THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

A Study Guide

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developed by

University Extension
The University of California, San Diego
and
The Coast Community College District

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CONTENTS

vii Preface
ix Acknowledgments
xii How to Use This Course
1 **Julius Caesar**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"The Organization of the Play" by Robert E. Knoll
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test
25 **As You Like It**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"Retorts Courteous, Quips Modest, Replies Churlish, and Reproofs Valiant (and Some Lies Circumstantial and Direct): The Battle of Wits in *As You Like It*" by Martha Andresen-Thom
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test
47 **Romeo and Juliet**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"*Romeo and Juliet:* Patterns and Paradigms" by Marjorie Garber
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test
71 **The Tragedy of King Richard the Second**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"An Invitation to *Richard II*" by Michael Mullin
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test
101 **Measure for Measure**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"Mortality and Mercy in *Measure for Measure*" by Janet Adelman
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test
121 **The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth**
Introduction to the Play
Lesson Assignments
Learning Objectives
"*Henry VIII:* Shakespeare's Tragicomic Historical Romance" by John F. Andrews
Annotated Bibliography
Self-test

PREFACE

A preface is normally the place where authors thank people who have helped them produce their book. In this case, however, it seemed wise to depart from tradition. There are no "authors" as such of this book, and this study guide is only the linchpin of a much larger effort: the telecourse THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS.

This telecourse is a coproduction of the British Broadcasting Company and Time-Life Television; it began with the decision of the BBC to produce the entire canon of William Shakespeare's plays. The support of the Exxon Corporation, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and Morgan Guaranty Trust was secured, and broadcast rights were obtained. WNET (Channel 13), New York, was designated the station of origination, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting decided generously to fund a number of educational progams based on these productions, including this telecourse. The University Extension, University of California, San Diego, and the Coast Community College District were brought into the project as part of the telecourse production team. Course designers met with television people and teachers and scholars of Shakespeare, publishing contracts were secured, and educational materials were produced. This book is the capstone of that process.

Many people have been responsible for its progress. Mary Lindenstein Walshok of University Extension, University of California, San Diego, and Thomas Gripp of Coast Community College District spent hours with Brian Brightly of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting designing the institutional approach to the course. They were supported in their efforts by Martin N. Chamberlain at University Extension, University of California, San Diego, and Norman E. Watson and Bernard J. Luskin, Coast Community College District.

Once the design to produce a course was final, Maynard Mack, Ph.D., Sterling professor emeritus of English at Yale University, provided invaluable assistance in determining the direction of the course and identifying academic authors to take charge of each play.

The scholars and teachers of Shakespeare whose essays appear

in this book — Janet Adelman, Martha Andresen-Thom, John F. Andrews, Marjorie Garber, Robert E. Knoll, and Michael Mullin — have provided the core of the course. They not only wrote an introductory essay to each play; with the course designers, they also formulated student learning objectives, provided bibliographical information, and reviewed test questions.

Several individuals and organizations besides the BBC provided background information on the television plays. Tim Hallinan and Connie Stone of Tel Ed, Inc., Los Angeles, and Shirley Gillette of WNET were particularly helpful in this regard. Louise Hewitt of Coastline Community College supervised the copy editing and artwork of the course materials. Carl Glassford is responsible for the drawings in this book, and Susan Waldorf developed the test bank.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of the educational materials for each play in the course was supervised by an outstanding scholar and teacher in Shakespeare studies. Each also contributed an original essay to the materials on his or her play.

Janet Adelman, Ph.D., educated at Smith College, Oxford University, and Yale University, is associate professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley. She has published *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* and has edited *Twentieth Century Interpretations of King Lear.* She is currently interested in a psychoanalytic approach to Shakespeare. In this course she has contributed materials on *Measure for Measure.*

Martha Andresen-Thom, Ph.D., associate professor of English at Pomona College, has contributed materials for *As You Like It.* She has a B.A. and B.S. from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. from Yale University and has taught at the University of Pittsburgh as well as Pomona College. She has published a number of articles on Shakespeare, including "Ripeness is All: Aphorisms and Emblems in *King Lear*," and "Thinking About Shakespeare's Women and the Prosperous Art: A Reply to Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women.*" She is now working on a book about rogues and vagabonds in early Tudor fiction.

John F. Andrews, Ph.D., Director of Academic Programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., contributed materials for *Henry VIII*. With a B.A. from Princeton, M.A. in teaching from Harvard, and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt, Dr. Andrews taught at Florida State University, Tallahassee, before coming to the Folger Library. He is editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly* and executive editor of Folger Books. His publications include articles on the compositors of the First Folio, Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet,* and *Hamlet.* His current major interest is Shakespearean tragedy.

Marjorie Garber, Ph.D., associate professor of English at Yale University, worked with *Romeo and Juliet.* With a B.A. from Swarthmore College and a Ph.D. from Yale University, she is the

"Henry VIII": Shakespeare's Tragicomic Historical Romance

by John F. Andrews

"The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know *what* it is—what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide that the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you. As long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins or the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them." Thus, with characteristic sanity and wit, the late C. S. Lewis opens *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 1). And thus, with equal appropriateness, we may preface our consideration of *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth.*

Exactly what kind of play is it? Is it an English chronicle play comparable to such earlier Shakespearean works as *Richard II* and *Henry V*? Or is it a tragicomic romance comparable to such later works as *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest*? Or, combining these two possibilities, is it a new hybrid form containing features of both genres, along with features of such other genres as the Jonsonian masque and the late-medieval morality play? And was *Henry VIII* written entirely by Shakespeare or, as many critics since the mid-nineteenth century have believed, by Shakespeare in collaboration with his fellow playwright John Fletcher? Is it best dated in 1613, when in June its first recorded performance set off a fire that destroyed the Globe playhouse? If so, did its composition have anything to do with the February wedding of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of King James I and his queen, Anne of Denmark, to Frederick the Elector of Palatine? Is its subject matter primarily political or primarily religious in import? Is its form merely episodic—an unconnected sequence of trials, falls, and ceremonial pageants—or is it unified by a coherent dramatic design? These are only a few of the ques-

tions commentators and audiences have long asked, and continue to ask, in an effort to experience *Henry VIII* with a maximum of understanding, appreciation, and pleasure.

For even though it has enjoyed remarkable success in the theatre, *Henry VIII* has generally been regarded with puzzlement or disfavor by scholars and critics unable or unwilling to surrender themselves completely to the dramatic impact of the play's many memorable scenes and speeches: Norfolk's poetically heightened description of the fabled glory of the Field of the Cloth of Gold (I,i); Buckingham's moving valedictory to his wellwishers prior to his execution (II,i); Wolsey's advice to Cromwell about the dangers of ambition (III,ii); Anne Bullen's earthly coronation (IV,i) followed by Katherine of Aragon's vision of celestial coronation (IV,ii); Archbishop Cranmer's christening of the infant Elizabeth (V,v), "the maiden phoenix" who shall bring "upon this land a thousand thousand blessings." Taken in isolation, these are all fine moments, among the most widely admired in the whole of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and they have been effectively realized in performance by some of the greatest actors and actresses who ever donned Shakespearean costume. But few of the play's commentators have felt that such moments are sufficient to redeem a dramatic work they view as, at best, uneven in poetic and conceptual power. Some have explained this unevenness by hypothesizing that Shakespeare shared the composition of the play with one or more other playwrights. Others, rejecting the collaboration hypothesis, have explained the play's unevenness by inferring that when he wrote *Henry VIII* Shakespeare was no longer in consistent control of his talent (Samuel Johnson), was bored (Lytton Strachey), or was simply beyond the point when he could take time to invest his fullest creative energy in a play that may have been originally conceived and left incomplete in the 1590s (E. M. W. Tillyard), when the poet was writing his eight plays on the English kings preceding Henry VIII. Only a handful of modern critics have found in *Henry VIII* the kind of artistic integrity usually accorded the other plays Shakespeare wrote near the end of his career; and few of these would rank it among his higher achievements.

This is not the place to go into the technical arguments for and against collaboration, nor is it necessary here to list the many

inconsistencies and "weaknesses" in the play cited by those who believe it to be the work of more than one author. Suffice it to say that the case for collaboration has never been definitely demonstrated and is not supported by any evidence external to the play, whereas the play's inclusion among Shakespeare's works in the First Folio is evidence that the poet's friends, John Heminge and Henry Condell, who compiled the collection a few years after his death, considered *Henry VIII* to be a composition by their former colleague.

For our purposes, then, it may be wisest to take a positive approach. Let us assume, until we find ourselves forced to abandon the assumption, that *Henry VIII* is in fact a coherent work of dramatic art, one of the last works, if not the very last work, of the greatest poet and dramatist the world has yet seen. We should not allow "bardolatry" to blind us to flaws where they exist, of course, whether we are examining *Henry VIII* or such manifest works of genius as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. At the same time, however, we should resist the temptation to sally forth in quest of flaws, tilting at everything that seems on a superficial reading to be unfamiliar or difficult to accommodate to our initial view of what a play ought to be. When dealing with an author as complex and profound as Shakespeare—particularly when we recognize how astonishingly varied his different works are and how "experimental" many of his later plays seem by comparison with the dramatic patterns established in his earlier plays—we are well advised to bring with us a humble awareness that what may at first appear crude or awkward or otherwise mistaken is likely to have been devised for a particular effect in keeping with a highly sophisticated artistic design. And if there is such a design, we are much more apt to see it if we conscientiously search for it than if we approach the play with our eyes so blinkered as to eliminate in advance anything that falls outside a narrowly circumscribed range of possibilities.

Returning now to our initial question—exactly what kind of play is *Henry VIII*?—we should notice, to begin with, that the First Folio title for the work emphasizes the words "Famous History." The obvious presumption is that members of the audience will be familiar with the main outlines and many of the minor details of "The Life of King Henry the Eighth"—including a

number of incidents and later developments not selected for presentation in Shakespeare's dramatization of that life—because it is, in fact, a famous story and a story that was intimately related to the dynastic, political, and ecclestiastical preoccupations of seventeenth-century Englishmen. From the Prologue we infer that this presumption of historicity carries with it a corollary presumption that the playwright and his company feel obliged to present their story in such a manner as to bring home its "truth" reliably and effectually. (In Sir Henry Wotton's description of the fateful performance of June 29, 1613, the play is referred to under the name "All Is True"; it is likely that this phrase served for a time as either an alternate title or a subtitle for *Henry VIII*.)

Just what "truth" means in this context, however, is not altogether evident. It clearly does not mean that the playwright slavishly followed his historical sources. In *Henry VIII*, as in his earlier plays on English history, Shakespeare compressed and rearranged the chronology of events, omitted what he considered extraneous material, added new material of his own invention or material derived from unrelated sources, altered a number of significant details, and in general reshaped the narratives he drew from (most notably, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*) to give his "History" the dramatic form and thematic emphasis he wished it to have. He was not at liberty, of course, to alter any of the major "happenings" of Henry's reign (the King's decision to annul his marriage with Katherine of Aragon and marry Anne Bullen, for instance, or Cardinal Wolsey's fall from power), but he was free to structure his dramatic sequence in such a way as to "interpret" those happenings and condition his audience's response to them. As R. A. Foakes observes in the introduction to his New Arden edition, "The trial of Buckingham (1521) is placed in close proximity in the play to Henry's meeting with Anne (1527?) at a masque which she apparently did not attend," the juxtaposition suggesting the omnipresence of Wolsey, who arranged both the trial and the masque. Similarly, "the marriage of Henry with Anne Boleyn (1532) is brought forward before the fall of Wolsey, which occurred in 1529," evidently to remind Wolsey before his death of the totality of his political and ecclesiastical discomfiture. And perhaps most important, "the death of Katherine (1536) is . . .

brought forward by several years, and is made to precede the birth of Elizabeth (1533)" thereby enabling the playwright both to beatify the King's unfortunate but noble first wife and to glorify the offspring of his second.

If *Henry VIII* is to be viewed as a history play then, we must recognize that the "truth" of the events it depicts is based on something other than a literal adherence to strict chronology. As with Shakespeare's other histories, *Henry VIII* is chronicle dramatized, a sequence of events selected and arranged in such a pattern as will allow their significance to merge with clarity and coherence (offering some kind of political "meaning" pertinent to the lives of a seventeenth-century audience), while at the same time generating an appropriate emotional, ethical, and spiritual response. The opening words of the Prologue set the proper tone:

I come no more to make you laugh. Things now
That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow
We now present.

But if in its dependence on a familiar chapter of English history *Henry VIII* shows affinities to such earlier history plays as *Richard III* and *1 Henry IV* in its treatment of that material it also shows strong affinities to the tragicomic romances Shakespeare was writing in the period immediately preceding it. The earlier histories had drawn heavily on political themes: the responsibility of a king to his people as God's deputy, and the social and political chaos that resulted if he abdicated his duty (*Richard II*); the unquiet reign of a king who has usurped the throne from its rightful occupant (*1* and *2 Henry IV*); the social harmony and military success possible for a king who exercises his responsibilities properly (*Henry V*); the internecine strife emanating from a weak king who allows his authority to be challenged by ambitious and unruly noblemen (*1, 2,* and *3 Henry VI*); the bloody tyranny that is a people's final punishment for participating in rebellion against a rightful king, and the necessity of purging the kingdom of a tyrant whose evil has become intolerable (*Richard III*). These and other themes—some of them deriving from the late-medieval Morality Play, with its allegorical

portrayal of the human soul subject to temptation but capable of redemption through grace and repentance, some of them deriving from Boccaccio's *De Casibus* tragedies, depicting the falls of men and women from high estate to low, some of them deriving from the early Tudor *Mirror for Magistrates,* offering examples of political failure for wise princes to avoid—had helped shape and inform the history plays Shakespeare wrote during the 1590s. And many of these themes remain in *Henry VIII,* a work that may be seen, in certain ways, as the capstone of Shakespeare's earlier cycle of English historical dramas.

It has often been observed, for example, that *Henry VIII* depicts three *De Casibus* falls of fortune (Buckingham, Katherine, and Wolsey) and strongly hints at a fourth yet to come (Cranmer). Similarly, it is evident that in *Henry VIII*, as in the earlier histories, a high premium is placed on the maintenance of order and degree through a strong, responsible monarchy. Henry has an undisputed title to his throne. He enjoys the loyalty and good will of his subjects (in Shakespeare's time, Henry was regarded more favorably than is usual today, frequently being depicted as a kind of bluff King Hal), even those who fall from royal favor. He attempts to judge wisely and, after the demise of his "bad angel" Wolsey, does so. And however much his personal inclinations affect his "conscience" in the great matter of his divorce (the play leaves no doubt that his infatuation with Anne Bullen is, to put it mildly, conveniently compatible with his stated desire to get right with God by severing his marriage to his brother's widow, a marriage that could be construed as lacking Biblical approval, at least in Levitical terms), Henry's quest to beget a male heir is partly, if not wholly, motivated by a wish to prevent the kingdom from falling into civil strife once he dies. There can be no doubt, then, that *Henry VIII* reflects essentially the same political orientation that one finds in the earlier Shakespearean plays on English history.

But there are differences, too, and these are best accounted for by recalling that in the one and a half decades since he had last written an English history play Shakespeare had moved through a period of tragedies (*Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra*) and dark, problematic tragicomedies (*All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure*) to emerge into a

late period of what may perhaps best be defined as tragicomic romances (*Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest*).

Until recently, the late romances have seemed to be the most puzzling plays in the Shakespearean canon. Relying as they do on such devices as a choral "presenter" (Gower in *Pericles*) to narrate background and transitional incidents, they tend to be panoramic and rambling by comparison with the earlier, more "disciplined" plays. They intermingle times and settings with blithe disregard for probability and verisimilitude, parading anachronisms and inconsistencies as if they were virtues. They depict incidents of a wildly implausible nature (in *The Winter's Tale,* for example, one of Antigonus's speeches is interrupted when he exits "pursued by a bear"), and they depend heavily on tempests, shipwrecks, and other violently disruptive events to move the action forward. In the kind of world the romances present, human beings are shown to be largely at the mercy of forces beyond their ken and control. Families are separated at sea, left to wander for years in adversity, and then miraculously reunited at the close. Symbolically named children (Mariana in *Pericles,* Perdita in *The Winter's Tale,* Miranda in *The Tempest*) function as instruments of special grace, restoring faith and vision to parents who have lost or are in danger of losing their way. Terrible calamities are but narrowly averted, and then only because of sudden reversals that involve either an astonishing change of heart or an inexplicable visitation from above.

Time plays so significant a role in these works as to be almost a character in its own right. In most of the romances, the action spans many years (in *Pericles,* for example, the hero is a youth at the beginning and an old man near death at the end), and one of the themes most prominently developed is the need to endure adversity with long-suffering patience. Rather than focusing on a single character or group of characters, as in the tragedies and earlier comedies, the romances tend to divide our attention among a number of characters whose destinies may seem, at first, to have little to do with one another. As a consequence, romance plots tends to be comparatively disjointed and episodic. Normally such plots conclude with a great coming together of disparate characters and narrative strands, and the final unity is depicted in a ceremonial event (a feast, a wedding, a dance, a visionary pageant) symbolic of harmony, restitution, and divinely ordered

peace. Rather than conceal their artifice, the romances tend to display it openly, on the one hand reminding the audience that what it is witnessing is only a fiction, a play, and on the other hand controlling the audience's responses so fully as to captivate every spectator with the play's concluding "wonder."

It is not necessary to identify all of these characteristics in *Henry VIII* to show that it has certain affinities to Shakespeare's late tragicomic romances. The play may be lacking in a *deus ex machina,* for example, but as Frank Kermode has pointed out, it features a king who is represented "as exercising certain Godlike functions," particularly in Act V when he intervenes to preserve Archbishop Cranmer from a fate similar to the fates suffered earlier in the play by Buckingham, Katherine, and Wolsey ("What Is Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* About?" originally printed in the 1948 *Durham University Journal* but more readily accessible in *Shakespeare: The Histories,* Eugene M. Waith, ed. [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965], p. 172). And the play ends with a ceremonial ritual—Cranmer's prophecy of the golden age that will ensue from the infant he is christening.

En route to that Elizabethan "final cause," the play makes use of such romance conventions as the choral presenter (though it would be a mistake to assume that this device is common to all the tragicomic romances or exclusive to them, since it is absent from *The Tempest* and present in a number of other plays, including *Henry V,* the Shakespearean history play closest in mood and form to *Henry VIII*); the symbolically named character (there is no person in any of Shakespeare's historical sources who corresponds to Katherine's servant Patience); the emphasis on time (although the play concentrates upon a relatively brief period in the reign of Henry VIII, from the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520 to the birth of Elizabeth in 1533, it looks forward to the whole of the Tudor dynasty, which ended with the death of Elizabeth in 1603, and beyond that to the reign of Elizabeth's chosen successor, James I, and to the promising future of yet another Elizabeth, daughter of yet another Anne); the diffused focus (our attention centers, as the action proceeds, on a succession of personalities, Buckingham, Wolsey, Katherine, Anne, and Cranmer, with Henry himself remaining largely in the background except as his will and influence are felt in the lives of other characters); the

emphasis on adversity endured with patience (both Buckingham and Wolsey face their sentences with subdued resignation, as does Katherine in her last moments, and Cranmer's response to the news that he will be tried indicates that he too would accept God and the King's will with quiet faith); and the emphasis on providential intervention (Anne's vision in IV,ii is not unlike the "most majestic vision" of Iris, Ceres, and Juno in Act IV of *The Tempest*).

If we are now prepared to grant the probability that Shakespeare composed *Henry VIII* as a new kind of play—a hybrid form combining characteristics of the early English history play with characteristics of the late tragicomic romance—we are in a position to begin drawing further inferences. First, as to date and occasion, it would seem more likely than not that the play was composed with the February 1613 wedding in mind and constructed so as to conclude with a prophecy that would allude not only to the glories of the Elizabethan age, but also to the reign of King James I, with special reference to the happiness soon to be furthered by a dynastic alliance with a strong Protestant state. This would account in part for the play's structural emphasis on the overthrow of Wolsey (who is associated with papal intrigue) and the rise of Cranmer (who, as author of the Book of Common Prayer in years to come, would help lay the theological cornerstone of the new Church of England), and it would also lend appropriateness to the play's emphasis on celebration and ritual. One thinks of the elaborate costumes, settings, and festivities associated with the Field of the Cloth of Gold in I,i; of the masque at Wolsey's castle in I,iv, where the King and his entourage enter dressed as shepherds and Henry falls in love at the first sight of Anne Bullen's beauty; of the pageantry of Anne's coronation in IV,i and the universal joy it evokes from a populace impressed by her quiet dignity; of the christening of Elizabeth in V,iv, with its stately Biblical cadences and its prophecy that her heir, James I, will be "as great in admiration as herself" and, through his offspring, "make new nations."

Second, as to import, it should now be evident that *Henry VIII*'s burden is both political and religious. Dealing as it does with the foundation of the Elizabethan-Jacobean era, and doing so in accordance with the history play's customary emphasis on the mutual obligations of a divinely appointed ruler and the nation

subject to his rule, *Henry VIII* reaffirms the Tudor-Stuart concept of kingship and political order. At the same time, however, focusing as it does on the dynastic question that led eventually to the English reformation, and associating two major characters with Catholicism (Katherine and Wolsey) and two others with Protestantism (Anne and Cranmer), the play is at least implicitly ecclesiastical in its concerns. And, to a degree far greater than that characteristic of the earlier history plays, it is explicitly religious in its treatment of its subject matter. Like the earlier plays on English history, *Henry VIII* dramatizes the melancholy consequences of disloyalty, abuse of privilege, and treason. Like the earlier plays, it presents the human condition in all of its proclivity to the seven deadly sins. Unlike the earlier plays, however, and unlike Shakespeare's tragedies, it consistently presents that condition in the light of eternity, offering an overtly theological perspective on ethical and political issues. As in Shakespeare's tragicomic romances, *Henry VIII* presents a world that is providentially ordered, a world in which grace prevails over justice, life prevails over death.

There are four trials in the play. In the first, Buckingham (whether or not he is guilty, and I,v,220 would seem to suggest that he is) is denied due process and convicted through the machinations of the devious Wolsey. In the second, Katherine, again because of Wolsey, is placed in an unfair and indefensible position, and it is clear that by one means or another she will eventually be cast off. In the third, Wolsey himself is caught red-handed and removed from office. And in the fourth, Cranmer appears to be headed for the same kind of doom that befell his predecessors until he displays the King's ring and discomfits his accusers. In the first two trials, we are given the strong impression that justice has not been properly rendered, and we are left to attribute this in large measure to Wolsey's pernicious influence on the King. In the last two, we are assured that justice has prevailed, and we attribute this to the fact that the King has now removed Wolsey from his counsel and is exercising his judicial powers in the light of his own good wisdom. The play thus suggests that Henry grows in insight as his reign matures.

Curiously enough, notwithstanding their contrasting features when viewed from the perspective of civil justice, the four

trials of the play are remarkably similar in their outcomes when viewed from the perspective of divine grace. For in each case, the result of the "testing" the trial affords is to induce in the subject a new degree of self-knowledge, humility, faith, and compassion. Buckingham forgives his enemies, blesses his King, and says "if he speak of Buckingham, pray tell him/You met him half in heaven" (II,i,87–8). Katherine pleads eloquently and powerfully in her own defense; once her fate is settled, however, she resigns herself with patience to the destiny prepared for her, expresses pity for even her archenemy Wolsey, urges Capuchius to look after the well-being of her servants, and sends a last message to the King: "Tell him in death I blessed him" (IV,ii,163). Once it is obvious to Wolsey that any further machinations of his will be unavailing, he undergoes a sudden change of heart, acknowledges the sins that led to his downfall, warns Cromwell to "fling away ambition!" (III,ii,440), and faces death "Never so happy" (III,ii,377).

I know myself now, and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience. The king has cured me—
I humbly thank his grace—and from these shoulders,
These ruined pillars, out of pity taken
A load would sink a navy—too much honor.
O 'tis a burden, Cromwell, 'tis a burden
Too heavy for a man that hopes for heaven.

(III,ii,378–85)

Though not convicted of any wrongdoing, even Cranmer expresses gratitude for a "good occasion/Most thoroughly to be winnowed, where my chaff/And corn shall fly asunder" (V,i,109–11).

The implication of these and other speeches is that civil and political trials serve, in *Henry VIII,* a symbolic function not unlike that served in the tragicomic romances by the tempests and other calamities that initially threaten to destroy but end by redeeming life. As R. A. Foakes astutely observes, in this play "where earthly justice fails, all will be made right in heaven; where it does right, as for Wolsey and Cranmer, it corresponds to heavenly justice; and since in the play earthly justice corresponds

to heavenly justice only when Henry acts directly, the dramatic effect is to enhance the stature of Henry as God's deputy" (New Arden edition, pp. li,lii).

We all know, of course, that in the real world not every story has a happy ending, whether that story deals with an individual (such as Richard II) or a nation (such as the England depicted in, say, the three parts of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*). By omitting reference to those parts of his story that are less pleasant than the ones he elects to include, Shakespeare presents in *Henry VIII* an idealized portrait of the King and a highly romanticized version of the historical period he dominated. If we imagine ourselves as a seventeenth-century audience leaving the theater after a performance of the play, therefore, we may perhaps be excused if we wonder how we should respond to the drama in light of our knowledge of historical facts conveniently distorted or omitted. Should our happiness over the golden age of Elizabeth (which was viewed nostalgically, rather than prophetically, by the play's first audience) be qualified by our awareness of the suffering (by Anne and by Henry's four subsequent wives, by Cranmer, by Thomas More, by Cromwell) that would inevitably precede that period? Even within the play, should our positive response to the nation's joy over the coronation of Anne Bullen be diminished by our consciousness of the injustice done to Katherine?

As we begin to ask these and other questions, it will no doubt occur to us to ponder the larger issue of just how much it is possible for art to interpret without completely transforming and mythologizing the intractable facts of history. Are we able, in the final analysis, to remember the reign of Henry VIII so selectively as to concentrate only on those aspects of the period that the play seems to define as relevant? Or do we find our minds insistently bringing into our experience of *Henry VIII* other "irrelevant" facts that tend to subvert the play's evident purpose? If the latter is the case, is this, too, part of the artist's design (like Goya, to offer a royal portrait that is at once pleasing to the patron and devastating to his image as viewed by other, more discerning, eyes), or is it an indication that the artist's objective (to depict the "famous history" of *Henry VIII* as if it were a kind of Divine Comedy) was impossible for even a Shakespeare to achieve with complete success?

We may now return to our initial question. Exactly what kind of play is *Henry VIII*? As the foregoing discussion should indicate, there is good reason to believe that it is a brave attempt by an incomparable playwright to create a new genre: what might be called, for lack of a better term, a tragicomic historical romance. As this rather Polonian hodgepodge of a name will immediately suggest, however, the very concept of such a genre is as fraught with ambiguity as the example of it we have in *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth*. We need to know more before we can say with any assurance just *what* we have in this rich and enigmatic work of art.

For readers interested in pursuing these questions further, the following studies might profitably be consulted: (a) the New Arden and New Cambridge editions cited above, plus the New Penguin edition by A. R. Humphries (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1971); (b) *Shakespeare's English Kings* by Peter Saccio (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), a brief and clear introduction to the historical backgrounds of the play, along with a useful bibliography of major historical studies; (c) *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* edited by Geoffrey Bullough, Volume IV (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), reprinting the pertinent source and background materials for the play; (d) *Later Shakespeare* (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 8) edited by John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), containing essays on "Shakespeare and Romance" by Stanley Wells, "The Staging of the Last Plays" by Daniel Seltzer, and "What's Past Is Prologue: *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII*" by Bernard Harris; (e) *The Crown of Life* by G. Wilson Knight (London: Methuen, 1947); (f) "Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*: History as Myth" by Howard Felperin, *Studies in English Literature* 6 (1966), 225–246; (g) "Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*: Romance Redeemed by History" by H. M. Richmond, *Shakespeare Studies* 4 (1969), 334–349; and (h) *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision* by Joan Hartwig (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972). This is but a highly selective beginning bibliography, of course, but it will provide the basis for a more extensive bibliography for the student who wishes to dig still deeper.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berman, Ronald. "King Henry the Eighth: History and Romance," *English Studies* 48 (1967), 112–121.
Berman outlines the many aspects of Shakespeare's opulent play. He declares it "a complicated but symmetrical balance of themes and of modes of representation." It contains, he notes, the strong elements of both his early and late plays: the politics, heroic rhetoric, and motive of his early histories; the symbolism and concern with development of consciousness in the protagonists of his later romances. In short, it is a summation and showcase for the many themes Shakespeare used throughout his writings.

Foakes, R. A. Introduction to *King Henry VIII. The Arden Shakespeare.* London: Methuen, 1957.
Foakes has divided his lengthy introduction into three parts. The first part he designates the "Technical Introduction." Here Foakes summarizes and assesses the controversy about Shakespeare's authorship of the play, including a linguistic breakdown of usage of certain words. Foakes supports the theory that Shakespeare was in fact the sole author. The second part is called the "Critical Introduction." In it Foakes examines the way in which Shakespeare's art had developed up to the time of this writing *Henry VIII,* as a means of reaching an understanding of his purpose in that play. The last part is a short summation of the history of the staging of the play.

Saccio, Peter. "Henry VIII: The Supreme Head," in his *Shakespeare's English Kings*. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
Designed for students of Shakespeare, theatregoers, and anyone interested in the kings discussed, this book is a comparison of the "history" in Shakespeare's plays with actual history. It includes genealogical charts and a chronology. Saccio does a splendid job on the Henry VIII history, including a discussion of the historical importance of Henry and its effect on the form and content of the play. (The piece on Richard II is also very good.)

Sen Gupta, S. C. "Henry VIII," in his *Shakespeare's Historical Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
This brief but thorough examination of the play is broken down into three distinct sections. The first analyzes the play and discusses the importance of the historical material used. The second section briefly covers the question of the authorship of the play. The final section asks about the total significance and meaning of the work.