



**England's Re-formation in *King Henry VIII*:**

**Shakespeare's "chosen [esoteric] truth" for an "understanding friend"**

I will find  
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed  
Within the center.

*-Hamlet, 2.2.157-159<sup>i</sup>*

Today Islamic countries, where religious authorities dominate political rulers and even encourage sectarian violence, perplex us. Perhaps we are bewildered because we have forgotten our own history. In past times, Christian priests subdued political authorities, thereby encouraging religious warfare. For God's ministers spoke with an otherworldly authority earthly princes had to acknowledge. In Shakespeare's histories, for instance, English kings often clashed with churchmen. The threat of such conflicts presented a dilemma for the monarchs. To maintain their rule, they needed support from the Church; and yet—to turn to the other side of the dilemma—this ecclesiastical prop could become a weapon threatening their throne. The task for the king, then, was to strike a balance: maintain the Church's support without

undermining his political authority. Most of Shakespeare's kings failed to maintain this equilibrium.

After boldly refusing to be ruled by the Pope, King John subsequently begged the Papal legate for his crown (KJ, 3.I.147-160; 5.I.1-4). After the otherworldly Richard II proclaimed, "the breath of worldly men cannot depose/ The deputy elected by the Lord," he was deposed by a worldly man (R2 3.2. 56-57; 4.1). However, because that worldly usurper, Henry IV, was not "the deputy elected by the Lord," his reign was plagued by rebellion. Having compelling church support, Henry V temporarily distracted the English from such a rebellion with a war on France. After his death, however, Henry VI proved so piously apolitical that one of his nobles tells him "thou art not king; / Nor fit to govern and rule multitudes" (2H6 5.I.93-94). Even the "murderous Machiavil" Richard III tried to "clothe [his] naked villainy/ With odds and ends stol'n forth of holy writ/ And seem a saint" (3H6 3.2.193; R3 1.3.335-337). Only Henry VIII established (at least on stage) a durable balance by combining political and religious rule in the monarch. The play about this final Henry, who manages England's resolution of its theological-political dilemma, is the subject of this essay.

Of course, the drama is a fiction; the playwright avails himself of poetic license to violate the historical record.<sup>ii</sup> For instance, in this play Henry rejoices in a female heir and Cranmer subordinates faith to good works. Nonetheless, even when poetically differing from fact, Henry VIII's story was controversial in Shakespeare's England. The country was divided between Protestants and Catholics. The intensity of religious fervor can be seen in the Catholic Gun Powder Plot eight years before the play's first performance. As Howard White remarks, "Henry, Katherine, Buckingham, and Wolsey were all dead, yet they left an inheritance not only of belief but also of faction and fanaticism" (74). Consequently, to temper the threat of sectarian violence the playwright writes in a politic manner. He maintains, as we shall see, a studied ambivalence in the Catholic/Protestant controversy.

Although prudent writing requires careful reading, such care need not include attention to the co-authorship quarrel. For few scholars today argue about which parts of the play Shakespeare or John Fletcher wrote.<sup>iii</sup> Thankful as we may be for this armistice in the authorship war, we should not forget the *casus belli*: namely, the play's unusual organization. As James Spedding noted, there is "something peculiar either in the execution, or the structure, or the general design" of the play (Harris and Scott, 28, 29).

Indeed, *Henry VIII* is atypically organized. It is one of three Shakespeare plays with only a Prologue and Epilogue. Of those three, only in this play does the playwright deliver the Prologue. Furthermore, as we shall see, Epilogue and Prologue are thematically linked. Similarly, just after the Prologue and just before the Epilogue are conversations describing events outside the dramatic time frame; and these two are likewise related. Finally and most importantly, within these double envelopes is a drama that begins tragically but ends comically. And these two genres are once again thematically associated. Thus the reader discovers a six-part sequence: Prologue, conversation, tragedy, comedy, conversation, and Epilogue.

How these six parts form a whole can only be sketched in outline here; the subsequent argument attempts to put flesh on this skeleton in two steps or stages. First, the six parts form three pairs by means of similarities—Prologue to Epilogue, conversation to conversation, and tragedy to comedy. The resulting arrangement forms a chiasmus, one we abbreviate with the letters ABCCBA. Second, in each pair, not only are members similar in certain respects (A to A, B to B), they are dissimilar in other ways (A to A\*, B to B\*). That is, as comedy contrasts with tragedy, so likewise do conversations as well as Prologue and Epilogue. Thus our chiasmus becomes: ABCC\*B\*A\*. Mary Douglas reminds us this ancient chiasmus arrangement, found in the Bible and Homeric epics, is also called a ring composition.<sup>iv</sup> So we can say our chiasmic play coheres into three concentric rings or circles.

To achieve a proper understanding of this play, all three circles must be studied; no part—dramatic or non-dramatic—can be ignored. For the overall organization in circles must be grasped in order to understand what the Prologue calls “our chosen truth” reserved for “an understanding friend” (18, 22).<sup>v</sup> Emerging from the second of these two steps of argument is my thesis, which was first suggested by Allan Bloom: “Only at the end of the history plays is there a king, King Henry VIII, who is himself really the high priest and interprets the divine in such a way as to serve England” (*Giants and Dwarfs*, 91). By means of a (fictional) resolution of the church/state dilemma, this king re-forms both English religion and society. Apprehending these alterations, we become Shakespeare’s “understanding friend.”

### **Outer Circle: Prologue and Epilogue**

As suggested by the abbreviation of our chiasmus, A and A\* are both similar and dissimilar. That is, enumeration of playgoers joins the two, while the foreshadowing of a genre shift disjoins them.

The Epilogue’s beginning suggests the numeral link to the Prologue: “Tis ten to one this play can never please / All that are here.” For Prologue and Epilogue in fact catalogue ten types of playgoers. In an enumerative division to which we return at the end of this essay, the Prologue mentions seven of these, the Epilogue the remaining three. Of these ten, only one will be rightly pleased. The other nine are in various ways deficient. Some will be satisfied with limited or selective hopes (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>); others will be deceived (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>); and still others displeased by inappropriate expectations (8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>).

The exception is the seventh, a friend understanding “our chosen truth.” He alone is described in the singular; he approaches the play with understanding rather than inappropriate hopes or expectations; and he is not identified as attending a performance. Perhaps the “understanding friend” is exceptional not only in

substituting understanding for presuppositions but also in reading the play in the study.<sup>vi</sup> For this is the place for slow re-reading—which is to say, the place for the reading appropriate to this play. That is, to understand the play’s intricate formal structure aright requires reading and re-reading. Furthermore, reading can uncover the play’s deceptions and ambiguities a theatergoer might miss.

In the context of the “chosen truth” the Prologue, by speaking deceptively of the play’s contents, exemplifies one such duplicity. Speaking of playgoers with inappropriate expectations, the Prologue says those “That come to hear a merry bawdy play,/ A noise of targets, or to see a fellow/ In a long motley coat guarded with yellow/ Will be deceiv’d” (I4-I7). Thus it seems the play will contain no obscenity, warfare, and clowning. Yet in the immediate sequence a repetition of these exclusions proves defective:

To rank our chosen truth with such a show  
*As fool and fight is*, besides forfeiting  
Our own brains and the opinion that we bring  
To make that only true we now intend,  
Will leave us never an understanding friend.  
(I8-22; italics added.)

While “fool and fight” replicate clowning and warfare, “bawdy” disappears. Such an omission alerts the understanding friend to the obscenities of (for instance) I.4 where Lovell, Sands, and Anne Boleyn engage in lewd talk (Cf. I.4. 10-18, 46-48). But, as we shall see, sex does not exhaust the themes the play treats with deception.

Besides speaking deceptively, the Prologue is ambiguous about England's sectarian divide: "Such as give/ Their money out of hope they may believe; May here find truth, too" (I, 7-9). But Shakespeare does not say whether the truth is Catholic or Protestant—or (as I shall argue) neither. Likewise ambiguous is the subjunctive "may find truth." Perhaps only those predisposed to believe (whether they be Catholic or Protestant) can find their own truth in this play. Likewise the Epilogue's mention of a "good woman" in the play fails to specify whether she is the Catholic Katherine or the Protestant Elizabeth. These ambiguities are appropriate to a performance attended by both Protestants and Catholics.

But while the preceding numbering, deception, and ambiguities connect Prologue and Epilogue, the drama's genres separate them as A to A\*. For while the Prologue has the audience be sad at the tragedy they will see, the Epilogue suggests some will smile at the comedy they have seen. Thus the Prologue begins,

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. (I-5)

And it concludes with a command, "Be sad, as we would make ye" (25).

While these passages describe the first three acts, they do not account for the last two non-tragic ones. As if to make up for that lack, the Epilogue ends with the playwright fearful that

All the expected good we are like to hear,  
For this Play at this time, is only in  
The merciful construction of good women,  
For such a one we showed them: If they smile,  
And say 'twill do; I know within a while  
All the best men are ours. (8-13)

Hence while the Prologue commands the audience be sad, the Epilogue hopes some will smile. How are we to find unity in a play that begins with “such noble scenes, as draw the eye to flow,” and ends with ladies smiling? Harmony of tragedy and comedy will become clearer in our discussion of the inner circle, the drama itself.

Thus while the genre shift differentiates Prologue and Epilogue, numeration connects them. Nonetheless, “our chosen truth” is only for one of the ten addresses, “an understanding friend.” He alone perceives deceptions and ambiguities.

#### **THE MIDDLE CIRCLE: 1.1.1-100 AND 5.4.14-76**

Two conversations, one beginning Act I and the other ending Act 5, form the B and B\* of our chiasmus.<sup>vii</sup> They resemble each other in epitomizing the English nation, albeit at different times: the first pre-modern England, the second modern. The differences manifest themselves in monarchs, churchmen, nobles, and commoners.

Besides providing two representations of England, these parts resemble each other in their timing: both describe events outside the dramatic time (1521 to 1533), one of the past and the other the future. In the first, the Norfolk recounts to Buckingham

a 1520 treaty ceremony called the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In the second, the Archbishop of Canterbury prophesizes to King Henry the future rule of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) as well as that of her successor King James I (1603-1625). In addition, both are predominantly narrative rather than dramatic. That is, a first, knowledgeable person informs at length a second person responding briefly.

But (to repeat) the corresponding members of the two societies differ one from the other, beginning with the monarchs. The pre-modern monarchs at the treaty ceremony impress others with outward shows and spectacles. As the Duke of Norfolk describes the rulers of England and France, the “two kings, / equal *in luster*, were now best, now worst, / as presence did present them” (I.I.28-30. Italics added.). Likewise the participants lack substance: “Their dwarfish pages were/ As cherubims, all gilt; the madams too, / Not used to toil, did almost sweat to bear/ The pride upon them” (I.I.22-25). Which is to say, the pages were nothing but their adornment and the ladies unworthy their jewelry (“the pride”). They are empty suits. The monarchs themselves are unimportant; and the treaty consummated at this ceremony came to naught (I.I.89-99). Thus, in Norfolk’s account, Henry VIII accomplishes nothing but a showy ceremony.

By contrast, in Cranmer’s prophecy, Elizabeth I’s interior excellence complements her substantial accomplishments. The Biblical Queen of Sheba “was never more covetous of wisdom and fair virtue” (5.4.23-24). “All princely graces/ That mold up such a mighty piece as this is, / With all the virtues that attend the good/ Shall still be doubled on her” (25-28). However, her successor, James I, receives more restrained praise. He will inherit Elizabeth’s achievements, while lacking something of her excellence. “Peace, Plenty, Love, Truth, Terror, / that were the servants of this chosen infant,/ Shall then be his, and like a Vine grow to him”—but not *from* him (42, 46). James shall be “as great *in admiration* as herself,” “as great *in fame* as she was”—but not in deeds (42, 51; italics added). Whereas Elizabeth shall be “a Pattern to all Princes



living with her/ And all that shall succeed,” when James flourishes, “our Children’s Children shall see this, and bless Heaven”—not James himself (22-23, 54-55).<sup>viii</sup>

These transformations in the kings effect change in their relation to clerics. The drama’s opening depicts monarch subordinate to churchman; the ending portrays churchman subordinate to monarch. Norfolk describes the dominance of a Churchman at the Field of the Cloth of Gold: “All this was order’d by the good discretion/ Of the right reverend Cardinal of York” (I.I.50-51). In other words, a cleric arranges a political treaty between England and France. The play’s ending, however, overturns this hierarchy. Wishing to prophesy the future reign of Princess Elizabeth, Archbishop Cranmer says to King Henry, “Let me speak sir, /For heaven now bids me” (5.4.14-15). In other words, a priest inspired by heaven asks a statesman permission to prophesy. Responding to Cranmer’s prophesy about Elizabeth, Henry acts as England’s high priest by usurping the Church’s prerogative of declaring Holy Days:

This day, no man think

‘Has business at his house; for all shall stay:

This little one shall make it Holy-day.<sup>ix</sup>

Not only is the church transformed, so also the nobility. The first ceremony describes a hierarchical England in which different classes have their set places. “All was royal,” says Norfolk about the medieval ceremony, “[t]o the disposing of it naught rebelled. / Order gave each thing view; the office did/ Distinctly his function” (42-45). This is an England in which the road to success is ancestry, “whose grace/ Chalks successors their way,” as Norfolk says (59-60). By contrast, Elizabeth will nurture a different aristocracy: “those about her/ From her shall read the perfect ways

of honour;/ And by those *claim their greatness, not by blood*" (36-38; italics added). Advancement under Elizabeth will depend, not upon birth into old families, but upon the habit and choice by the monarch. Those so chosen, of course, are more likely to support the monarch than are the nobles of blood.

In addition to selected nobles, Elizabeth will gain support among commoners. Only the lineage nobles witnessed the medieval ceremony of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Commoners were excluded. Elizabeth's England, on the other hand, will be inclusive: "in her days," says Cranmer, "*every man* shall eat in safety/ Under his own vine what he Plants;/ And sing the merry songs of peace to *all his neighbours*" (33-35; italics added). Elizabeth's virtues unite the English with each other and against their foes: "She shall be lov'd and fear'd: her own shall bless her;/ Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn/ And hang their heads with sorrow" (5.4.30-32).

Thus, this middle circle sketches transformed England. The monarchs change from ornamental and ineffective to wise and accomplished; clerics from domineering to subordinate; nobles from advancing by ancestry to advancing by honor of the monarch; and commons from exclusion to inclusion. The subsequent circle elaborates on these political and ecclesiastical transformations.

#### **THE INNER CIRCLE: 1.1.101 to 5.4.15**

The drama of the inner ring is situated between the narratives of the middle ring. The action begins with a triumph for Wolsey, Buckingham's arrest, and ends with one for Henry, Elizabeth's christening. But, as the Prologue and Epilogue suggest, this drama divides into two genres. The first three acts are tragic, the last two comic. Thus the inner circle in our chiasmus appears as C and C\*. Since the genre shift establishes discontinuity, what, we might ask, establishes continuity? Our question, then, resembles that of Theseus in *Midsummer Night's Dream* when he puzzled by the

“very tragic mirth” of Pyramus and Thisby: “How shall we find the concord of this discord?” (MSND 5.1.60).

Theseus’ question is especially pertinent, since the peculiar “tragedy” in the first acts does not allow for comic relief. The Prologue describes serial catastrophes, a continuous sequence of the high brought low: “Think you see/ The very persons of our noble story . . . great, and followed by the general throng . . . Then, in a moment, see/ How soon this mightiness meets misery” (25-30). Such repetitive misfortunes characterize tragedies where Providence or Fate replaces Aristotle’s *hamartia* and a sense of the transience of worldly glory replaces catharsis of fear and pity. This play, then, resembles medieval tragedies like Chaucer’s *Monk’s Tale* and Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*.

In Acts I to 3 such miseries befall the Duke of Buckingham (2.1), Queen Katherine (3.1), and Cardinal Wolsey (3.2). Since the first three acts fulfill the Prologue’s prediction of a succession of tragedies, we expect a continuation of “mightiness meet[ing] misery.” After all, in historical fact three more of the play’s characters were soon executed—Thomas More in 1535, Anne Boleyn in 1536, and Thomas Cromwell in 1540.

But the final acts frustrate our expectation. In acts four and five, characters are happy and the mood joyful. These final six scenes celebrate Anne’s coronation as Queen (4.1), Katherine’s joyful death-bed vision promising her Heavenly bliss (4.2), King Henry’s rescue of Archbishop Cranmer from a Roman Catholic conspiracy (5.1 and 2), and the christening and the prophecy about Princess Elizabeth (5.3 and 5.4).

So Theseus’ question recurs: how to find concord of this discord of three tragic and two comic acts? If *Midsummer Night’s Dream* provides us with the query, *Winter’s Tale* provides an answer, or at least the outline of one.<sup>x</sup> For, like *King Henry VIII* (1613), this late romance (1611) blends three tragic with two comic acts. Signaling *Winter’s Tale’s* transition between the two genres is a soliloquy in which Time claims to alter human behavior:

“since it is in my power/ To o’erthrow law and in one self-born hour/ To plant and o’erwhelm custom” (4.1.7-9).

After Time’s speech, comic scenes reverse or mirror tragic ones. That is, the last two acts replay the somber first three in a sprightlier mode. Thus, whereas in 1.2 Leontes wants Polixenes not to return to Bohemia, with tragic consequences; in 4.2 Polixenes wants Camillo not to return to Sicilia, with comic consequences. Whereas in 2.1 Leontes’ disowning of his son leads to Mamillius’ death, in 4.4 Polixenes’ disowning of his son happily leads to Florizel’s fleeing to Sicilia. Whereas in 3.2 Leontes’ jealousy leads to Hermione’s assumed “death,” in 4.4 Autolycus’ ballad of two women intimate with one man entails no jealousy. And finally, whereas in 3.1 Mammilius’ swooning leads tragically to his actual death, in 4.3 Autolycus’ feigned “swooning” is comic. Thus *Winter’s Tale* finds concord in seeming discord by having the mirthful last scenes mirror image the tragic first ones.

If Time’s soliloquy announces the genre reverse, different characters in similar circumstances cause these reversals. The comic characters right what is amiss in the tragic ones. Polixenes’ jealousy is not as intense as that of Leontes; Florizel is more mature than Mamillius; Autolycus’ lovers are low characters incapable of feeling Hermione’s tragic heartbreak; and whereas Autolycus is a experienced con man whose swoon is feigned, Mamillius is an immature child whose faint is genuine.

Thus, in a play written about the same time as *King Henry VIII*, Shakespeare created concord from the discord of tragic mirth. And, as we shall now see, similar (but not exact) harmonizing reappears in *King Henry VIII*. That is, our play resembles *Winter’s Tale* in marking the genre shift and in reversing scenes. But it differs in cause, its etiology: for change in the plot, not in the characters, brings about the genre reversal.

As 4.1 of *Winter’s Tale* marks the shift to comedy with Time’s soliloquy, so does 4.1 of *King Henry VIII* with echoing lines. Whereas the tragic part of the play began “Good morrow,

and well met,” the happier begins “Y’are well met once again” (1.1.1, 4.1.1). The two gentlemen speaking in 4.1 reflect upon a change of mood as they watch Queen Anne’s procession:

2 Gentleman:   At our last encounter  
   The Duke of Buckingham came from his trial.

1 Gentleman: ‘Tis very true. But that time offer’d sorrow,  
   This general joy. (4.1.4-7)

Thus does Shakespeare signal this genre change with conversations beginning alike but ending differently.

In addition to thus marking this change, *King Henry VIII* resembles *Winter’s Tale* in blending two genres with mirror imaging scenes. These reversals, as we shall see, parallel the middle circle’s alteration of the England’s monarchs, churchmen, nobles, and commoners.

The king and churchmen can be grouped together in several pre-trial interrogations: one of Buckingham’s Surveyor before the former’s trial for treason (1.2), two others of Archbishop Cranmer (5.1) and of the Privy Council (5.2). Whereas in the former a churchman dominates the king with unhappy results, in the latter two the king dominates churchmen with happy results.

In 1.2 Wolsey persuades Henry to believe a Surveyor witnessing against his former master, the Duke of Buckingham. This witness claims he overheard the Duke say if King Henry should die without heir, the Duke would become King of England. Prompted by Cardinal Wolsey (“Please your Highness, note/ This dangerous conception in this point”), the King ignores his Queen’s attempts to interrupt what she suspects is perjury (156-157). The Surveyor likewise claims his master said a monk prophesied the

Duke would become King. Finally, the Duke said if he were threatened with imprisonment, he would kill the King. Hearing this testimony, Henry concludes Buckingham is a “traitor to th’height!” (1.2.114).

But too quickly so concludes. For the testimony of this witness is suspect. Since the Duke discharged this Surveyor on corruption charges, he has motive to slander the Duke (1.2.171-172). Thus the Queen warns the witness, “Take good heed/ You charge not in your spleen a noble person/ And spoil your nobler soul” (1.2.198-200). Furthermore, even if we grant the Duke would confide such treasonous thoughts to an underling, why place himself in danger by discharging the man? Why make an enemy of one who could convict you? No such questions occur to the King manipulated by the Cardinal.

The reverse is true in 5.1 and 5.2 where Henry shrewdly manipulates one churchman in order to entrap others. As an overview of Henry’s trap we can say he first permits Roman Catholics on his Privy Council to charge Archbishop Cranmer with heresy. The King uses this allowance, however, to assert his dual sovereignty as political monarch and religious High Priest. For not only does Henry command with regal authority, he also interprets—or misinterprets—Scripture to serve English politics. First Henry must convert Cranmer to depend upon his king.

Step by step the King catechizes the Archbishop first with fear and then with favor. Without offering royal aid, Henry tries to frighten Cranmer, warning him of the Privy Council’s charge. Given Cranmer’s knowledge of hostility toward him by Catholic Counselors, especially Gardiner (Cf. 5.2.93-97), he should realize he would be convicted of the capital crime of heresy. Nonetheless, Cranmer responds to this threat with a New Testament thought: he welcomes such a trial as a “good occasion/ Most thoroughly to be winnow’d, where my chaff/ And corn shall fly asunder” (5.1.109-111; cf. *Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17*). Cranmer depends on Christ.

However, Henry prefers dependence upon the king: “Thy truth and thy integrity is rooted in us, thy friend,” responds Henry (5.1.114-115). But still singing from the old hymnal, Cranmer rejects royal help: “the good I stand on is *my* truth and honesty” (5.1.123; italics added.). Seeing the unworldliness of this pious cleric, Henry counters with a New Testament thought. “Ween you of better luck,” he asks, “I mean in perjur’d witness, than your master, / Whose minister you are, whiles here he liv’d / Upon this naughty earth?” (5.2.135-38). This allusion to Christ’s trial (*Matthew 26: 59-66*) strikes home; for now Cranmer grants the King equality with the deity: “God and your majesty / Protect mine innocence, or I fall into / The trap is laid for me” (5.1.140-142). Then Henry confirms the Archbishop’s conversion with a favor, giving him the king’s ring to use at his interrogation. Thus Henry has persuaded Cranmer to seek royal as well as Christian salvation before the Council.

The subsequent interrogation by the Privy Council (5.2) not only deepens Cranmer’s new faith but also establishes Henry as Head of a Church tolerant of different sects. Opposing such forbearance are Catholics led by Gardiner. The latter is a fanatic who desires that “Cranmer, Cromwell . . . and [Anne Boleyn] / Sleep in their graves” (5.1.27, 29, 31-32). King Henry’s counteraction to this murderous conspiracy (as we saw above) begins in 5.1. In 5.2, the next stage of Henry’s entrapment begins with the King eavesdropping on his Privy Council, contrary to Shakespeare’s source (Foakes, 1996, 212-215, esp. 214).

At this Council’s inquest, the Lord Chancellor and Gardiner make two allegations against the Archbishop: (1) heretical teachings and (2) endangering civil peace. The Lord Chancellor accuses Cranmer of “new opinions, / Diverse and dangerous; which are heresies, / And, not reform’d, may prove pernicious” (5.2. 52-54). Gardiner warns that heresies lead to “Commotions, uproars, with a general taint / Of the whole state” (5.2.63-64). The accused begins with an evasion. For Cranmer, a Lutheran heretic to Catholicism knows Gardiner wishes him ill. Thus he sidesteps the

first or doctrinal accusation by saying his “teaching . . . was ever *to do well*,” while responding forthrightly to the second or civil disorder one:

*nor is there living*

(I speak it with a single heart, my lords)

*A man that more detests*, more stirs against,

Both in his *private conscience* and his place,

*Defacers of a public peace than I do.* (5.2.71-75; italics added.)

The Archbishop uses a debating ploy against malicious interlocutors. In place of his heretical doctrines, Cranmer substitutes his deeds (“*ever to do well*”), specifically his defense of the public peace. He detests those who disturb peace, both in the privacy of his conscience (invisible to others) and in his office as Archbishop (his public “place” visible to others).

Nonetheless, Cranmer subsequently addresses the heresy charge indirectly by reproving Gardiner’s “doing daily wrongs” in persecuting heretics and admonishing him to “[w]in straying souls with modesty again, / Cast none away” (99-100, 103). Thus Cranmer favors a toleration which King Henry later enforces (5.2.193-194). However conscientiously Roman Catholics persecute heretics, they are guilty of disturbing the peace. What Machiavelli terms the “pious cruelty” of the Spanish Inquisition is not even pious in Henry’s Re-formed England (*The Prince*, 132).

For the moment, however, Cranmer’s admonition to “win straying souls with modesty” falls on deaf ears. For the Privy Council calls a guard to escort Cranmer to prison. In response Cranmer reveals the ring from King Henry: “By virtue of that ring,”



says Cranmer, “I take my cause / Out of the gripes of cruel men, and give it / To a most noble judge, *the King my master*” (5.2.134-136; italics added). In the previous scene, Henry persuaded Cranmer to depend upon him by recalling the trial of the latter’s master, Christ (5.1.136). Here Cranmer’s completes his conversion begun in 5.1.

But that of the Privy Council recusants has yet to be accomplished. For these intolerant Catholics must come to acknowledge Henry’s authority not only as monarch but also as high priest. In order to so subject these men, Henry first rebuffs Gardiner’s attempt to entitle the King as “[o]ne that, in all obedience, makes the Church / The chief aim of his honor” (154, 152-53). Henry rejects this theocratic ranking, replacing the Bishop’s hierarchy (King serves the Church) with its opposite (Church serves the King). This he does by rebuking the Council for exceeding powers delegated by the King in maliciously persecuting Cranmer (5.2. 156, 176-182). In thus defending the Archbishop, Henry turns Cranmer’s debating evasion (which, again, he overheard) into a church rule: heresy charges against “private conscience” give way to judgments on loving one another.

For the King, ignoring the heresy charge, commands his Privy Councilors, “Be friends, for shame, my Lords,” says Henry, “all embrace [Cranmer]” (5.2.194, 193). Of course, Henry might justify himself with Christ’s Last Supper command to love one another. That is, Henry may echo Christ: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one to another*” (John 13: 34-5; italics added.). In the context of the Last Supper, however, Christ’s “new commandment” differs from Henry’s. Whereas Christ is to die for his friends, Henry is saving himself (as we shall see) and his friend’s life. As Christ explains his commandment, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

But the King's empowerment depends not only on his (questionably Scriptural) manipulation of churchmen but also of nobles. This latter support is suggested in mirrored scenes from the two genres. In the tragic acts the nobles hardly have a voice. Wolsey dominates them because of his favor with the king. 2.2 begins with the Lord Chamberlain fearfully submitting to Wolsey's theft of some of the Chamberlain's horses. Later in this scene, Henry dismisses Norfolk and Suffolk in favor of Wolsey. "Go to," says the King to the Dukes, "I'll make ye know your times of business: / Is this an hour for temporal affairs" (2.2.71-72). And the King turns to Wolsey, "the quiet of my wounded conscience, / Thou art a cure fit for a king" (2.2. 74-75).

But the tables are turned in the comic scene 4.1, when (for instance) the King seizes Wolsey's property. As some gentlemen converse during the procession from Anne's coronation, one remarks that York Place, Wolsey's palace, has become the King's property: "'Tis now the King's, and called Whitehall" (4.1.97). Also stage directions between lines 36 and 37 of 4.1 reveal the King appointed the Lord Chancellor to lead the procession, followed by Suffolk as High Steward and Norfolk as Marshal. In the new order, secular nobles are honored more than ecclesiastical ones.

Of the examples just mentioned, perhaps the most far-reaching is Henry's seizure of Wolsey's residence. Since Henry is Head of the Church, he now owns ecclesiastic properties. The consequences of this transfer of wealth are well known. Henry seized monasteries (those "bare ruined choirs" of Sonnet 73) and eventually sold them to wealthy would-be nobles. These new aristocrats, of course, then owe their titles and estates to their King and not to their lineage. The so-indebted nobility, as Cranmer's prophesy about Elizabeth has it, "From her shall read the perfect ways of honour, / And by those claim their greatness, not by blood" (5.4.37-38).

Besides loyal nobles, commoners, attracted to Anne and Elizabeth, support the King. The popularity of these two is

counted as if it were the monarch's own popularity. For as Harry Jaffa writes of the Tudors after the break with Rome, "Elizabeth, like her father, represented what was a popular and national cause . . . Only as the kings of England claimed their mandates directly from God could England free itself from the Holy Roman Empire, the successor (or, as Hobbes would say, the ghost) of the empire of Caesars . . ." (15). Thus anti-Papal sentiment strengthened the Tudor monarchs.

The transformed people appear in contrasting tragic and comic scenes. The commoners are mentioned in four scenes, two in each genre. In the tragic acts, the people are either silent or absent. In the comic acts, they suddenly demand to be heard and seen. Indeed, before and after the genre shift, the commoners' relation to the king reverses in two pairs of scenes.

The people appear on stage but once in the tragic acts. In 2.1 they silently accompany some noble friends of Buckingham to his execution. On the way to his execution, Buckingham briefly addresses these mute commoners before dismissing them in order to converse at greater length with his noble friends (2.1.55-71 and 131-36 versus 2.1.71-136). "All good people," says Buckingham to the former group, "You that thus far have come to pity me, / Hear what I say, and then go home and lose me" (2.1.55-57). But his more intimate and lengthy words are to his noble friends: "You few that lov'd me" (2.1.71). To these he issues warnings appropriate to nobles in Wolsey's England.

These dismissed and speechless commoners are also mentioned in 1.2 where Queen Katherine pleads against harsh taxes on their property: "I am solicited not by a few," says Katherine to Henry, "that your *subjects* are in great grievance" (1.2.18. Italics added.). But, despite the gravity of their situation, these "subject" dare not approach Henry's court.

Very different are the commoners in the comic acts. For, contradicting Holinshed, Shakespeare inserts boisterous commoners into Anne's coronation (4.1) in place of the silent ones of 2.1 and

brazen ones crashing into the court for Elizabeth's christening (5.3) in place of the absent ones of 1.2.

In Holinshed's version of Anne's coronation, only nobles attend; commoners are absent. Furthermore, the ceremony was not joyous. For, as G.M. Trevelyan remarks, "Anne Boleyn was unpopular [since she was a] mistress raised to be a wife at another's expense."<sup>xi</sup> But the play has it differently. After accurately following Holinshed's description of Anne's crowning in Westminster Abbey, Shakespeare appends fabricated lines with Anne wooing the common people (in italics):

The rich stream

Of lords and ladies, having brought the queen

To a prepar'd place in the choir, fell off

A distance from her: while her grace sat down

To rest a while, . . .

. . . *opposing freely*

*The beauty of her person to the people.*

. . . . *which when the people*

*Had the full view of, such a noise arose*

*As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest,*

*As loud, and to as many tunes. Hats, cloaks*

*(Doublets, I think) flew up, and had their faces*

*Been loose, this day they had been lost. Such joy*

*I never saw before. (4.1.62-76)*

Shakespeare's italicized additions transform Holinshed's stately ceremony into a mob scene, where Queen Anne's beauty provokes commoners to cheer and throw clothing. Plainly the silent commoners in 2.I find their voices in 4.I.

If Shakespeare's fabrication above misrepresents Queen Anne's historical coronation, perhaps it prefigures Queen Elizabeth I's pageants and progressions. Historians J.A. Neale and Alison Plowden describe Elizabeth's wooing of the people to enhance regal authority. The former writes, "No Prince has been a greater courtier of the people, nor any actress known better how to move her audience to transports of love and admiration" (5). The latter remarks that Elizabeth's progressions "were also invaluable as public relations exercises, an opportunity to display the reverse side of the royal image—the gracious, lovable mother-figure" (73). Thus Shakespeare's additions about Queen Anne may anachronistically recall Queen Elizabeth's courting of the people. For, as the middle ring suggests, this last of the Tudors was in most times beloved by all: "her own shall bless her" (5.4.30).

The rise of commoners is illustrated by the other mirrored pairs, 1.2 and 5.3. In the former scene, the commoners, despite being impoverished by harsh taxes, dare not show their faces at court. By contrast, in 5.3, Shakespeare invents a scene in which the people break into court in order to celebrate the christening of Elizabeth. Speaking of the people's participation in royal celebrations, the 2nd Gentleman praises them: "The *citizens*/ I am sure have shown at full *their royal minds*--/ As, let 'em have their rights, they are ever forward" (4.I.7-9. Italics added.). Thus those formerly called "subjects" or even "rabble" are now "citizens" exercising rights to show their royalist loyalties. Fittingly then can King Henry conclude Elizabeth's christening by addressing both nobles and commoners—now citizens—together in one body: "This day, *no man* think/ 'Has business at his house; for *all* shall stay" (5.4.74-76; italics added.).

So have we have harmonized tragedy with comedy by means of mirror-imaged scenes in which the previously dependent King becomes dominates. In the non-tragic England, the King entraps clergymen to save his marriage and reform the Church, seizes church lands to create nobles loyal to the throne, and courts the commoners to empower the monarch.

**THE "CHOSEN TRUTH" FOR "AN UNDERSTANDING FRIEND":  
PROLOGUE 18, 22**

Having found counterparts between *Henry VIII* and *Winter's Tale* with respect to marking genre shifts and linking comedy to tragedy, there remains one other parallel to consider: the causes reversing genres. In *Winter's Tale* that cause was change of characters; in *Henry VIII* it is change in plot. In the tragic acts England is Catholic, while in the comic ones it is Protestant. However, this event does not appear on stage. We must infer it from remarks by one gentleman, who says Cranmer divorced Katherine and Henry in a court convened at Dunstable (4.I.24-33). Since nowhere are we told of Rome's permission to divorce, Henry must broken with Roman authority. So the genres hinge on a part of the plot occurring off-stage between Acts III and IV.

By severing ties with Rome, Henry brings his country out of the sadness of the first three acts into the happiness of the last two. That schism allows Anne's coronation as Henry's Queen and Elizabeth's christening as his legitimate heir (4.I and 5.3-4). Furthermore, while protecting the Lutheran Cranmer from Catholic persecution, Henry extends to Catholics like Katherine and Gardiner tolerance to pursue personal salvation providing they do not disturb public peace (4.2 and 5.2). Under Henry's new Caesaropapism, the clergy obey the monarch, the nobles are loyal to him, and the commoners find in him a focus of national pride.

But if the play's genres pivot on England's separation from Roman Catholicism, why obscure this crucial plot element off-

stage? After all, so inconspicuous is it that one critic complains, “the main point which is sought for by every reader [of this play] . . . the great religious revolution—the transition of England from Catholicism to Protestantism . . . is portrayed with . . . dimness and ambiguity” (Harris and Scott, 39). This indistinct ambiguity, however, manifests the playwright’s political sense. For, as noted above, the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism remained an explosive issue even in Shakespeare’s time. In such a climate of opinion, a prudent man might well obscure this event. Rather than placarding the schism, Shakespeare reserves this truth for an understanding friend. Or, to state the manner differently, the play teaches differentially: to most playgoers it downplays the great divorce; but to the understanding it hints at its centrality.

Such an unobtrusive treatment of one issue in the play leads us to wonder if there are other such issues, perhaps not off-stage, but at least obscured in other ways. Such is the case. In history, Henry’s break with Rome helped issue in Protestant Reformation to England. But in this play, what Henry brought to the Church of England is less clear. To clarify, we return to the King’s interrogation of Cranmer in 5.1 and of his Privy Council in 5.2. The question is not on whether the English Church is any longer Catholic—which it surely is not—but what kind of Church Henry created.

Consider 5.1 where Henry cites Scripture to Cranmer in a manner inappropriate to Christ’s teaching. To persuade Cranmer to save his life, Henry alludes to Christ’s trial before his death (*Matthew 26: 59-66*). While the King is correct that false witnesses brought Christ to His death, it was a death he did not run from; rather, he embraced it as his mission. Knowing that Judas was about to betray him, Christ made no effort to stop or dissuade his betrayer (*Matt. 26: 23-25*). Furthermore, Christ affirmed the will of his Father in accepting death (*Matt. 26: 42*). Indeed, Christ rebuked one of his disciples who used a sword to ward off those who arrested Him (*Matt. 51-52*). Yet Henry uses this part

of the Gospel to persuade Archbishop Cranmer to save himself from death.

An objection to the above is that Shakespeare merely follows his source, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.<sup>xii</sup> True it is that Shakespeare follows the letter of his source, but he changes its spirit. In the play, political, not religious, reasoning motivates Henry's entrapment, of which his interrogation of Cranmer is a part. That is, Henry's altruistic protection of Cranmer in Foxe becomes self-interested protection of Henry in 5.2. For the King is the ultimate beneficiary of Cranmer's "salvation." After all, Cranmer must be safeguarded. For the downfall of the Archbishop who arranged his divorce from Queen Katherine would jeopardize Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, and thereby the legitimacy of her daughter, Princess Elizabeth. Henry implies as much when, after rescuing Cranmer from the Privy Council in 5.2, he says, "The common voice I see is verified/ Of thee, which says thus, 'Do my Lord of Canterbury/ A *shrewd* turn, and he's your friend forever'" (5.2. 209-211; italics added.). Henry's "shrewd turn" transforms the Christian sentiment found in the source into a saying of non-Christian cunning.<sup>xiii</sup> In other words, Henry's hidden purpose in entrapping his Privy Council is to benefit his own and England's political future.

Even more questionably Christian is Cranmer and Henry's transformation of Christ's religion before the Privy Council. By ignoring Cranmer's evasion of the heresy charge, King Henry encourages toleration of different sects. However beneficial to public peace, this shift transvalues Christianity. As opposed to Judaism and Islam, Christianity's essence—whether Roman Catholic or Reformed Protestant—is correct belief. As Ernest Fortin explains, "Christianity first comes to sight as a nonpolitical religion or a 'sound doctrine,' as St. Paul repeatedly calls it (*I Tim. 1.10; 3.3; Tit. 1.9; 2.1*)." "In the absence of any divinely promulgated legal and social system," writes Fortin, "one would be justified, not by the performance of lawful deeds, but by faith." Because of its peculiar character, "no other religious tradition has



ever placed a greater premium on purity of doctrine” than Christianity “or [has] been so much on its guard against heresy.” E.M. Forster even claimed that calling one religion false and another true is essentially a Christian idea. In short, for Christians, orthodoxy is paramount (Fortin, 223-233, esp. 227-228). The Christianity Henry creates in this play, however, reverses this order: orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy.

We can illustrate this rank ordering by referring to the twofold division of the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments are often represented artistically on two tablets divided into three duties to God and seven to men. Catholics and Lutherans, the religions of the interlocutors in 5.2.43-83, achieve this three and seven separation by combining the first three Biblical statements into one commandment: “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me; you shall not make for yourself an idol.” Thereafter the three duties to God are: acknowledge the Lord as only God, do not take his name in vain, and keep holy the Sabbath. And the seven duties to men are: honor father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet your neighbor’s wife, and do not covet his goods.

This disjunction reflects a hierarchy. Of the tablets or tables dividing the Commandments—the first theological, the second ethical—Christianity gives priority to the first, to God and His nature.<sup>xiv</sup> At the same time, Christians find the first tablet more controversial than the second one. For though few Christians dispute whether murder or theft are forbidden, many have disputed whether God is one or three, whether and how Christ is God, whether it is permissible to have graven images in churches, how to observe the Sabbath, and so forth. These controversies over the Decalogue’s first table have sparked civil struggles and religious persecution. If, as Cranmer and (later) Henry insist, Christians could subordinate the first table to the second by focusing on loving one another, religious warfare would diminish. Duties to other men would supersede orthodoxy; ethics replaces theology.

Some might object that this re-ordering departs from the historical record of Protestants such as Cranmer. For the historical Cranmer followed Martin Luther in prioritizing faith over good works. Both men protested salvation resulted from faith alone: *sola fides*. Thus Cranmer wrote in the 39 Articles of the Church of England, “we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ *by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.*”<sup>xv</sup> But this objection conflates history and poetry. For Cranmer of this play differs from his historical counterpart, since the former justifies himself by his righteousness or his good deeds. When Henry threatens the Archbishop with his Privy Council’s coming accusations, Cranmer says, “The good I stand on is my truth and honesty” (5.2.122). And when the Privy Council thereafter accuses him of heresy, Cranmer says the purpose of his teaching “Was ever to do well” (5.2.72).

So, to repeat, for the King Henry of this play, rightly directed love becomes more important than theologically correct beliefs. Benevolence toward one’s fellow men is more important than beliefs in the nature of the deity. Now such a reordering of the Commandments—ten divided into seven and three—recalls the numbering in Prologue and Epilogue. Like the Decalogue, the outer ring lists ten types of playgoers. But their division of seven in the Prologue and three in the Epilogue suggests Henry’s transformation of Christianity. Such a redefined Christianity, “our chosen truth,” must be reserved for an “understanding friend.” For it differs radically from the expectations of “Such as give/Their money out of hope they may believe.” It favors neither Protestant nor Catholic; rather, it supports politicians in their struggles with priest of whatever sect. Thereby, in the magic of poetic fiction, Shakespeare presents a non-sectarian or political solution to England’s conflict of church and state.

## CONCLUSION

Henry VIII does bring Reformation to England, to both church and society. But it is not the Protestant Reformation. Instead of building a wall separating church and state, he combines the two under the Headship of the monarch. Henry VIII assumes the power to interpret scripture and dictate religious practice. As Allan Bloom remarked above, in so doing King Henry VIII becomes “the High Priest and interprets the divine in such a way as to serve England.”

As a result of the monarch’s elevation, English society begins its poetic transformation from pre-modern to modern. The king no longer defers to the clergy; the nobles are loyal to the king to whom they trace their ascendancy; and the commoners cheer their monarch as a national hero.

But only by recognizing *King Henry VIII’s* triple ring composition can we understand these things, Shakespeare’s “chosen truth.” For, as the epigraph of this essay says, we “find where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed within the center.” The play’s center, England’s break with Roman Catholicism, changes our chiasmus to this abbreviation: ABCDC\*B\*A\*. Mary Douglas calls this pattern the “perfect form” of ring composition whose “effect is to give special emphasis to the pivotal central point” (16). If we fail to see the play’s ring structure, the off-stage break with Rome remains at best dim and ambiguous.<sup>xvi</sup> But seen in a chiasmic sequence, the schism becomes emphatically important. For, to summarize its three encircling rings, this pivotal event divides its audiences into the significant numbers seven and three, shows England change from pre-modern to modern, and transforms the play from tragedy to comedy. Above all, it invents a Christianity directed by the monarch to the political good of England.

Nonetheless, as edifying as we may find the England of the end of the play, it is not historical—at least as we understand “history.” For in actual fact, Henry VIII did not foster toleration after the break with Rome. Henry executed Thomas More for failing to acknowledge the very supremacy he is made to

acknowledge in 5.2.<sup>xvii</sup> During the reign of Henry's daughter Mary, many Protestants were martyred. Likewise during the reign of Elizabeth many Catholics were put to death. Indeed, even such toleration as Parliament promulgated during the Glorious Revolution of 1688 excluded Roman Catholics and provided but limited "allowance" (even the term "tolerance" was eschewed) for Dissenters. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Catholics granted certain civil rights (Mansfield 1964, 933-46, esp. 941-942). To view this play aright then, we must as it were use temporal bifocals, the reading lens for where the playwright dramatizes the past and the distance lens for where he projects the future.

But how to account for the projecting of such a utopian England, —what one critic calls a "paradisaal future" (Bliss 16)? To answer, we should redefine *Henry VIII's* genre. Although this play is listed in the First Folio under "Histories," it is surely not "history" in our sense of the term. As we have seen, and as could be illustrated at much greater length, this play departs from its sources in crucial respects. It is at least as much fictional as faithful dramatizing of chronicle histories.

Moreover, this play is not unique. To cite a few other examples, in the whole of *King John* there is no mention of Magna Carta, for us an important milestone in the road toward Parliamentary democracy. For Shakespeare, Magna Carta weakened his favored policy of centralizing power in the monarchy. Again, Shakespeare fabricated Prince Hal's adventures with Falstaff in the two parts of *Henry IV*. In fact, one could fill a book—indeed Peter Saccio has—with more such violations of our understanding of "history."

But merely collecting such deviations and concluding Shakespeare plays fast and loose with his sources is wrongheaded. For we thereby assume Shakespeare tried and failed to write our kind of "history." This is a mistake. It cuts his history plays to fit our Procrustean bed. Rather, Shakespeare practiced an older

historiography described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile, Or Education*:

The ancient historians are filled with views which one could use even if the facts which present them are false. But we do not know how to get any true advantage from history. Critical erudition absorbs everything, as if it were very important whether a fact is true, provided that a useful teaching can be drawn from it. Sensible men ought to regard history as a tissue of fables whose moral is very appropriate to the human heart (Rousseau 1979, 156).

Seth Benardete explains what Rousseau means by “a tissue of fables” with an appropriate moral. Benardete’s *Herodotean Inquiries* argues that Herodotus’ *History* is not primarily concerned with what happened in the past. To shoehorn him into modern historiography is wrongheaded. Of course, Herodotus does relate something of the Persian War, and he does make use of written records. But Herodotus marshals the particulars of this war, some of which he acknowledges to be false or inaccurate, in order to allow the perceptive access to certain universal questions the particulars suggest. Herodotus’ universal *logos* lies embedded in the particulars, true or false, that he narrates.<sup>xviii</sup>

As with Herodotus, so it is with Shakespeare. Of course, readers should consider the poet’s sources, noting how he follows them sometimes and varies other times. But such erudition is but a beginning. We must then try (for instance) to determine why *King Henry VIII* re-forms Christianity with false facts. Perhaps the playwright thereby encouraged a political supremacy that creates religious toleration. Thus does Shakespeare use ancient historiography in the hope that England would not resemble Islamic theocracies of today.

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<sup>i</sup>All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare* and cited in the text by act, scene, and line.

<sup>ii</sup> This is not to say that the playwright's sources, such as Hollinshed and Foxt, wrote strictly factual history as we would expect today. For example, Hollinshed's chronicles include Banquo and Fleance (later to appear in *Macbeth*), characters who never existed. My essay merely argues that occasionally Shakespeare deviated from such histories as he had in order to make certain points.

<sup>iii</sup> The authorship controversy is irrelevant to my argument. Whether or not the play co-authored, it is (I argue) intricately organized. My stance was anticipated by Alexander Leggett: "I have avoided—some would say evaded—the authorship question on the grounds that the play is what it is no matter who wrote what. But one reason why there is not the consensus about this play that there is about *Two Noble Kinsman* is that here the changes from a difficult style to an easy one are more obviously deliberate and functional, suggesting either a close collaboration or a single mind at work" (139n). For a summary of this authorship controversy from an anti-collaboration point of view, the reader might consult R.A. Foakes "Introduction" *King Henry VIII* (1964) xv-xxviii. A pro-collaboration summary based on Michel Foucault can be found in Gordon McMullan, "Introduction" *King Henry VIII* (2000) 180-199.

<sup>iv</sup> "Ring composition is parallelism with an important difference. It is based on parallelism in the straightforward sense that one section has to be read in connection with another that is parallel because it covers similar *or antithetical* situations, and some of the same vocabulary acts as cues to the pairing. But the parallel sections are not juxtaposed in the texts. They must be placed opposite each other, one on each side of the ring. The structure is chiasmic; it depends on the "crossing over" or change of direction of the movement at the middle point" (6, italics added.). Douglas adds that the "perfect form" of this composition would be ABCDC\*B\*A\* "to give special emphasis to the pivotal central point" (17). We will see the pivotal central point of Shakespeare's play in the final section of my essay. James Ryan claims "Shakespeare habitually arranges his plot and character actions chiasmicly [sic], in a reflective arch-like structure: A-B-C-B-A" (89).

<sup>v</sup> I have found no one in the secondary literature arguing the play's chiasmic or ring organization. Those arguing for different ways to organize the play focus instead on one of the following points: a sequence of trials, the wheel of fortune, imagery and ceremony, or a celebration of Elizabethan England.

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Among those seeing a sequence of trials are the following: Gerard B. Wegemer, "Henry VIII on Trial: Confronting Malice and Conscience in Shakespeare's *All is True*"; Ivo Kamps, "Possible Pasts: Historiography and Legitimation in *Henry VIII*"; William Baillie, "*Henry VIII*: A Jacobean History," *Shakespeare Studies*; and R.A. Foakes, "Introduction" *King Henry VIII* (1957).

Prominent among 20<sup>th</sup> century critics citing the wheel of fortune are Northrop Frye (1965), Bernard Harris (1966), and Frank V. Cespedes (1980); excerpts from their essays are reprinted in Harris, Laurie Lanzen and Mark W. Scott, eds. *Shakespearean Criticism*: 65-67 (Frye), 67-68 (Harris), and 81-84 (Cespedes).

Among those basing their case on imagery or ceremony are Linda Micheli, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and Ann Shaver, *Selected papers from West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association*.

Most prominent among those celebrating Elizabethan England as seen in Cranmer's prophecy is G. Wilson Knight. Knight sees the play as both "a recapitulation of earlier Histories" as well as Shakespeare's one explicitly Christian play" (258, 277). My essay disputes this second claim.

Falling outside these groupings is Guy Story Brown's *Shakespeare's Prince*, a commentary on *Henry VIII*, act by act, scene by scene, sometimes line by line. No overarching thesis unifies Brown's explications of the play. This book's title and many references to Machiavelli's *Prince* might suggest the thesis of this erudite but unfocused volume, but such is in fact not the case.

<sup>vi</sup> Against the predominant view (that Shakespeare wrote only for stage performances), Lukas Erne persuasively argues he wrote both for stage and page—that is, Shakespeare intended for his plays to be published and read. He saw himself as a literary dramatist. Erne's failure to convince many reviewers prompted him to publish a second edition (2013) addressing the substantive criticisms of the first edition. For a balanced criticism of the first edition, see Michael P. Jensen. Erne also published *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (2013) as a third attempt to establish Shakespeare as a literary dramatist.

<sup>vii</sup> Mrs. Leo Grindon anticipated my connecting these fore and after parts: "The play opens with a description of one pageant [the Field of the Cloth of Gold] having disastrous results; it closes with another which promises a harvest of virtue to the whole nation." Quoted in Cespedes (422). In a similar vein Mark Rose comments, "Cranmer's praise of Elizabeth provides a description of 'earthly glory' that stands as the authentic contrast to the Field [of Cloth of Gold]" (436).

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<sup>viii</sup> Such subtle disparagement of James I make me skeptical of the claims of those such as Mark Rankin who see in Shakespeare's play a design to flatter the interests and agenda of James: ("Henry VIII" 359-366).

<sup>ix</sup> (V, 4, 74-76). Many editors reject the spelling "Holy-day" in favor of "holiday," even though "Holy-day" is found in the First Folio as well as the Riverside and 2<sup>nd</sup> Arden. Nonetheless Bevington, Ribner/Kitteridge, Norton, Folger, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Arden substitute "holiday." These latter editors depart from the Folio for either of two reasons: (1) because it seems out of place for a secular King to command a "Holy-day," or (2) because the OED says that until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century *holy-day* and *holiday* both designated a consecrated or religious festival day. With regard to (1) I find this religious term not out of place, since it supports my thesis that in this play Henry VIII becomes England's high priest who interprets the divine in such a way as to serve England. With regard to (2) what the OED (which cites none of the playwright's uses of the two spellings) says of some pre-1600 writers is not true of Shakespeare. According to the *Shakespeare Concordance*, the playwright clearly distinguishes religious "Holy-day" from secular "holiday(s)." "Holy-day" is used *only once* here in *King Henry VIII*; "holiday" is used 15 times, mostly as a noun but also as an adjective or adverb. Also, even though Shakespeare did not live to see his First Folio through the press, it is difficult to believe his theater colleagues Heminges and Condrell (the Folio editors) would have printed the (to us) inappropriate "Holy-day" unless they followed some copy of the play they thought reliably conveyed Shakespeare's intention. Is it also possible these two first editors, living in a milieu of religious warfare, may have been more sensitive to the theological-political dilemma in this play than modern editors living in the religiously tolerant West?

<sup>x</sup> My reading of *Winter's Tale* summarizes that of Mary Nichols, "Tragedy and Comedy in Shakespeare's Poetic Vision in *The Winter's Tale*," 137-156.

<sup>xi</sup> *History of England* 55. More recently, William Leahy supports Trevelyan with a 1533 eyewitness to Anne's coronation who said, "the crowd stood mute" and "the event had been cold, meager, uncomfortable, and dissatisfying to everyone." Furthermore, J.J. Scarisbrick reports that after a preacher called for prayers for the new Queen Anne, most of the London congregation walked out (313). By contrast, concerning the 1559 coronation procession of Elizabeth I, Leahy quotes Richard Mulcaster's *The Passage of Our Most Drad Sovereigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth through the City of*



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London to show that while the commoners were enthusiastic about Elizabeth, “Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth’s mother, . . . is not mentioned” (Leahy 134, 138).

<sup>xii</sup> Bullough, IV, 486l quoted Shakespeare 1974, 101In.

<sup>xiii</sup> 5.2.209-211. Shakespeare’s source is John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*; the relevant passage is reprinted in the second Arden edition, 211.

<sup>xiv</sup> What we call the Ten Commandments are precepts abstracted from two slightly different version of God’s remarks in *Exodus* 20:1-14 and *Deuteronomy* 5: 19-28. Furthermore, the divisions of the two types of commandments (duties to God and duties to neighbor) differ from one religious tradition to another. These differences spring from the question how to group what (for instance) in the Exodus passages amounts fourteen imperative statements. Yet Deuteronomy 10:4 says, “And he wrote on the tables, as at the first writing, the Ten Words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of fire on the day of the assembly.” How to reduce 14 to 10? Different groupings of these imperatives yield different divisions. So, as George Anastaplo remarks, the Jewish tradition divides them such that the first five are on one tablet, the other five on another: 90-91. The Christian tradition, however, differs not just from the Jewish but also from one sect to another. The Catholic and the Lutheran confessions divide the commandments into three duties to God and seven to neighbor. The Orthodox and some Reformed communities divide them into four duties to God and six to neighbor. The calculations in my essay are based on the Catholic and Lutheran division of three and seven because those two traditions are the ones relevant to the Lutheran Cranmer’s trial before the Roman Catholics in 5.2 of our play.

<sup>xv</sup> <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/39articles.html>. Italics added.

<sup>xvi</sup> Mary Nichols’s (2014) essay on the play argues that inasmuch as *Henry VIII* does not manifest a single dramatic action, Shakespeare offers a panorama of characters manifesting Christian virtues that could contribute to a good political community. But, in light of its chiasmic structure, *Henry VIII* does manifest a single dramatic action, the transition of England from pre-modern to modern pivoting on that nation’s break with the ecclesiastical authority of Rome.

<sup>xvii</sup> Shakespeare’s distortion of the historical Thomas More, if we can assume he is the unnamed Lord Chancellor in 5.2, is a particularly striking example of what we would call the “unhistorical” character of this play. See, for instance, the criticism of the play’s treatment of this great man by one scholar (Wegemer “Henry VIII on Trial” 73). But perhaps by treating the play as Horododean “history,” we may make some sense of Shakespeare’s unhistorical Thomas More. After all, More prefixes his *Utopia* with a tongue-

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in-cheek letter to his friend Peter Giles, at one point directing his irony against Christianity. More mentions being accosted by “a devout man and a theologian by profession, *burning with an extraordinary desire* to visit Utopia . . . for the purpose of *fostering and promoting our religion*, begun there so felicitously” (More 43; italics added). Unfortunately, More says he forgot to ask where Utopia (literally: no place) was located. Perhaps Shakespeare, who had a hand in a play on Thomas More, may have taken his cue from More’s playfully ironic refusal to bring proselytizing Christianity to his utopian commonwealth.

For different views of this play’s curious relation to history, see the articles by Cespedes and Leggatt.

<sup>xviii</sup>Seth Benardete I-6, especially 6. Benardete gives an example helpful with our play. “In the eighth book (I18-I19) Herodotus tells a story that he himself finds unconvincing about [the Persian King] Xerxes’ return to Asia after his defeat at Salamis. Xerxes is said to have sailed home from Ionia, and when a storm came up which the captain warned would swamp them unless the ship were lightened, Xerxes requested the Persians on board to show their concern for his safety by jumping into the sea; and when they obeyed him and the ship made port, Xerxes ‘because the captain had saved the king’s life rewarded him with a golden crown, but because he had lost the lives of many Persians cut off his head.’ If we accept Herodotus’ reasons for rejecting this as a fable, we might then wonder why he should bother to tell it. As it cannot be true, we can only account for it by considering its ‘meaning’: only what it says, as opposed to its veracity, warrants its inclusion. What it says is simple. Xerxes is shown to act out a perfect caricature of justice. Either of his actions, taken by itself, is just, but together each just action cancels out the other, and absurdity follows. The story is told, then, because it points to a truth about justice: the strict application of a just rule, to pay back what is owed, leads to a contradiction. That this misunderstanding of justice peculiarly belongs to the Persians will become clear later, so that we shall see that even so false a story tells the truth about the Persians (cf. III.36.5-6)” (4-5).

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