

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Hamlet in England

Sylvia Townsend Warner*

How to cite: Warner, S.T. 'Hamlet in England'. *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2021(1), pp. 31–44 • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2021.4>

Published: 10 November 2021

Copyright:

© 2021, Tanya Stobbs. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2021.4>

This is a reprint originally found in the Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive, Dorset History Centre; DHC reference number 'D/TWA/A32'; previous reference number at the Dorset County Museum 'STW.2012.125.0872'.

Open Access:

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

*(1893–1978)

Hamlet in England

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Abstract

An unpublished short story by Sylvia Townsend Warner. It fancifully elaborates the story of Acts 4 and 5 of *Hamlet*, starting on board the ship taking Hamlet to England after the killing of Polonius. The story begins before the Danish vessel's encounter with a pirate ship and Hamlet's capture by the pirates, and imagines the circumstances by which he returns to Denmark in the changed state of mind in which we meet him in Act 5.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; *Hamlet*; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; pirates.

Editor's note: The typescript of 'Hamlet in England' is undated, but Warner gives some indication of its date and genesis in her 'Notes on The Corner That Held Them'. She states that the novel 'began in 1941. I was in a doldrum. I had tried the beginning which remains as Hamlet in England...' (The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society 2020:1, p. 4). *This establishes that 'Hamlet in England' was originally planned as a longer piece of writing, but this surviving story is shapely and seems to be complete and self-contained. It starts with Hamlet on board the ship which is taking him to England after the killing of Polonius.*

Hamlet in England¹

That Hamlet undergoes a sea-change between his departure in Act Four and his return at the beginning of Act Five is fairly generally agreed.

Roy Walker, *The Time Is Out of Joint*

At the news that a ship was overhauling them and that the Captain believed her to be a pirate, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had hurried on deck. Amid the uproar of the ship cramming on more sail, the scuffling of the seamen's feet, the Captain shouting commands through a trumpet, their voices could yet be heard giving good advice and encouragement.

I ought to be up there too, Hamlet thought.

He rose and stretched himself, and sat down again. Not till this moment had he been left in peace. Even at night their snores assured him that they kept him company. In the morning they were full of high spirits, and men of the world. By the evening, yielding to the influence of large meals and sea-going appetites, they mellowed into philosophers, exchanging aphorisms, and agreeing that women are incalculable – better, when good women, than any man can be, and when worse, infinitely worse; that nature will out and that a man's treatment of his horse is often the surest indication of his character; that education is more than book-learning; that there is much that is narrow and superstitious in formal religion, and that there are certain simple beliefs which never fail a man, though he may make no parade of them.

To judge by the noise overhead, the pursuer was still gaining on their ship. The vessel creaked and sighed, her sails exploded, the waves slapped higher against her sides and the bilgewater responded with melancholy gurgles. For all this increase of speed, the Captain cursed more anxiously through his trumpet and the voices of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern became ever more courageous and rallying.

'Sweet Jesu! Suppose I were chained to the same oar with them?'

Hamlet realised that this was quite possible. The seas were infested with pirates, the demand for galley-slaves was ever on the increase; and stirred by a movement of compassion, a pirate might well decide that the three northerners would be happier and pull more stoutly if chained side by side on the bench. For as Rosencrantz had observed last night to Guildenstern – or had Guildenstern pointed this out to Rosencrantz? – there is a great deal of compassion lodged in the rough bosoms. Indeed, indeed, the same oar might tether them; and he would be placed in the middle.

But they had gone on deck. And the pleasure of being free of them was too exquisite to be wasted on anticipations. How rarely, Hamlet reflected, can one enjoy a present moment. Like a March sapling, man's mind is forever blown from its vertical, shrinking back from the future into times past, or buffeted forward by what shrieks behind. It is no wonder that man invented the cloister, and that girls, the most desperate

variety of humankind, should scratch and claw their way out from a destiny of marriage and motherhood, rend the pearl bobs from their ears, and cast themselves, bleeding and breathless, on the leeward side of the nunnery wall. To get out of the wind, that is the motive. To get out of the wind, and sit down in the present tense. *Now I am eating my dinner. Now I am warming my toes. Now I am singing the third penitential psalm.* I could do worse, thought Hamlet, than enter the religious life.

Meanwhile, a pirate ship was overhauling them, and he had the stateroom to himself. He yawned, and stroked his hands over his face, and drew them down his ribs and along his thighs, and rubbed his kneecaps affectionately. Five minutes of silence, of relaxation, of nobody's company, had allowed him to fall in love with himself, to find his body pleasant to the touch and his thoughts entertaining.

'If the truth were known,' he said, 'I have a very affectionate disposition. A man who in the course of five minutes can fall in love with himself cannot, surely, be such a misanthrope. I've got a melodious speaking voice, too. The family voice... but my version of it is far the most tuneable.'

It would be better, for all that, not to listen to it. In such a precious moment as this, when the prospect of danger calls the gallant and boring to action, and leaves one free to contemplate, it is best to model oneself on Melchizidec, a man who had neither father nor mother to muddle his thinking.²

'A blameless bladder,' he said, rising and beginning to step a pavane about the stateroom. 'Not a breath of original sin in it. Blown up by thinking alone, not a puff of generation in the whole process.'

Just then, the letter caught his eye. Superscription upward, it lay by the doorway, sidling with a crablike movement as the ship rocked under her load of sail. Sighing, he stooped, and picked it up. And turning it in his hand, he said – as though it were the only speculation it could arouse in him: 'Now which of you two dolts dropped it?'

It had amused him to watch their secrecy, and the grimaces with which each had conveyed to each other the zealous enquiry: *You have it safe?* – the dutiful answer: *I guard it like my life.* The agonising hole that it burned in the pocket obliged them to share the responsibility. At intervals it would be transferred, enveloped in glove or handkerchief, from one to other. At night he had set himself to guess from the devotional note of the snores which faithful fellow it was bedded with, till losing interest in their game, he had lost count of the transferences. Now it was his.

Suddenly he cast the letter away, and stood wringing his hands. A moment before, and he had been happy, absolved from care and

conscience, his own man and in love with himself. Now he was the Prince of Denmark, and must go back to his part in the tragedy. He picked up the letter, broke the seal, and sat down, coldly and sedately, to read.

*Commending myself unto you I commend also the two honourable gentlemen who will bring this to your hands. Rosencrantz is the one, Guildenstern the other. Their intent of good towards your Majesty and your Majesty's realm is as entire as mine. Would it were so with the other, who accompanies them. But he (my own nephew, alas!) plots to undo us, and would poison both our kingdoms. For the safety of my own kingdom I cannot keep him here. For the safety of yours, I adjure you, let him remain in it no longer than the sharpening of an axe.*³

It was notable how the thought of poison dogged the writer's mind. 'But he (my own uncle, alas!) has poisoned my father, and plots to undo me.' Hamlet chanted the words under his breath, and the family voice crawled gently over his ears. From his boyhood up, he had heard people about the court saying that he combined the best of both brothers: his father's chivalry, his uncle's discretion. He had soon learned what these discriminating words were meant to imply: that his father was somewhat of a fool, and his uncle somewhat of a knave.

'God, what a family!' he exclaimed, striking his fist on the table.

The pirate must be close on them now. The uproar of orders and Aye, Ayes had sunk into a melancholy hubbub. One poor wretch was howling a psalm-tune, and the sails flapped lumpishly, as though crew and steersman had lost all interest in the wind. He got out his writing-case, put wax to melt above the brazier, and wrote.

I am not wont to use traitors as ambassadors. None the less, the gentlemen who bear this letter, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to wit, are to my certain knowledge, traitors. I have made ambassadors of them this once that you on receiving them may make of them honest men, I mean, by putting of them to death.

Undoing his collar he pulled out a ribbon with a seal dangling from it. As a child, he had often stood at his father's knee, pressing the seal down on the wax, and glorying in the imprint it made. Then it had been a long and solemn business. This time, it was sooner over. While the wax hardened he looked round on the room where for a little he had been happy.⁴ Then he tightened his sword-belt, and ran up on deck.

The buccaneer, a smarter vessel and better managed than their own, was coming up alongside. Its spread and bulk seemed to darken the whole

deck. After so much activity there was nothing to do but wait, leaving the finish to wind and water. The crews of both vessels stood staring open-mouthed at each other, and some of the sailors, in an embarrassment of proximity, exchanged grins. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were arguing with the Captain, urging him to let them lead a boarding party onto the pirate vessel. 'We can do it easily,' said Rosencrantz.

'The Viking breed,' exclaimed Guildenstern; and added, 'Besides, look how few men they have compared with us. Now, who will follow?'

He turned around, and saw Hamlet.

'Oh! So there you are, Hamlet.'

'Yes, here I am. I think this letter must belong to one or other of you.'

Their hands went out simultaneously. Two honest dogs whose bone had been thrown back to them from over a wall could not have looked more miracle-struck. The Captain bellowed: 'Port your helm!'

Swung out of her course, the ship seemed to stagger, to rear up and come to a standstill.

'Out with the grappling-irons! Make ready to board her.'

'Hurrah!' shouted Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The sailors began to move about, exchanging gloomy obscenities and offering bets.

'Jesus Christ! May I be forever damned if she isn't refusing,' murmured the Captain. 'Board her!' he bellowed in an incredulous ecstasy.

Like the claws of a wild cat the grappling irons swung out. Two of them struck and held. The water between the two vessels began to rattle like a mill-race. In a fit of childishness Hamlet knew that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern must not be before him. He leaped; midway in his leap he saw a knife flash past him and an axe cutting away a grappling iron. He landed on the pirate's deck, on his feet but off his balance. A man with an axe caught hold of him, steadied him, and heaved him out of the way as though he were a barrel. He tripped over a rope and fell, striking his head against a stanchion. While he was trying to rise, a tall negro with a knife in his neck fell on top of him, and bounced up and down in the death throes.

At last the negro lay still, sprawled across him. Feeling bruised and sick, Hamlet looked round him. He saw the sails fill with wind, he saw that the distance between the two ships was wider, and fast widening. The pirate ship was clear, and as far as he could tell he was the only man of the attacking party to have boarded her. Arranging the dead man across his knee, he sat leaning against a mast, trying to stem the flow of blood from his nose by snuffling, and waiting to be taken prisoner.

A young man, strikingly handsome in a swarthy gawdy way, wearing very elegant Spanish leather boots and carrying an absurd ebony cane, now approached.

‘Did you kill my Hannibal?’

‘No. He fell on top of me.’

‘One crew, dismissed dead. One prisoner, taken. I may say that all this is damned unfortunate. I’m short of men, and I’m short of victuals. Well, let me introduce myself. I am Francis Firebrace,⁵ an Englishman.’

‘My name is Hamlet. I am a Dane.’

‘Master Hamlet, let me free you of this poor blackamoor, and help you up. You are not seriously injured, I take it. Fresh blood is a lovely colour, don’t you think? *See where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament.*⁶ Do you happen to be a churchman?’

‘A churchman?’

‘A divine, a minister, a man of God, a priest, a presbyter, a Companion of Jesus, a what you will.’

‘No. I am a layman.’

‘Ah! I beg your pardon. I was misled by your clothes. They are rather remarkably sombre.⁷ I asked, because if I could have appointed you ship’s chaplain, it would have saved me from the incivility of making you my prisoner. Still, there it is. Mr Hamlet, consider yourself my prisoner until you can raise a ransom. Mind your head!’

One of these English madmen, thought Hamlet, following Mr Firebrace below.

A religious madness, he thought a few moments later; for the most notable and seemingly the most permanent objects in the stateroom were three German pastors in black gowns. Two were playing gloomily at push-pin, the third sat watching them with his arms folded. None of them made any movement to rise, or showed the slightest interest in the newcomer. On a further examination of his surroundings Hamlet concluded that Francis Firebrace enjoyed a miscellaneous madness. An Indian boy sat in one corner clasping a marmoset, another corner was occupied by a mummy and a theorbo, nailed on the wall was a scrolled and gilded family tree, and in a hammock slung from the ceiling reclined an elderly seaman, half-naked, and looking very much like Neptune except that instead of a trident he held a tankard.⁸

‘Do you smoke?’

Lighting his pipe Mr Firebrace sat down to entertain his captive. Learning that Hamlet had been on his way to England, he launched into an account of the beauties and curiosities of that country, and especially

of the neighbourhood of Fovant in Wiltshire, which was his birthplace. At Fovant, Mrs Vercook had dyed a page sky-blue. Sir Urian Trimble had walked about stark naked at his daughter's wedding, taking bites at the leg of a cold goose. Dr Minge, a Canon of Salisbury, believed himself to be the same serpent which beguiled Eve and consequently went everywhere on his belly, even when entering and quitting the pulpit. All the Precoxes had tails by heredity, and Christian Salmoner had died of a surfeit of hedgehogs.

'I call my ship The Nonesuch of Fovant.'

'Have you been long in your profession?'

'Five years. A younger son, you understand. But piracy is not what it was. Little did my poor mother think when she fitted me out so kindly that I should come to this, tossing about on the German Ocean loaded up with worthless clergymen and a cargo of Russian furs that have got the moth, and waiting for the nights to grow longer so that I can sneak down the Channel.'

Hamlet, who had lost a good deal of blood, and was unused to the smell of tobacco, found himself sliding into a light-headed belief that the ship was literally loaded with men of religion, that black gowns filled the hold, close-packed between bales of fur. There they would sit, meditating upon moths, rust, and vanity. He said: 'I thought you told me you lacked a chaplain?'

'So I do. It distresses me a great deal, I assure you. Most of my crew are convinced, quite properly, I don't doubt, that they will go into hellfire; and it seems a pity to deny them the consolations of religion during the short while they can enjoy them. Of course, I always read prayers. But a chaplain would be better, and could give his entire mind to it.'

'But, surely... ' Hamlet glanced towards the three pastors.

'Anabaptists, every one of them,' replied Mr Firebrace.¹⁰ 'Heaven knows, I am not narrow-minded. No one could call me a bigot. But one must draw the line somewhere, and no Anabaptist shall be chaplain in a ship of mine.'

At this, the elderly seaman in the hammock exclaimed in a voice of thunder: 'Nor a Socinian! Nor a Presbyterian! Nor a Papist! If you bring in a Papist, Mr Firebrace, I'll have his guts out.'

'Nonsense, Elkanah! I have a great respect for the old religion. Rome was a kinder mother than ever Canterbury will be.'

'They burned my great-uncle,' said the seaman.

'You'll get colder comfort from the Archbishop of Canterbury,' said the pirate captain. 'Ask *him* for a load of firing on a winter's day, and see what you'll get.'

'I don't need to ask any man for charity,' Elkanah grunted.

'That's how the English argue,' said Mr Firebrace, turning to Hamlet. 'You expound the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and they answer, Aye, but my grannie's old cat had four legs. Yes, you would have been delighted with England. You speak the language uncommonly well for a foreigner, too.'

'I had hoped to improve it.'

'So you will, so you will! We shall have many conversations before you are ransomed. And I shall be thankful to have someone intelligent to talk to, for a change.'

This remark had its natural result, and they fell silent.

The stateroom was hot and airless, and presently Hamlet began to doze. He thought he was sitting under a tree in whose branches crows kept up a monotonous caw-caw. The tree grew on a heath, and over the heath threads of gossamer were floating, and an old man trudged to and fro picking up goose-quills. He was a notary, and that was why he needed so many quills. Jerking himself awake, Hamlet found himself staring at the third pastor, who with folded arms stared back at him. He was a stout fellow, he had large round eyes, and his hair, which was cropped and curly, grew low on his forehead. He is like a gowned bull, Hamlet thought, and closed his eyes in order not to stare injuriously. Swaying his head from side to side, and stumbling over his gown, the pastor advanced on the old man, who with astonishing alacrity turned about, and let off a flight of goose-quills, like arrows. The bull's front legs gave way, wounded to death it fell on its knees, and burrowed its head in the ground. The notary pulled a sheet of parchment from his bosom, and pressed it against the bull's neck. When he withdrew it, it was dotted with round blood-spots, like seals. Hamlet woke with a start, clutching for the seal that hung in his bosom. It was there. He could feel it through the cloth. And the letter? Yes, he had given the letter, it was safe with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who were at this moment continuing their journey to England, congratulating themselves on their gallantry and their escape. Doubtless, they would deliver it. They were so extremely trustworthy. Mr Firebrace averted his glance, and it was plain that he had seen the hand seeking the seal. Elkanah in his hammock, the three pastors, the Indian boy, all looked at Hamlet with a firmer interest. He was a man with something in his bosom. The Indian boy spread a cloth on the table, and laid out a meal of wine and prunes and pickled herring. Then he went back to his corner and began to play very badly on the theorbo. The three pastors sat in stockish silence while Francis Firebrace pronounced a long grace

before meat, and then cast themselves on the pickled herring. Amiably conversing, Francis Firebrace did his best to make Hamlet drunk, and seeing his trend, Hamlet fell in with it, imitating to the best of his powers the genial sottishness of Elsinore. Presently he began to be very attentive to the mummy, saying that he had never seen a finer specimen, that its inexpressive ogle delighted him, and that he liked the smell.

‘Welcome to it, I’m sure,’ said his host. ‘You’ve only got to make an offer. Welcome to anything else that you take a fancy to, on the same terms. I’m a plain man, I don’t care for gewgaws.’ Saying this he looked disparagingly at the three pastors. ‘With a mummy like that, you could make a fortune in Denmark. Our northern nights are long and cold, and the cry of the sea-mew frightens away concupiscence. I wonder you don’t sell it to the present Danish Majesty.’

‘Don’t act the whoremonger, Mr Firebrace,’ roared Elkanah from above. ‘Sell the gentleman the idol, and good riddance to it. But don’t act the whoremonger! Don’t set foot in Denmark, either! It’s alive with ghosts.’

Mr Firebrace remarked that Elkanah was the voice of his conscience, and the best friend he had in the world. With tipsy tears brimming his eyes he asked Hamlet if Elkanah wasn’t a sweet old porcupine.

There was a knock on the door. Disregarding it, Mr Firebrace urged Hamlet to make a bid for the pastors, adding that he would make a reduction on taking a quantity.

‘But they’re Anabaptists. Must warn you of that. I took them to oblige a friend and I just can’t get rid of them. They’re too poor to ransom themselves, and their congregations haven’t the bowels to raise a ransom either. Just the sort of pimping poverty-struck uncomfortable behaviour you would expect from such fellows’ congregations.’

‘Amen to that!’ sounded from the hammock.

‘You, now – you’re of a different kidney. Even if you don’t happen to carry your price in your pocket, you’ll have loving friends at home ready to pay for you. It’s always so. No sooner do I make a genteel conversible captive, a captive I could love, than he’s ransomed away from me.’

‘Suppose I stayed with you?’ said Hamlet thoughtfully.

Mr Firebrace did not appear to hear this. The knocking had grown more insistent, and now the door was opened, and in came a seaman with a fussed preoccupied expression. The rush of cold fresh air that entered with him emphasised his striking sobriety.

‘Mr Firebrace, sir. It is my duty to tell you that the crew have mutinied.’

‘What maggot is it this time?’ the crew’s master enquired in a tone of testy resignation.

‘They say they won’t sail the ship an hour longer while she has so many bad omens on board.’

‘Let them jump off her, then.’

‘They say it’s bad enough to sail with three clergymen. Now you’ve taken another aboard.’

‘He’s no more a clergyman than I am. He is a gentleman who chooses to dress in black. As for the other three, you know as well as I do, Williams, I am only too anxious to see the last of them. But do you expect me to throw them overboard, a dead loss to all of us? The motto of this ship is: Each for all, and all for each. Tell the crew to remember that, and that they’ll get their share whenever I get mine, and meanwhile they must make the best of it.’

‘They say that besides the four clergymen, which is four too many, and a dead blackamoor, there’s a ghost on the poop.’

‘A what on the poop?’

‘A ghost on the poop, Mr Firebrace, sir. It’s walking up and down –’

‘More than you are, you pocky canting half-hearted radish, you!’ Elkanah’s knife flashed by and stuck quivering in the wainscot.¹¹ But the boatswain had swerved in time, and now he vanished, slamming the door after him.

‘It’s a calm night,’ said Mr Firebrace. ‘Let them mutiny if they want to. They’ll jump to it fast enough if they sight something to go after.’

Hamlet gazed into his wine-cup. More wine was served by the Indian boy, and as a sort of intermediate grace the bull-browed pastor exclaimed: ‘All good spirits, praise the Lord!’ After this cautious aspiration he and his companions went on quietly toasting, while Hamlet, Elkanah, and Mr Firebrace, conversation having flagged, sang a catch or two. But in the void half-world of the wine-cup Hamlet had seen the reflection of an orchard where a dead man lay robustly sleeping and a man still alive crept up to him. The pirate’s life, so brisk in action, so tranquil in spirit, was not for him. The thief’s planet had not twinkled on his birth; while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sailed blithely on to England he must turn back to Denmark and resume his destiny. When the last catch had fallen to tatters and the voice of Mr Firebrace’s conscience was uttering only loud snores, he made an excuse and quitted the stateroom. Up on deck the melancholy cold air of the sea almost scythed away his senses, and he had to steady himself by a rat-line.¹² The crew were huddled together amidships, looking towards

the poop and murmuring among themselves. 'Look at him now! Thinks he owns the ship, the old bugger!' 'Knows his own mind, seemingly.' From the way they spoke it was obvious that already they felt a proprietary interest.

Hamlet took a step forward. The ghost halted in its pacing, and turned as though to look at him.

'He's snuffed something! Look out! He'll be after us!'

The sight of Hamlet gave a more positive direction to their fears, and for a minute or two he was in real danger. But those who wanted to throw him overboard were opposed by others who wanted him to exorcise the ghost, and during this clash of pieties he buttonholed the boatswain, Williams – a man, as he had already guessed, riddled with self-importance and duty, a tool ready-hafted for any hand with a smooth palm. To Williams he explained that the ghost was familiar to him, being no other than the spirit of his father against whose dying wish, he had left his native land to study necromancy in Scotland. From the hour he set sail his father's angry shape had bestridden the vessel, and it was to escape from it that he had leaped onto the pirate ship.

'But, as you see, it has followed me, and looks more fell and angry for every league of sea-water we have sailed against its will.'

Many times repeating this simple story as more and more of the crew composed themselves enough to listen to him, Hamlet almost forgot the true ghost in the ghost of his invention, especially congratulating himself on that stroke about necromancy; for all the men knew of the storm-raising witches in Scotland, and knowing this to be true were easily persuaded to credit the rest of the story. What was to be done now, he asked, feigning to take them into consultation; and went on to say that in his opinion nothing would avail but that he should go back to Denmark, whither the ghost would accompany him, and lie down again in the family vault. If the crew would sail the ship towards Denmark he, for his part, would undertake to keep Francis Firebrace and Elkanah too busy drinking to notice the change in her course. This, too, they could credit, for it was notorious that a Dane could drink any other man under the table. And when they had sighted land, he said, they could put him off in a boat, and so The Nonesuch of Fovant would be discharged of her uneasy burden.

'But the ransom?' said Williams.

'I will pay it into your hands when I and my father leave the ship. Look!' he said, raising his voice. 'Look towards the poop. My father, what is your will?'

Stiffly the armoured ghost raised his right arm and pointed east-north-east. A moment later a patch of sea fog hid him from their eyes.

For the second time that day Hamlet was in love with himself. The fit of self-love at finding himself left in peace by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern was no more than a passing amourette, but what he felt now was true love, love mixed with veneration. He had always known – which of us has not? – that he had fine capacities for action, if only he could unpack them. Since coming on deck, they had unpacked themselves. In liquor, dishevelled, a captive, with a swollen nose, and taken to be a clergyman, he had been tranquil as the Pole Star overhead. Eloquence had been his servant, not his Delilah, and for the first time in his life he had been able consistently to assert himself. Even the ghost had acknowledged his mastery and followed his lead. Walking towards the companion-way he felt himself plucked by the sleeve. It was the righteous Williams again.

‘The crew say they can do nothing if those three German pastors are to be left on board.’

He replied that he would see to that also.

This seemed likely to be a rather tiresome commission, but he came to be thankful for it. Though it was easy to win those pastoral hearts it took him all his ingenuity to prick them into willingness to exchange their captivity for the insecurity of an open boat and an unbeneficed future. To carry out these negotiations while continuing to carouse with Francis Firebrace and Elkanah was [a further challenge].¹³ Even with this mitigating interest, the next few days were so inanely rowdy and tedious that if he had not been accustomed to court life he would have found them insufferable. But they passed; and early one morning a boat was loosed from the vessel’s side, and presently the smell of land was in his nostrils, and he saw wave after wave running ahead towards the low shore. Looking back, he saw *The Nonesuch* of Fovant going about upon the water in the rays of the rising sun. The land-breeze filled her sails, she moved with the solemn buoyancy of a goddess. He had leaped upon her deck, and been rolled out of the way like a barrel. He had sat leaning against a mast while the foolish blood dripped from his nose onto a dead negro. And from that moment his life had been changed. He had become a new man.

Thus it was that Hamlet returned to his native land accompanied by two sailors and three pastors. The boat was abandoned, for the sailors had no mind to go back to the wrath of a sobering master and his Elkanah; besides, they had grown much attached to Hamlet. Leaving the pastors

morosely breakfasting at an ale-house, already regretting the comforts of captivity, and accusing each other of being the first to be fooled by that young man's sophistries, while the salt water dripping from their gowns speckled the sanded floor, they set forward with him towards Elsinore.

Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive, Dorset History Centre; DHC reference number 'D/TWA/A32'; previous reference number at the Dorset County Museum 'STW.2012.125.0872'

Notes

1. The typescript is titled 'A SEA-CHANGE'; this is crossed through by hand and the new title added in Warner's handwriting. Lower on the page Warner has written 'The Nonesuch of Favant', probably another possible title she had not ruled out. She would return to 'The Sea-Change' and use it in the title of the opera about Shelley for which she wrote the libretto and Paul Nordoff the music (see *The Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal 2015*, 14–34).
2. 'Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God ... Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually' (Hebrews 7:1 and 7:3, King James Version).
3. On his return to Denmark Hamlet tells Horatio the story of his capture by pirates and his escape (*Hamlet* V.ii, 1–56). Warner's narrative departs from the play in many circumstances, but the detail about the sharpened axe stayed with her ('no leisure bated, / No, not to stay the grinding of the axe, / My head should be struck off' (lines 24–6)).
4. The first version in the typescript reads 'where for a little while he had been his own man'.
5. Warner had known 'a young man called Robert Firebrace' in the early 1920s; see *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), 39.
6. The cultured Firebrace quotes from Faustus's soliloquy in the last scene of *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe (c. 1592); Faustus is about to be carried off to hell.
7. Hamlet mentions his 'inky cloak' and 'customary suits of solemn black' (I.ii, 77–8).
8. The Indian boy seems to have arrived from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II.i, 105–6). 'Theorbo': a stringed instrument of the lute family.
9. The Nonesuch Press was founded in 1922 by Francis and Vera Meynell and Warner's close friend David Garnett.
10. Anabaptist: 'A member of various Christian groups who trace their origins to the radical reformation movement in Germany, Switzerland, and the Low Countries in the 16th century, characterized by a strict adherence to Bible teachings, and the belief that baptism is only valid when administered to people old enough to fully understand the sacrament' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
11. The typescript reads 'Elkanah's knife flashed by and stuck quivering in the wainscot', but Warner has deleted 'knife' by hand and substituted 'tankard', and bracketed 'flashed by and stuck quivering in the wainscot'. Given the incompleteness of her second thoughts, however, the reading text above gives the typescript version.

12. 'Rat-line': 'Any of the small lines fastened across the shrouds of a sailing ship like the rungs of a ladder, used for climbing the rigging' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
13. The sentence in the typescript is incomplete; Warner has added the final 'was' by hand and the three words in square brackets are supplied editorially.