SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF SHAKESPEARE'S *KING HENRY THE EIGHTH*: AN ESSAY IN REHABILITATION

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At least two questions have to be asked about Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII* before any profitable attempt at critical analysis of its particular form and content can begin. The first is why Shakespeare let twelve years pass between providing his actors with *Henry V* to open the first Globe in 1599 and the composition of *Henry VIII* during 1612, a performance of which on 29 June 1613 resulted in the destruction of that famous playhouse by fire. The second is why he chose not to write a play about Henry VII to link his *Richard III* with *Henry VIII*.

Any answer to either question must finally remain speculative since Shakespeare failed to supply answers himself. However, we do possess the evidence of the troubles encountered by the authors of the play of *Sir Thomas More* when attempting to get it licensed for performance by the Master of the Revels in the early 1590s, to warn us that the dangers surrounding any discussion of a Tudor monarch on the stage were sufficient to deter a professional playmaker from devoting much time or energy to writing a play with Henry VII or Henry VIII as title-role, while Elizabeth I was still alive. Even after James I's accession in 1603, time enough would have to pass for it to be known whether he was likely to adopt a more relaxed attitude towards public discussion of the conduct of Tudor monarchs. In this lecture it will be my purpose to argue that he did—at least with certain provisos—and that Shakespeare knew this by the time that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* were safely in the repertoire of the King's Men.

The question then remains of why he opted to write *Henry VIII* rather than a play about Henry VII or both. Here the simplest and most probable answer lies in the facts of history itself. When the authors of *1066 and All That* described a British sovereign as 'a good King' they usually meant that chronicles of that reign

failed to record sufficient subject-matter of a scandalous and notorious character to be worth writing about at any length. In this sense Henry VII was an exceptionally 'good King'. Under his rule peace succeeded civil war; dynastic marriages replaced war abroad; the national economy recovered; learning and letters flourished. Yet none of these admirable achievements supply material that invites attention from a dramatist. The single exception is the pathetic insurrections led by Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, the one from Ireland and the other from Holland, both of which were swiftly and easily suppressed. In one of them John Ford was later to find the seeds of drama; but even his interest is focused on the personality of the unfortunate Warbeck and the psychology of self-deception, *not* on Henry VII. Shakespeare, moreover, may well have felt that he had already said all he wished to say about Henry VII in the closing Acts of *Richard III*. So much then for the 'missing' play of *Henry VII*.

Two further questions, however, require an answer. The first of these is why it should have appeared 'safe' to write a play about Henry VIII around 1611/12. An answer is that the playwright Samuel Rowley had already taken the temperature at the Revels Office in obtaining a license in 1605 for his rumbustuous defence of the King and the Protestant Reformation, *When You See Me You Know Me. Or the famous Chronicle Historic of Henry the eight.*

The second question is why should Shakespeare have decided to take down his play in a manner so strikingly different both from his own earlier 'Histories' and from Rowley's play. I wish to argue now that the answer to both these questions rests in Shakespeare having wanted to say something about Henry VIII, and more particularly about Queen Katherine of Aragon, which his patron, James I, actually wanted to be said and widely heard at that particular time.

John Munro when editing the play for *The London Shakespeare* (1957) wrote disparagingly of its structure in his Introduction:

> Although primarily dramatic and spectacular, the play attempts to reconcile the tragic and unmerited falls of Buckingham and Katherine, the self-provoked fall of Wolsey and the foretoken of the fall of Cranmer, with the rise of Anne Bullen and the felicitous birth of Elizabeth, and, finally, the exaltation of James as the King appointed to carry on the divine mission of the Tudors.

As a plot synopsis this could scarcely be bettered. However, he then continues,

The dramatic result is a series of ill-fitting episodes, smothered in pageantry, and redeemed by some magnificent speeches and situations.

It is no wonder that, apart from questions of style, it has been so frequently stated that Shakespeare cannot have been responsible for the general structure of the play. (iv. 1149)[1]

Is that really the best that can be said of it? Or has Munro left out of his account any factor or factors in his appraisal of the play that might lead to a more favourable verdict? One such factor, altogether ignored by all critics known to me, is the measure of topicality that the play possessed for its original audiences which is now lost on us.[2] This lies at the very heart of the drama, the advent of the Reformation and the burden of responsibility for an event which still eclipsed all others in its political implications and reverberances. The Scottish James VI had succeeded to the English throne in 1603 because he was a Protestant lineally descended from Henry VII. The Gunpowder Plot had been hatched in 1605 because he was a Protestant, and had been designed to assassinate both him and his heirs in favour of a Roman Catholic alternative. Yet James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had been a Catholic and had been executed by Elizabeth I accused of conspiring to assassinate her. Behind that lay memories of Mary I, her consort Philip II of Spain, and the fires of Smithfield; and behind Mary I lay the figure of her mother, Katherine of Aragon, whom Henry VIII had divorced in order to marry Anne Bullen, the mother of Elizabeth I, aided and abetted by Cardinal Wolsey and the papal legate Cardinal Campeius. A hotter political potato than this could scarcely have been plucked from the embers of remembered history in 1611. In other words, it stands to reason that a play which places Queen Katherine's trial and Henry's subsequent wedding at the centre

[1] As it forms no part of my purpose within this lecture to discuss attribution, it suffices here to state that I accept the normal critical view that Shakespeare collaborated with John Fletcher in writing it, being responsible for the ordering of the action, or 'invention', himself as well as for most of the major set-piece scenes, and leaving the linking passages to Fletcher in the manner of contemporary portrait painters, who, having taken full responsibility for the likeness and posture of the sitter, left it to apprentices to complete the costume and background.

[2] R. A. Foakes in his edition of the play for the 'Arden Shakespeare' does at least relate it to the courtship and wedding of the Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine, Prince Frederick Henry (Introduction, pp. xxx–xxxv); but he omits to mention that among the many suitors for the Princess between 1609 and the wedding itself were several Roman Catholics, not the least being Philip III of Spain (then a widower) whose candidature was strongly favoured by Queen Anne.

of the action could only hope to meet with the censor's approval if it was structured in such a way as to be ideologically acceptable: in short, it was passed by the Revels Office for performance because it said something about these highly charged historical events that the King in Council wanted said.

I wish now to suggest, therefore, that what James and his Ministers wanted said was that Katherine of Aragon, although both a Spaniard and a Roman Catholic, was a woman more sinned against than sinning: and from the way her scenes are written it is difficult to believe that Shakespeare did not share that view of her himself. Indeed, the play is so structured as to ensure that the audience's sympathies are carefully and consistently directed towards her and then retained by her, notwithstanding the more flamboyant scenes which follow in Act V, and the repeated pattern of Fortune's turning wheel.[1] The short Epilogue confirms this view. From the Privy Council's standpoint, however, it was no less important that Henry VIII, Anne Bullen, and Elizabeth I should be detached and exculpated from any personal responsibility for Katherine's fate. This Shakespeare achieves by laying all blame squarely at the door of Anti-Christ, Pope Clement VII, and his diabolic agents Cardinal Wolsey (who likens his own fall to Lucifer's) and the egregious papal legate, Campeius (a latter-day Iscariot). With both these objectives accomplished, Shakespeare can move safely towards the final apotheosis of James VI and I, revealing this to be the culmination of a messianic vision of an imperial future for the British, predestined by Divine Providence and brought to fruition through the Reformation.

Before turning to the text itself to explore the way in which Shakespeare manipulates his materials to this threefold end, I must beg leave to substantiate my claim that all three of these objectives had special relevance at the time he was writing the play. Reduced to essentials they can be expressed as follows: the harmony that is bred from union begets peace and prosperity.[2] God, as King James repeatedly told his subjects in his speeches,

[1] This pattern and its recurrence in the other Romances is fully discussed by Frank V. Cespedes in '"We are one in fortunes": The Sense of History in *Henry VIII*', *English Literary Review*, vol. x, no. 3 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 413–38.

[2] For fuller discussion see G. Wickham, 'Romance and Emblem: A Study of the Dramatic Structure of *The Winter's Tale*', *Elizabethan Theatre III*, ed. David Galloway, 1973, pp. 82–9; 'Masque and Anti-Masque in *The Tempest*', *Essays and Studies 1975*, ed. R. Ellrodt, pp. 1–14; and 'Riddle and Emblem: A Study in the Dramatic Structure of *Cymbeline*', *English Renaissance Studies*, 1980, ed. John Carey, pp. 94–113; also Roy Strong, *Britannia Triumphans*, 1980.

had brought an end to all the speculation and anxiety that had bedevilled the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign by reuniting the Kingdoms of Scotland and England within his person, just as God had terminated the Wars of the Roses a century earlier in the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York: and if England had prospered under the Tudors, how much more so would the reunited Kingdom of Britannia, Great Britain, flourish under the Stuarts. A start had been made in the Peace Treaty signed with Spain in 1604; Guy Fawkes's devilish gunpowder treason had miscarried; the future looked brighter still. When James's son Henry, created Prince of Wales in 1610, inherited the throne, he would truly reunite Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and England within an imperial diadem embracing colonies in the New World. And in his sons Henry and Charles, and his daughter Elizabeth, James rested his hopes of a still more resplendent achievement in the ultimate reunion of a sadly divided Christendom through judicious dynastic marriages. Not for nothing did he welcome as his motto on arriving in England, *Beati Pacifici*: Blessed are the Peacemakers; for the reward he foresaw for his subjects in God's good time was to be nothing less than a *Pax Britannica* as stable, widespread and durable as the former *Pax Romana*; in short, a Protestant Empire grounded on London, and led by the predestinately elect nation of Great Britain.

Poets, pageanteers, and playmakers had swiftly battened on these romantic ideals, adorning them in the mythological metaphors of Trojan Brutus, the prophet Merlin, and the sleeping King Arthur formerly bestowed on the house of Tudor, and exploiting such legendary early British kings as Lear and Cymbeline, to advance them further. James had encouraged them himself by matching words with deeds. The burial arrangements made for his predecessor and his murdered mother in the King Henry VII Chapel at Westminster provided his subjects with both an explicit example and an emblem of practical peacemaking: bury the past: forgive and forget. The wedding of Lord Hay, leader of the Scottish peers, and the Lady Honora Denny, heiress to an English peerage, celebrated at Court and crowned with a Masque commissioned from Thomas Campion in 1606, again served to translate an abstract idea into recognizable, concrete terms of reference. And, if Scots, instead of fighting the English, could marry them, why should Protestants not marry Catholics and thus spread peace and prosperity through union further still?

It was within this climate of opinion that negotiations started in earnest in 1609 to find an appropriate bride and groom for

Prince Henry and the Princess Elizabeth: and it was against this background that one awkward ghost had still to be laid to rest, the tarnished image of a Spanish Princess married to a King of England for more than twenty years, mother of his first child, yet ultimately disgraced, rejected and left alone to die as a virtual exile in a foreign land. This could hardly be regarded as a good advertisement for a repeat performance. No wonder the King and his Ministers thought it high time to set the record straight: yet in setting it straight, the over-riding image of a divinely chosen, elect nation being led by a latter-day Moses and a second Joshua into a promised land of imperial dimensions must in no way be sullied or despoiled.

Shakespeare, I suggest, set out in 1611 to lay this ghost, fully aware of the urgency and importance attaching to this task. It was one worthy of the King's Men. Who better placed to tackle it? Title and Prologue combine as signposts to an understanding of the company's intent. Audiences were told that they were to see and hear a play called 'The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth', probably sub-titled 'All is True' when it first appeared. No word of Henry himself in the Prologue, and none of the other characters are named; but there is an unusual insistence upon the realism with which both the story and the persons in it are to be treated in this play. *Truth* will reward those who pay for admission; this *truth* has been 'chosen'; clowning and ribaldry can only serve to undermine the recipients' sense of the *truth* of the actions represented, and have accordingly been deliberately avoided. The events to be discussed are 'serious', 'weighty', 'full of state and woe'.

> Those that can pity here
> May, if they think it well, let fall a tear.

Hitherto, it has generally been assumed that *Henry VIII*, because it is known to have been performed at the Globe on 29 June 1613, must therefore have been written for, and first performed at, the Globe. Admittedly R. A. Foakes, in editing the play for 'The Arden Shakespeare' in 1968, encouraged the idea of earlier performances;[1] but what no one has recognized, as far as I am aware, is that this play could just as easily have been written for first performance in the King's Men's Private Playhouse in the Blackfriars, which they had recovered for their own use in August 1608.[2] Once this is remarked, then the probability that the play

[1] Op. cit., pp. xxx–xxxi.

[2] On James I's decision to disband the Company of Boys known as the

was conceived for presentation at the Blackfriars through the winter season of 1612/13 and then transferred to the Globe in the summer of 1613 has to be taken very seriously, since that Playhouse had been fashioned out of the great open room, or hall, formerly known as the Parliament Chamber—*itself the actual site of Queen Katherine's trial in 1528.*

If, temporarily, we accept this hypothesis, an explanation is at once forthcoming for the extraordinary insistence upon 'truth', already remarked upon, and for the no less extraordinary insistence upon verisimilitude in many of the play's exceptionally long and detailed stage-directions. In other words, if Shakespeare intended, as I am now arguing that he did, to re-enact the Queen's trial some eighty years on within the walls of the Court-room where it had originally been held, but before a new jury of Jacobean playgoers, then accuracy and verisimilitude (or at least the semblance of both) must have assumed a special importance for author, actors, and audience alike.

With that said, let us now apply this hypothesis to the existing Folio text, and examine such consequences as this may have on an understanding of the play's dramatic structure.

The play itself begins some thirteen years after Henry VIII's accession with a vivid if retrospective account of the Field of the Cloth of Gold of 1523. Within fifty lines, however, this descriptive setting is angled to discredit its prime begetter, Cardinal Wolsey. 'Ambitious finger' . . . 'fierce vanities' . . . 'spider-like out of his self-drawing web' . . . thus the Dukes of Norfolk and Buckingham describe his contribution. Lord Abergavanny probes deeper:

> . . . I can see his pride
> Peep through each part of him. Whence has he that?
> If not from hell, the devil is a niggard,
> Or has given all before, and he begins
> A new hell in himself.

The allusion is transparent: if Wolsey is the Pope's principal representative in England, so Lucifer was the brightest of God's angels. They proceed to attribute the unprecedented extravagance of the Field of the Cloth of Gold to deliberate scheming on Wolsey's part to ruin the nobility, only to be interrupted by the entrance of Wolsey himself in great pomp and circumstance. Battle is swiftly joined between him and Buckingham who now

Children of the King's Revels whose manager, Henry Evans, had leased the playhouse from the Burbages between 1600 and 1608, see G. Wickham, *Early English Stages*, vol. ii, pt. 2 (1972), pp. 129–36.

views Wolsey as 'This holy fox, or wolf, or both', an ironic comment in the event since further discourse is cut short by the arrest of Buckingham on Wolsey's orders.

Scene 2 introduces the audience to the King and Queen. Katherine's role is highly significant. It is analogous both to Esther's when pleading for the Jews before Ahasuerus and to that of the Virgin Mary as intercessor for sinful man before God. Here she takes cause with London's merchants and artisans reduced to penury by Wolsey's taxes with little thought for herself or any danger in which such action might place her.

> I am much too venturous
> In tempting of your patience, but am boldened
> Under your promised pardon. The subjects' grief
> Comes through commissions, which compels from each
> The sixth part of his substance, to be levied
> Without delay; and the pretence for this
> Is named your wars in France.

Nothing could be better calculated to win her the immediate sympathy of the public.

Wolsey side-steps her accusations by passing the buck to the Judges. Nevertheless, the King acts on the Queen's advice and orders a free pardon to be given to everyone who has failed to pay the tax. Wolsey passes this instruction on to his secretary, but tells him to attribute the sudden pardon to his own 'intercession'. This action, combined with the Cardinal's scarlet hat behind which it is given, could only serve to confirm the audience in the impression of devilish viciousness gleaned earlier of Wolsey from Buckingham's comments. This viciousness—fox and wolf at once—is then displayed in action as Wolsey cajoles a bribed and perjured servant of the Duke into accusing him of treason. Again the Queen intervenes to plead for charity, but in vain. Buckingham must stand trial: Wolsey's voice still rings more loudly in the King's ear than Katherine's.

The action then shifts to Wolsey's Palace, where the Cardinal is depicted as host at a banquet worthy of the Borgias. Henry himself is to be the principal guest, leading a troupe of mummers disguised as shepherds. The Queen has not been invited, but Sir Thomas Bullen's young daughter, Anne, has. Once Henry, now unmasked, has met her, Wolsey adopts the role of Panderus and escorts the flirtatious couple to refreshments in his private apartments. The pastoral setting supplied by the shepherd-masquers can scarcely be coincidental: the care already taken to

equate Wolsey with Lucifer serves deftly to translate the close of this Act into a sixteenth-century Garden of Eden shortly before the Fall. Neither Henry nor Katherine can now stop what must follow, but the blame for it has been firmly planted on a Cardinal in an adder's coat.

Act II opens with Buckingham's finale. Shakespeare denies us the trial scene deliberately: that he must hold in reserve. Instead he employs an eye-witness to describe to an absentee what has happened. If words are to be believed, then not only did the trial itself represent a miscarriage of justice, but responsibility for that rested with the perjured clergy guided and suborned by the envious Cardinal. As the eye-witness observes, this has become a routine.

> And generally, whoever the King favours
> The Cardinal instantly will find employment,
> And far enough from Court too.

Nor are these sentiments confined to courtiers playing the power-game. As the absentee responds:

> All the commons
> Hate him perniciously, and, o' my conscience,
> Wish him ten fathom deep.

Buckingham then appears on his way to the scaffold. He is urged to speak his mind. What is notable, when he does so, is that he never directs one word of blame towards the King. The dramatic purpose of his harrowing and pitiful farewell is not, however, an end in itself: rather is it designed to prepare the audience to fear for the Queen's safety. The execution procession has no sooner left the stage than the second of the two Gentlemen who began the scene by discussing Buckingham's trial informs his companion of,

> . . . an ensuing evil, if it fall,
> Greater than this.

Pressed to explain himself, he confides a rumour that has recently reached him.

> Either the Cardinal,
> Or some about him near, have, out of malice
> To the good Queen, possessed him (i.e. the King) with a scruple
> That will undo her . . .
> . . . The Cardinal
> Will have his will, and she must fall.

Thus we are brought back to the image of the Paradise Garden that closed Act I. With Lucifer abroad in it, Eve must fall: but

this time Adam must be lured first. What is 'this scruple that will undo her'? We only have to wait some ten more lines for the answer. As the Lord Chamberlain observes to the Duke of Norfolk,

> 'It seems the marriage with his brother's wife
> Has crept too near his conscience.'
> 'No' replies Suffolk, 'his conscience
> Has crept too near another lady.'

A rash ripost! Yet Norfolk immediately confirms it and adds a damning rider.

> 'Tis so.
> This is the Cardinal's doing, the King-Cardinal.
> That blind priest, like the eldest son of fortune,
> Turns what he list. The King will know him one day.

Still the King's fault lies only in ignorance of the devilish machinations being practised upon him. The Queen is wholly excused by Norfolk. Wolsey, he remarks, having first schemed to introduce the King to Anne Bullen, then plants the idea of incest in his mind, stirring up a turmoil of doubts, dangers, fears and despairs.

> And out of all these to restore the King,
> He counsels a divorce, a loss of her
> That, like a jewel, has hung twenty years
> About his neck, yet never lost her lustre;
> Of her that loves him with that excellence
> That angels love good men with, even of her
> That, when the greatest stroke of fortune falls
> Will bless the King:—and is not this course pious?

In reply to this ironic rhetorical question Suffolk declares open war on the Cardinal.

> . . . so, I leave him
> To him that made him proud, the Pope.

Most of the cards are now face-upwards on the table. Time can thus be foreshortened: the papal legate has arrived; he and Wolsey are free to work their fiend-like ends upon the innocent King and Queen of England; but by now Jacobean audiences have also been equipped by this skilful playmaker to serve as jurymen on the conduct of all four. To hammer home the point Shakespeare then provides the King with these four lines:

> The most convenient place that I can think of
> For such receipt of learning is Blackfriars:
> There ye shall meet about this weighty business:
> My Wolsey, see it furnished.

Katherine was the youngest child of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. She arrived in England in October 1501, when she was still only fifteen, and married Arthur, Prince of Wales in St Paul's Cathedral on 14 November, only to become a widow five months later. In 1509 she was married again to her brother-in-law, Henry VIII, and crowned Queen of England on 24 June in Westminster Abbey. Divorce proceedings commenced in the Legatine Court specially set up in the Great Hall of Blackfriars in May 1529. The king finally abandoned her in July 1531. She died, a virtual prisoner at Kimbolton Castle, in January 1536.

In those four lines the equating of the Parliament Chamber, the site of the original trial, with the existing Private Playhouse is made explicit for all present to hear and see.

Before the Queen's trial can begin, however, one more card has to be turned upwards—Anne Bullen's. Promptly we meet her expressing dismay at the turn events have taken, pitying Katherine's predicament, and vowing that she will never allow herself to take her place as Queen. In all this she is mocked by a companion resembling Juliet's nurse. When Anne swears that by her 'truth and maidenhead' she would not be a queen, this shrewd woman replies,

> Beshrew me, I would,
> And venture maidenhead for 't: and so would you,
> For all this spice of your hypocrisy.
> You that have so fair parts of woman on you
> Have too a woman's heart, which ever yet
> Affected eminence, wealth, sovereignty;
> Which, to say sooth, are blessings; and which gifts—
> Saving your mincing—the capacity
> Of your soft cheveril conscience would receive
> If you might please to stretch it.

This is a devastating exposure. With her card now face-upwards, Anne can be dismissed from the drama that is to follow in Blackfriars. At this point it would perhaps be as well to recapitulate, in the manner of one of those chess problems in newspapers showing the state of play and the number of moves white has in which to checkmate black, on how Shakespeare has manipulated audience sympathies to date, in preparation for the play's central event, the trial of the Queen.

In one sense the Buckingham scenes in Acts I and II are non-events, since the ambiguous story of his treason is not an end in itself, only a means to another end: his guilt or innocence, in other words, are left in some doubt; all that is certain is that he was rash in his choice of personal servants and in the trust he placed in them. What these scenes really exist to do is to show audiences that Henry VIII is no less rash, in human terms of reference, in the trust he places in his ministers; that the leader of them, Wolsey, is as devious as could be expected of any ecclesiastic owing his allegiance and authority to the Pope, and as ambitious as Lucifer who had succeeded in deceiving God himself. This exonerates the King, but it bodes ill for the Queen if she is courageous enough to step between the Cardinal and his own ends. This she does, first by pleading for the citizens against unjust and ruinous taxation, and

then as an intercessor for Buckingham. Wolsey promptly counters these dangerous moves, first by arranging to place Anne Bullen within Henry's acquaintanceship and then by expressing doubts to Henry about the legitimacy of his marriage. Thus Satan comes to tempt the old Adam in Henry's mortal nature with a nubile apple, and to employ the niceties of legal small-print, with the Pope's help, to ensure that he will yield. Lastly, Anne's role within this diabolic plot is also glossed to protect her against any charge of having been a prime mover in the events to follow; she is no more than the unfortunate but essential instrument chosen by Wolsey, as it seems, to effect his revenge on Katherine. Young, beautiful, and unschooled in politics, but wholly feminine in her nature, she is fully aware of what could result from the situation in which she finds herself to have been placed. Like Henry, therefore, from the audience's standpoint, she is still an innocent within the Machiavellian game orchestrated by Anti-Christ.

It is against this moral backcloth that Katherine's trial begins: discerning spectators may well have noticed parallels with Hermione's situation in Act II of *The Winter's Tale*. No actress worth that name could ask for a better start.

The re-enactment of the historical event in Blackfriars Hall begins with a blaze of pageantry: the stage-direction covering the order of proceedings is itself fourteen lines long. Significantly the trial starts with these words from Wolsey:

> Whilst our commission from Rome is read,
> Let silence be commanded.

This supplies Katherine with her cue to launch into one of the best known audition pieces in the canon:

> Sir, I desire you do me right and justice,
> And to bestow your pity on me . . .

This plea, and the forty-five lines that follow it are addressed directly to the King, but it is the two Cardinals who intervene with answers to prevent him replying to her request for Spanish lawyers. She, in turn, accuses Wolsey to his face of pride, cunning, and all uncharitableness. Her courage is only matched by her simplicity, for in her refusal to be judged by Wolsey it is 'unto the Pope' that she appeals—

> To bring my whole cause 'fore his Holiness,
> And to be judged by him.

—whereupon she sweeps out of the hall, a woman patently more sinned against than sinning, and every inch a Queen. It is a *tour*

de force and one that succeeds in moving the King at last to speak: what is more, her conduct has recovered his admiration for her: she is 'the queen of earthly queens'.

Wolsey is at once on the defensive: nor can anything be quite the same again. Henry excuses him and, at his suggestion, offers the audience a seventy-line account of how the lack of a male heir, conjoined with the possible illegitimacy of his only daughter, so disturbed him as to make it imperative, in the nation's interest, to settle the matter once and for all. Campieus, in supporting his resolve, sinisterly suggests that the Queen's proposed appeal should be blocked. This proves to be the last straw for Henry, who abruptly closes the scene with an unexpected aside to the audience:

> I may perceive
> These Cardinals trifle with me. I abhor
> This dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome.

He summons Cranmer: Fortune's wheel has started to turn.

Act III opens like the last act of *Othello*. The Queen, still loyal to her husband, but now wracked with anxiety and foreboding, like Desdemona, takes comfort in music.

> In sweet music is such art,
> Killing care and grief of heart
> Fall asleep, or hearing die.

This touching scene is interrupted by a visitation from Wolsey and Campeius. In the interview which follows Shakespeare wrings the changes on his audiences' emotions, as the dialogue alternates between the obsequious counselling of the two Cardinals and the Queen's dignified, doubting and contemptuous responses. Campeius rashly rebukes her rising anger and provokes a devastatingly frank ripost.

> The more shame for ye. Holy men I thought ye,
> Upon my soul, two reverend cardinal virtues;
> But cardinal sins and hollow hearts I fear ye.
> Mend 'em, for shame, my lords. Is this your comfort?
> The cordial that ye bring a wretched lady,
> A woman lost among ye, laughed at, scorned?
> I will not wish ye half my miseries:
> I have more charity. But say, I warned ye:
> Take heed, for heaven's sake, take heed, lest at once
> The burthen of my sorrow fall upon ye.

The scene continues for another hundred lines, but it is all over

bar the shouting, the tears, the wringing of hands. As Katherine herself observes,

> Like the lily
> That once was mistress of the field and flourished,
> I'll hang my head and perish.

Maybe, if that is heaven's high purpose; but her prophecy, like Cassandra's, will swiftly come to pass through the agency of the Reformation. Cranmer is at work; Campeius has fled to Rome; Wolsey, much to his alarm, has discovered Anne Bullen to be a secret Lutheran; rumour has it that the pragmatic King will resolve his own and the nation's dilemma by marrying her forthwith. All that is still controllable. What is not is the letter he has sent to the Pope which, in error, gets delivered to the King. When Henry hands him this damning evidence of his own avarice and double-dealing, he knows the game is up.

> Nay then, farewell!
> I have touched the highest point of all my greatness;
> And, from that full meridian of my glory,
> I haste now to my setting. I shall fall
> Like a bright exhalation in the evening,
> And no man see me more.

Charged by others with extortion, duplicity, and viciousness, Wolsey ironically answers his accusers in the language Katherine had used to him—'officious lords', 'curious courses', 'men of malice',—but with the vital difference that the audience, who had believed Katherine, now disbelieve him, more especially on hearing Surrey address him as 'thou scarlet sin'! The longer this goes on, and as the list of Wolsey's deceptions is catalogued by his accusers, so the need for a thorough Reformation of a totally corrupt 2nd Estate becomes self-evident. At least it brings Wolsey to self-knowledge at last. Left to meditate, he soliloquizes memorably and philosophically on the personal catastrophe prophesied by the Queen; and, in conclusion, recognizes that,

> . . . when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
> Never to hope again.

And so the way is clear to move on to Anne's marriage and coronation. Both are conveyed to us as matters of fact without any further discussion of the rights and wrongs of either. As Wolsey admits,

> The King has gone beyond me. All my glories
> In that one woman I have lost for ever.

In other words Anne was God's chosen instrument who, with the King's assistance, would occasion Wolsey's fall and, with it, bring about the Reformation. Cranmer and Cromwell are left to effect it. And so we move to her coronation, but we will be denied any closer acquaintance with her. Her name will recur, briefly, in the dialogue when she gives birth to a daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, but that is all: in that role she will neither speak nor be seen. Her role is over. Yet Katherine is destined to return, and in one of the play's most moving scenes. Old, isolated, ill, and ignored during the coronation celebrations, we meet her next with her few loyal retainers at Kimbolton Castle. It is an astonishing scene, its ritualistic simplicity contrasting sharply with the garish pomp and circumstance of the preceding scene. With all passion spent and music at the close, it offers us a theatrical representation of the supreme Christian virtue of Fortitude. Starting with a recital of the circumstances of Wolsey's death it moves on to an exchange of obituaries; the first, supplied by Katherine, of his vices; the second supplied by Griffith, her usher, of his virtues. Katherine sums up.

> After my death I wish no other herald,
> No other speaker of my living actions,
> To keep mine honour from corruption,
> But such an honest chronicler as Griffith.
> Whom I most hated living, thou hast made me,
> With thy religious truth and modesty,
> Now in his ashes honour. Peace be with him!

Shakespeare has shown us a woman who has loved her neighbours as herself and honoured both God and the King, his appointed deputy on earth. She has endured suffering with patience, dignity and humility; and now, with true Christian charity, she forgives her arch enemy. Shakespeare rewards her with a dream which bears a close resemblance to pictures of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary as depicted by such Mannerist painters as Correggio, Guido Renni, and Murillo.

Choreographed in all probability by the King's dancing master, Monsieur Hieronimus Herne,[1] six seraphic children

> enter, solemnly tripping one after another . . . clad in white Robes, wearing on their heads Garlands of Bay, and golden Vizards on their faces, Branches of Bays or Palm in their hands.

As they dance they pair off and each pair in turn holds a spare

[1] It was he who, according to Ben Jonson, choreographed the grotesque dance for the anti-masque to *The Masque of Queens* in 1609, which was presented by the King's Men.

garland over Katherine's head while the others curtsy to her. The stage-direction in Folio ends as follows:

And so, in their Dancing vanish, carrying the Garland with them. The Music continues.

As Katherine wakes, she fancies she still sees these angelic beings and addresses them as 'Spirits of peace'.

This powerful icon of a martyr's crown awaiting a soul that has lived and died for her faith provides a fitting prelude to a gesture of reconcilement from her husband and a final reckoning. When told by Capucius that he brings commendations and comfort from the King, Katherine responds,

> O my good lord, that comfort comes too late:
> 'Tis like a pardon after execution.
> That gentle physic, given in time, had cured me;
> But now I am past all comforts here but prayers.
> How does his Highness?
> Madam, in good health.
> So may he ever do! and ever flourish
> When I shall dwell with worms, and my poor name
> Banished the Kingdom!

Yet even as she speaks these words, Shakespeare is repealing in Blackfriars that very banishment which an English Court had imposed upon her in Blackfriars.

With failing strength she dictates her last will and testament, and bequeaths to her faithful attendants instructions for her funeral.

> Let me be used with honour. Strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave. Embalm me,
> Then lay me forth; although unqueened, yet like
> A queen, and daughter to a king, inter me.
> I can no more.

And there ends the finest death scene Shakespeare ever wrote: and with it ends Act IV. Why then add Act V? It's there, in my submission, to wrench the play back into time-present. This is effected by the birth and christening of the Princess Elizabeth. The latter is entrusted to Thomas Cranmer who, as Archbishop of Canterbury, is a fit mouthpiece for prophetic utterance. Following a panegyric on Elizabeth's future achievements, he proceeds,

> Nor shall this peace sleep with her; but, as when
> The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,

> Her ashes new create another heir
> As great in admiration as herself,
> So shall she leave her blessedness to one—
> When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness—
> Who from the sacred ashes of her honour
> Shall starlike rise, as great in fame as she was,
> And so stand fixed. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
> That were the servants to this chosen infant,
> Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him.
> Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
> His honour and the greatness of his name
> Shall be, and make new nations. He shall flourish,
> And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
> To all the plains about him. Our children's children
> Shall see this, and bless heaven.

And so Fortune's wheel has come full-circle. The children's children cited here by Cranmer are now the very same spectators who are watching him deliver this prophecy. Peace, plenty, love—the familiar Jamesian aspirations—and with them the first-fruits of an imperial future for God's chosen Protestant people have become realities.

My claim, therefore, is that Shakespeare set out to offer more in *King Henry VIII* than just a rag-bag of 'ill-fitting episodes, smothered in pageantry, redeemed by some magnificent speeches and situations' to humour jolly, jingoistic theatre-goers at the Globe. Rather is this play as carefully and artistically designed as all its immediate predecessors. Its structure is governed by a single unifying purpose, underpinned by the fortuitous conjunction of the former Parliament Chamber and contemporary Private Playhouse within the dissolved Priory of Blackfriars. That purpose, at its simplest, is to redeem *in the national interest* the slanders cast in 1531 upon the name of Katherine of Aragon on British soil. As dramatic narrative, it is a chunk of national history: as art it is a Requiem Mass and an entombment.

The dying Hamlet, as you will recall, calls on Horatio to render him a final favour.

> O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story.

I suggest that it was this voice, or one very like it, that rang in

Shakespeare's ears as he set about the rehabilitation of Katherine, Princess of Aragon and Queen of England, when composing *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth or, All is True* for production by the King's Men in their playhouse at Blackfriars in 1612.

Shakespeare's ears as he set about the rehabilitation of Katherine, Princess of Aragon and Queen of England, when composing *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth or, All is True* for production by the King's Men in their playhouse at Blackfriars in 1612.

ERRATUM

PLATE XIV: The portrait of Katherine of Aragon is reproduced with the kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery.