Queen Margaret, and by the English lords against Joan la Pucelle.

Nicholas Grene remarks that York's portrait of Margaret is something to be expected from a tortured adversary (6). However, in view of York's part in defaming Joan la Pucelle and in denying her pregnancy plea, we discover a politics which is consistent and discriminatory. This strategy is especially useful when he confronts Margaret because it blurs the real cause of the civil war, which is a contention between two blood lines. York makes the war look like a "sex" war and a "national" war waged against an unnatural gender and national Other. Not unlike the term, "tyrant," which can serve as "a political weapon" and "a form of propaganda" (Bushnell 79), the term, "she-wolf of France," serves exactly the same purpose.

Shakespeare's histories, as Leonard Tennenhouse notes, demonstrate that "authority goes to the contender who can seize hold of the symbols and signs legitimizing authority and wrest them from his rivals, thus making them serve his own interests" (121). Margaret has a potent symbol, Prince Edward, to legitimize her authority. York's counter-strategy is to single her out as an unnatural threatening foreign female, who must be subdued to ensure English patriarchal order.

Not unlike Constance in *King John*, Queen Margaret is eventually forced to seek French aid. This provides Yorkists a good cause to substantiate their attacks against her foreignness. However, it is obvious that Joan la Pucelle can be seen as a national Other from the

viewpoint of the English men because “Joan sins against England” (Bamber 138); but Margaret does not sin against England. Her cause as an English queen supporting the prince’s birthright is not without justification.

The call-for-courage speech Margaret makes when she returns to England with reinforcements manifests her determination (3H6, 5.4.1–38). The last two lines of this speech: “Why, courage then! what cannot be avoided/ ‘Twere childish weakness to lament or fear” (3H6, 5.4.37–38) reflects her own situation in England. There is no room for her to fear. As a mother, she has to protect her own son. The thirty-eight-line speech concretizes Margaret’s status as a charismatic leader and a heroine. Overshadowed by his mother’s glamour, Prince Edward is reduced to the role of a witness, a role usually belonging to women in the histories. He praises his mother:

Methinks a woman of this valiant spirit  
Should, if a coward heard her speak these words,  
Infuse his breast with magnanimity  
And make him, naked, foil a man at arms. (3H6, 5.4.39–42)

Margaret’s courage is insuppressible throughout the play until she witnessed the brutal murderer of Prince Edward. As Ranald comments, the histories show that women’s power derives from their relationship with their husband and son; once the relation is cut, they are rendered powerless (180). What happens to Margaret when Prince Edward dies is an immediate dissipation of her power and her warrior image. She is reduced to a helpless mother crying “O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy!” (3H6, 5.5.49). Left only with words to attack her enemies, she charges verbally: “Butchers and villains! bloody cannibals! /How sweet a plant have you untimely cropp’d!” (3H6, 5.5.59–60). Her lament (3H6, 5.5.49–65) reminds us of Constance’s sorrow when she loses her son, Arthur.

Shakespeare forges Margaret’s presence in *Richard III* (Saccio 14) to enrich his drama and this enhances a sense of continuity in his first tetralogy. The witch-like quality of Margaret conveys to the audience a

sense of the dramatic rather than the historic, especially if the original Elizabethan audience could readily realize that it is merely a piece of fiction to have her presence there. For the highly superstitious Elizabethans (Clark 19; Woodbridge 2–3), this witch-like figure must have commanded more frightening energy on the stage than what we can expect today. Her “wailing” for the dead is a kind of “rhetorical power” that “exhausts” Richard (Goodland 60). Margaret takes after Hamlet’s father’s ghost. As audience/readers, we are left in bewilderment as to whether what this old hag says is true or not. However, one thing that we can be sure of is that Margaret’s last image in Shakespeare’s drama arouses our sympathy for this foreign bride. Her marriage into England transforms her from the beautiful maid Suffolk has discovered in France into nothing but an old hag.

Besides Queen Margaret, Shakespeare has endowed considerable textual spaces to various other foreign brides in his histories. In *Richard II*, Queen Isabel of France voices her frustration and her disappointment with her husband-king’s incompetence:

What, is my Richard both in shape and mind  
 Transform’d and weak’ned? hath Bolingbroke depos’d  
 Thine intellect? hath he been in thy heart?  
 The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw  
 And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage  
 To be o’erpow’r’d, and wilt thou, pupil-like,  
 Take the correction mildly, kiss the rod,  
 And fawn on rage with base humility,  
 Which art a lion and the king of beasts? (*R2*, 5.1.26–34)

Remarkably, Queen Isabel’s disappointment is of the same type Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Queen Margaret. Both of these foreign brides are disappointed by their powerless husbands.

Earlier in the play, Isabel plays the role of a submissive wife who lives not for herself but for Richard: “To please the king I did—to please myself/I cannot do it” (*R2*, 2.2.5–6). When she first appears in *Richard II*, visiting the bed-ridden old Gaunt with the king, all that she



says is, "How fares our noble uncle, Lancaster?" (R2, 2.1.71) She is a wife who merely says her brief lines at appropriate times. Her presence in the play commands no attention until the famous garden scene, where her sorrow is paradoxically underscored by her acclaimed "want of speaking" (R2, 3.4.72), and by her "absence" when she assumes the position of eavesdropper. There she learns that Bolingbroke has defied his sentence of exile and has secured support from many of the lords against the King. Her reaction is despair: "Who shall hinder me? / I will despair, and be at enmity/With cozening Hope [. . .]" (R2, 2.2.68–69). Shakespeare's depiction of Isabel manifests that her fate depends on that of her husband's.

According to Peter Saccio, "Shakespeare's mature queen [Isabel] and her moving farewell to Richard in Act V of the play are unhistorical inventions" (22). This young queen is historically only ten years old.<sup>2</sup> By making her into a much more mature woman filled with disappointment and frustration, Shakespeare enhances the tragic effect of the plays. A remarkable point about this foreign bride is that she will return to France after which she is supposed to tell the sad story of the deposed king to others. Her final return to France seemingly signifies that this English queen is never truly naturalized—she does not belong to England.

Another remarkable English queen of foreign origin that Shakespeare depicts is Katherine of Spain, queen to Henry VIII. Despite her gentleness, which differs from Margaret's unruly spirit, she shares a common denominator with Margaret—divorce. By proclaiming her divorce from her husband's table and bed, Margaret empowers herself to fight against York, who has forced her husband to disinherit the prince. Queen Katherine seeks no divorce from her husband on her own. It is Henry VIII who has desired their divorce. In spite of the great difference in the two queens' cases, both divorces serve to individualize the queens from the kings in the plays.

Shakespeare's introduction of Queen Katherine is extremely impressive. She is not a meek wife like Queen Isabel in *Richard II*, who says her brief lines at an appropriate time, nor is she a haughty queen of foreign origin, who is jealous of an English Duchess's pompous style

and manners. She is a queen speaking for common people's welfare. She kneels down on her knees to plead for the king to cancel a heavily levied tax. She says the tax will impoverish commoners and eventually make them vent their reproach on their king. After pleading against the heavy tax, Katherine pleads for Buckingham. Buckingham is loved by commoners (*H8*, 2.1.53). This means that Katherine is with the people. This pleading scene has a significant meaning—it naturalizes Queen Katherine. In *Henry VI*, Shakespeare elaborates on English people's anxiety towards their French queen. Queen Margaret is hated as the "she-wolf of France." Compared to Margaret, Katherine is a queen full of kindness and gentleness. She exhibits no alien qualities despite her Spanish origin.

Nevertheless, she cannot escape from her misfortune when her husband-king takes a fancy to Anne Bullen and decides to divorce her. Shakespeare's representation of a kind and dutiful Katherine treated badly by her husband-king arouses our sympathy. Set against a Renaissance culture that abounds with literary productions, such as homilies, teaching women to be subservient to their husbands (Hansen 1–2), Shakespeare's dramatization of a virtuous Katherine unfairly treated by her husband can arouse a general anxiety. According to Juliet Dusinberre, "Shakespeare uses the women who seem the most at the mercy of the male world to assert values which measure its worth and find it wanting" (293).

Shakespeare even presents the council of judges as the king's tool. Before Katherine was married to Henry VIII, she was a princess dowager to Henry's elder brother. To make their marriage legal, the kings of England and Spain gathered "a wise council" "of every realm" to endorse its lawfulness (*H8*, 2.4.50–51). But under Henry VIII's keen desire to divorce Katherine, the council of judges the king gathers--the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the learned and reverend fathers of his order—refutes the lawfulness of their marriage. As Dusinberre notes, this council is "an impenetrable cabal of the learned" to which women have no access (223). Katherine is incapable of influencing any of the judges.

The play dramatizes the unfriendly nature of the legal procedure

to Katherine. The Black-Friars scene abounds with highly majestic formalities, beginning with trumpets, sennet and cornets, followed by a parade-like entrance of judges and attendants. The court creates an authoritative atmosphere that diminishes the importance of a single woman. When her name is called by the Crier, according to the stage direction, Queen Katherine “makes no answer but rises out of her chair, goes about the court, comes to the king, and kneels at his feet” (*H8*, 2.4). By ignoring the call of the judges and appealing directly to her husband, Katherine shows that she knows who the boss in court really is. She empowers herself by refusing to cooperate. Mary Beth Rose informs us that in the realm of the legal “a married woman in Renaissance England forfeited both agency and identity” (293). Women in the Renaissance, as Dusinger points out, are not allowed independence from men either physically or spiritually (92). The whole legal procedure is aimed to deprive Katherine of her identity as England’s queen, but it paradoxically grants her an individualized legal identity.

In the chronicles of Holinshed and Foixe, supposedly Shakespeare’s sources, Queen Katherine does not master the kind of “strength” as she does in Shakespeare’s play (Foakes xxxvii). Shakespeare has made, in Foakes’s terms, two “most significant changes” in Katherine’s long speech in her own defense (xxxvii). These include the additional proof of her loyalty:

[ . . . ] What friend of mine,  
That had to him deriv’d your anger, did I  
Continue in my like? nay, gave notice  
He was from thence discharg’d? (*H8*, 2.4, 29–32)

and her passionate cry:

[ . . . ] in God’s name  
Turn me away, and let the foul’st contempt  
Shut door upon me, and so give me up  
To the sharp’st kind of justice [ . . . ]. (*H8*, 2.4.39–42)

These two changes, as Foakes correctly argues, “give the character of the Queen here a strength lacking in the chronicle” (xxxvii). The additional proof of her loyalty to the king manifests her complete naturalization in England. Unlike other foreign queens, she has no relations or friends that the king does not like. The second added part pinpoints that there is a lack of justice when her loyalty to the English king results in a forced divorce. Katherine is, as Peter Milward states, “a heroine” who has been “unjustly treated” (167). Katherine’s case represents the helpless conditions of foreign brides who have traversed seas to be at the mercy of men in another country—away from their own folks.

In *Henry V*, the political status quo of France and England makes it necessary for Princess Katharine of France to learn English. The language and cultural boundary that she has to face is played up in a comical way when Katharine is unaware of the bawdy puns she produces. Such a comical scene is expected to arouse laughter at her expense. Within the context of the English invasion, and the subsequent surrender of the French, her incompetent management of the English language becomes a potent symbol of her own helplessness. Lisa Hopkins observes that Katharine is “a victim of Englishness,” who learns the language because Henry V’s military victories have made it clear that she will have to marry him (87). The alien language victimizes her just as the alien invasion does.

The later wooing scene, though highly comical, is also contextualized by the political reality of France having been invaded by England. The French king must consent to Henry V’s demand to inherit French throne through the rights of French princess, Katharine. Thus seen, Katharine, as a foreign bride-to-be, is a war trophy, a prize for the victorious Henry V. The language barrier between a foreign bride and her English husband is also played up in the case of Lady Mortimer who speaks no English. The match is mainly an exchange of political interest. It is made as a token for the consolidation of male agreement.

In *King John*, Constance of Brittany, wife to the late Geoffrey Platagenet, also experiences a fate similar to that of Queen Margaret. Though not a queen, Constance has consequential political influence

contention for the English throne. She insists on the right of her son, Arthur, according to primogeniture, to succeed the throne after King Richard dies heirless, as her late husband Geoffrey is Richard's next brother in line, and thus has a right before his younger brother John. Shakespeare's drama does not mention the will of Richard on his deathbed to appoint his adult brother, John, as his successor. John's reign appears as "strong possession" in Shakespeare's play (*John*, 1.1.39) and he has strong support from his queen mother, Eleanor. Eleanor accuses Constance of being "ambitious" (*John*, 1.1.32) and predicts that she will not stop "Till she had kindled France, and all the world, /Upon the right and party of her son" (*John*, 1.1.33–34). Not unlike Margaret, this foreign bride is not trusted by her English in-laws. When Constance secures French support, she gives Englishmen a real headache. Her case and Margaret's are rather similar in view of their foreign connections and the mother-son bond they rely on as the source of their power.

Not unlike his treatment of Margaret, Shakespeare allows plenty of room for Constance to express her feelings. Constance's love for Arthur is significant and appealing in the play (Blanpied 277), especially when she laments that Arthur has become a prisoner and expresses her deep worries about his safety. Her helpless situation as a widow deepens the tragic dimension of the play:

For I am sick and capable of fears,  
Oppress'd with wrongs and therefore full of fears,  
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,  
A woman, naturally born to fears. (*John*, 2.2.12–15)

Constance's throne contention for her son ends when Arthur is murdered. She is reported "in a frenzy died" (*John*, 4.2.122).

In a historical world, where women are supposed to rely either on their husbands or sons (Ranald 180), the premature deaths of male figures inevitably create a most miserable condition for their woman dependents. Shakespeare's great elaboration of Constance's lament for Arthur's death in *King John* manifests the kind of desperation a woman

can be dragged into, when the last of her male dependents is gone. A similar fate has befallen Queen Margaret in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy. Her matriarchal potency is dissipated once her son is murdered. "Neither Wife, Mother nor England's Queen," as Madonne M. Miner suggests, best describes Margaret's condition in *Richard III* (35–55). Queen Isabel in *Richard II* has to return to France in sadness after her husband is deposed. All these foreign brides are thrust into misery. Even Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII*, who is loved by English commoners, dies as an unqueened woman. The language barrier experienced by Princess Katharine in *Henry V* signifies that crossing national boundary to become a queen of England isn't an easy task.

The in-between condition that may confront a foreign bride is vividly dramatized in *King John* by Blanche when her newly-wedded husband declares war on her uncle. The initial marriage arrangement is made when the English king attempts to form a truce with France by offering to marry his niece, Blanche of Spain, to the French Dauphin, with a rich dowry:

Her dowry shall weigh equal with a queen:  
 For Anjou, and fair Touraine, Maine, Poictiers,  
 And all that we upon this side the sea—  
 Except this city now by us besig'd—  
 Find liable to our crown and dignity,  
 Shall gild her bridal bed, and make her rich  
 In titles, honours and promotions,  
 As she in beauty, education, blood,  
 Holds hands with any princess of the world. (*John*, 2.1.486–94).

The French gladly accept the offer and quickly forsake the cause of Constance, who wants support against King John. Not unlike Katharine's marriage with Henry V, this match is determined by political reality. The Bastard, who serves as "the audience's window on the events of history" (Smallwood 155), satirically comments that what has drawn France from "a resolv'd and honorable war" to "a most base and vile-concluded peace" is "commodity" (*John*, 2.1.581–86).

Shakespeare plays up this aspect of interest exchange and presents Blanche as a pawn in the two kings' power-contention game. Such a marriage arrangement soon creates a difficult in-betweenness for Blanche when France breaks away her alliance with England upon the demand of Cardinal Pandulf, the Pope's legate. Blanche pleads to her husband not to raise arms against "the blood that [he] hast married" (*John*, 3.1.228). In a sympathetic manner, she proclaims, "Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms/ Against mine uncle." (*John*, 3.1.234–35). However, her pleas fall upon deaf ears, after which she proclaims:

The sun's o'ercast with blood: fair day, adieu!  
 Which is the side that I must go withal?  
 I am with both: each army hath a hand;  
 And in their rage, I having hold of both,  
 They whirl asunder and dismember me.  
 Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win;  
 Uncle, I needs must pray that thou mayst lose;  
 Father, I may not wish the fortune thine;  
 Grandam, I will not wish thy wishes thrive:  
 Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose;  
 Assured loss before the match be play'd. (*John*, 3.1.326–336)

Her lament is dramatically appealing and its strength is all the more emphasized by its contrast to her newly-wedded husband's short and simple answer: "Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies." (*John*, 3.1. 263). By repeating "with me" two times, Lewis emphasizes that there is no other side she should take. He expects that once married, his wife should be on his side.

It is understandable that men in the historical context of Shakespeare's histories conceptualize a married woman as belonging to her husband. Mary Beth Rose observes that in the realm of the legal "a married woman in Renaissance England forfeited both agency and identity" (293). Interesting, "the very absoluteness of patriarchal right" (Howard and Rackin 131) is displayed in an earlier scene in *King John*, where the king, in his arbitration of the Faulconbridge dispute,

conceptualizes women as “cows” belonging to their husbands (*John*, 1.1.116–29). Contextualized by this earlier incident in the play, Lewis’s brief assertive answer to Blanche can be considered echoing John’s idea of marriage relationship. A married woman’s fortune is with her husband, not with her own kinsman’s anymore. When Blanche finally declares: “There where my fortune li’es, there my life dies” (*John*, 3.1.264), she concludes a most sympathetic in-between circumstance for a woman whose marriage causes her to be torn between her husband’s side and her own kinsmen. Though not a queen to England, but married to a French Dauphin by her uncle, Blanche’s dramatic lament is as appealing as a queen’s lament. Her role encapsulates the in-betweenness which entraps a foreign bride.

Crossing national boundaries to conquer foreign territories might be opportunities for men in Shakespeare’s history plays to prove their valor, heroism, and thus, their identity as men. But crossing national boundaries because of transnational marriages can be something pretty difficult to handle for women. Blanche’s lament in *King John* manifests that a difficult in-betweenness can plague a foreign bride. Attacks against Margaret for her French origin by the Yorkists and by the Duchess of Gloucester in the First Tetralogy underscore the general anxiety about English queen of foreign origin. The tragic unqueening of Katherine in *Henry VIII* represents the helpless conditions of foreign brides who have traversed seas to be at the mercy of men in another country. Even the seemingly happy marriage arrangement in *Henry V* isn’t really that happy if we consider Katharine’s role as a war trophy for the victorious Henry V. Moreover, the language barrier Katharine would have to cope with signifies that she is, to borrow Hopkins’s words, “a victim of Englishness” (87). Even though the bawdy languages she produces while attempting to learn English from her nurse provokes good laughter, they also provoke sympathy. Shakespeare employs these foreign brides in his history plays to enrich the basic historical plot.

Critics have pointed out, as mentioned earlier, that Shakespeare has made changes from his sources and stretched history to create more possibilities for dramatic tensions. Queen Isabel should be a child of



ten but Shakespeare has created a much more mature woman out of her, rendering her capable of uttering a powerful and emotional lament. The unhistorical presence of Margaret of Anjou in *Richard III* also manifests how Shakespeare has stretched history to enrich his drama. Her presence as a widow who has lost her beloved son enhances the overall tragic effect of England's prolonged civil war in the history plays. Interestingly, Margaret's role in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy is a rather complete history of the rise and fall of a queen. Her marriage procures her the position of an English queen but it eventually transforms her from the beautiful maid Suffolk has discovered in France into nothing but a sympathetic old hag. Stories about the woman boundary crossers add a fascinating dimension to a basic plot that is presumably about dynastic rise and fall. By stretching history here and there to create more possibilities for dramatic conflicts, Shakespeare makes his foreign brides cross not only spatial or cultural boundaries, but also the boundary of history into his fascinating drama.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's histories, as Kirby Farrell puts it, "begin with a crisis in heroic relationships" (59). This viewpoint fits well into *Henry VI*, where the unheroic disposition of the king evidently creates such a crisis, especially in view of the humiliation he inflicts upon his son.

<sup>2</sup> When Richard married Isabel of France in 1396 to seal up a long truce with France, she was seven (Saccio 22). Richard was deposed in 1399 (Saccio 30).

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## 女性與疆界跨越： 莎士比亞歷史劇中之外籍新娘

### 摘要

跨越疆界、爭霸異域——在莎士比亞的歷史劇中被運用為男性角色大展英雄本色的背景時機，就如同《亨利五世》中遠征法國的英國國王，藉由殺戮戰場，呈現自己的王者氣概，最後還娶回法國公主，為歷史劇創造出喜劇般的高潮。然而在莎翁的歷史劇中也存在著另一類的疆界跨越者——英國的外籍皇后。雖然以往對莎翁歷史劇的閱讀策略並不著重於這類角色，但細讀以英國歷史為框架的歷史劇後，不難發現莎翁除了國王及英雄的事蹟之外，亦開啟許多戲劇空間，納入各式各樣有趣的角色，而外籍新娘在莎翁所創造出的歷史劇中，亦佔有重要的戲份。這些外籍新娘或許是殺戮戰場所獲得的戰利品，又或許是政治聯姻的結果。婚姻對她們而言，並非單純之地理疆界的跨越，更帶來其他問題，例如語言文化之隔閡，與國籍身份歸屬之游離性。在《亨利五世》中，莎翁即巧妙的運用了語言文化之隔閡，編撰出法國公主凱瑟琳如何努力學習英語，卻因對此語言的了解及掌控不佳，製造出另有所指的語意，令人盡不住發笑。在《亨利六世》中，莎翁亦對外籍皇后的原本國籍屬性大做文章，瑪格麗特皇后雖然為國王生下王子，卻仍被政敵稱為「法國母狼」(She-wolf of France)，在在顯示出雖貴為皇后，她在英國的處境並不好受。而在歷史劇中最令人矚目的就是外籍新娘跑回自己國家借兵攻打英國的事，由此可見她們所具有的游離曖昧屬性確實對英國具有威脅性。本文將以歷史劇中的外籍新娘為研究議題，探討這些因婚姻而須跨越疆界的女性角色所具有之重要性，並討論莎翁如何藉由她們創造出引人發笑或令人歎歎的戲劇效果。

關鍵字：莎士比亞、歷史劇、女性、跨越疆界、外籍新娘