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Krantz: Audience Response to *Henry VIII* and Cultural Destabiliz

AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO *HENRY VIII* AND CULTURAL DESTABILIZATION

Susan E. Krantz

Linda Micheli's annotated bibliography makes it more apparent than ever that *Henry VIII* evokes violently opposed critical responses.¹ Is it Shakespeare's or isn't it?² Is it episodic and disunified, or is it unified? And, if it is unified, is its unity effected by the dramatist's use of masque and spectacle, or romance, or history, or some hybrid combination of these genres?³ The variety of interpretations for *Henry VIII* are not simply the results of academic vaudeville: neither the clever sleight-of-hand tricks so often associated with scholarly ingenuity, nor the balancing act on the tightrope of publish-or-perish adequately explains the disparate readings of the play. Instead, the wealth of critical disagreement demonstrates forcefully the serious questions readers have concerning the very nature of the play; as Frank Kermode put it in 1948, "What is Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* about?"⁴

Over forty years later, we are still asking the same question, and usually we search for an answer in genre, assuming that, if we know exactly what *Henry VIII* is, we will then understand what it means. However, regardless if Shakespeare wrote in *Henry VIII* history, or romance, or "pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited," he, nonetheless, had a variety of dramatic conventions and devices at his disposal with which to shape audience perception and control audience response. In this paper, I would like to examine the dramatist's use of those conventions and devices: authorial agents, dramatic moments during which a character speaks "directly" to the audience, scenic patterning as it shapes audience expectation, and "internal performance," in which characters function as audience. Such an examination reveals Shakespeare's pattern of creation and displacement or distortion of audience expectations, which results finally in a disturbing ambivalence concerning the messages embodied in the play. And this ambivalence that encourages us to continue asking what this play is about reflects the cultural destabilization contemporary with it.

The most obvious way a dramatist shapes audience response is through the classical frame of Prologue and Epilogue. The actors who present these speeches are authorial agents—in the Prologue setting mood and giving exposition, in the Epilogue asking for final approval and applause.⁵ In *Henry VIII*, however, the two elements of the classical frame are at odds with one another. The Prologue insists that the audience respond with proper seriousness (to "Be sad, as we would make ye" [25]) to matters of grave state importance:

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.
 (1-4)⁶

The Epilogue, in contrast, distances the audience from whatever stateliness and pomp, whatever prophetic national vision, the body of the play afforded. The final referent for the audience in the Epilogue is a “good” woman. Thus nobility has diminished to domesticity. The Epilogue assumes that the audience is incapable or unwilling to place the “weighty” matters of “state” promised in the Prologue above domestic concerns, for, if indeed Queen Katherine in her role as good woman is “All the expected good w^oare like to hear,” the expected “not-so-good” necessarily includes all political strategems and all state personages responsible for them, not the least of which is the king and his second marriage. In short, the Epilogue assumes that neither the nationalistic propaganda at the end of the play nor the references to heaven’s will scattered throughout the play are convincing enough for the audience to excuse the ill-treatment of a faithful wife.

There is a similar pattern of creation and displacement of audience expectations present in Queen Katherine’s role as character-agent.⁷ The audience is first introduced to her in the Council scene of Act 1, scene 2, during which she brings the Weaver’s Rebellion to the attention of the king, and, in so doing, she effects the relief of the over taxed and near rebellious citizenry. Here, Shakespeare clearly makes her the agent for the “correct” point of view. Her grasp of the facts, her political astuteness combined with her ethical concerns (she knows that excessive taxation is ethically wrong as well as politically dangerous), and, most important, her insight into Wolsey’s machinations and her courage in speaking openly on that point, all cue the audience to adopt her perspective as its own. That her character is contrived to be the agent in control of audience response is further confirmed by Shakespeare’s deviation from his source material and by the responses of the other characters present during the scene. Queen Katherine’s championing the cause of the citizenry is a complete invention by Shakespeare. Holinshed records the incident:

The king...willed to know by whose means the commissions were so strictley given....The king indeed was much offended ...[and] caused letters to be sent into all shires, that the matter should no further be talked of: & he pardoned all them that had denied the demand.⁸

Shakespeare disregards an opportunity to develop audience identification and sympathy for King Henry—a sympathetic identification he could have easily achieved by more closely following his source—thus allowing the king a scene in which he could overrule Wolsey strictly for the sake of his subjects, a scene without the mitigating circumstance of personal gratification always lurking in the back of the audience’s consciousness once he meets Anne Boleyn.

Instead, the scene stresses throughout King Henry’s dependence on Wolsey. From the opening stage direction—“*Enter King Henry, leaning on the Cardinal’s shoulder*”—to Wolsey’s closing the episode by manipulating the letters of pardon,

Krantz: Audience Response to *Henry VIII* and Cultural Destabiliz

Shakespeare portrays the king as a character with a seriously flawed perspective. In addition, because the episode ends with Wolsey's instructions to the Secretary to "let it be noised" that he deserves credit for the "revokement," rather than blame for the "exaction" of the tax, Queen Katherine's earlier accusation to Wolsey, "you frame / Things" (44-45), rings doubly true and ensures her role as character-agent for audience response.

Shakespeare again chooses Katherine as character-agent to introduce the other episode included in the scene, the charges against the Duke of Buckingham: "I am sorry that the Duke of Buckingham / Is run in your displeasure" (109-10). Although her warnings and intercessions are ineffectual in this affair, the audience's earlier conditioning inclines them to share her sympathies and to wonder if Henry's quick determination of the duke's guilt is anything more than rash judgment.

Throughout the play, the audience maintains its sympathy for Queen Katherine, but, in doing so, it undergoes a change—a fragmentation—of perspective. By Act 2 and Katherine's trial, the dramatic contrivance that directed audience response serves to disturb the values it created. By Act 4 and the coronation, the shadow of Katherine looms in opposition to the festivities and distorts the national values applauded in the scene as it simultaneously is distorted by them. By Act 5 and the baptism of Elizabeth, the audience's perceptions begin to be realigned in accordance with the nationalistic prophecies of Cranmer, but that perspective is again displaced in the domestic values of the Epilogue.

Katherine is the only character-agent in the play, with the possible exception of Wolsey who, at first, seems to function as an inverted measure for audience response. Like Richard III or Iago he plays his hand openly to the audience, but unlike them, he does not invite the audience to enjoy the game. Although his asides to and conversations with his minions confirm his villainy, his "direct" addresses to the audience—his two soliloquies—occur after he is fallen; and, while they do not serve to mitigate his crimes, they do serve to mitigate the audience's satisfaction in his reversal, displacing a sense of moral and political complacency and replacing it with disquieting ambivalence.

Wolsey's first soliloquy is sandwiched between the actions of the nobles, who, throughout this play, are at best questionable in their nobility.⁹ The audience has already seen Norfolk and Suffolk stand mute during the charges brought against Buckingham, leaving the Queen alone in her defense of him. Similarly, Suffolk is simply a silent bystander during the Queen's account of the Weaver's Rebellion, despite its historical setting in his own district. Together the nobles, especially Surrey, claim to be eager to confront the king about Wolsey:

Nor. If you will now unite in your complaints
And force them with a constancy, the cardinal
Cannot stand under them.

· · · · ·
Sur. I am joyful
To meet the least occasion. . .
· · · · ·
To be reveng'd on him.

(3.2.1-9)

However, they never do confront the king. Instead their conversations have the hollow ring of adolescent bravado, and their actions subsequent to Wolsey's fall imply the distasteful probability that they were simply climbing onto the king's bandwagon.

In fact, their lack of genuine courage is visually heightened for the audience in the stage direction immediately preceding Wolsey's first soliloquy: "*Exit King, frowning upon the Cardinal; the nobles throng after him, smiling and whispering.*" After watching the nobles smarm behind King Henry, whispering the hatred they have been afraid to speak openly and titillated by the fall from greatness, the audience, I believe, takes the conventional moralizing of Wolsey's "wheel of Fortune" soliloquy positively—at least he is a man who knows himself:

. . . Nay then, farewell:
I have touch'd the highest point of all my greatness,
I haste now to my setting.

(3.2.222-25)

When the nobles re-enter, they seem too much to relish their task of formally charging Wolsey and forcing him to relinquish the Great Seal. They enter *en masse*: that is, they gang up on Wolsey. In the rapid list of accusations they fire at Wolsey—all of them true—the audience's attention is drawn to their style as much as to the content of the charges. They are abusive in their new found power and ineffectual in the exercise of authority. Not only are they unable to retrieve the Great Seal, but near the end of their verbal onslaught the Lord Chamberlain insists they stop the name-calling:

O my lord [Surrey],
Press not a falling man too far; 'tis virtue:
His faults lie open to the laws, let them,
Not you correct him. My heart weeps to see him
So little of his great self.

(3.2.332-36)

Finally, with Norfolk's last jab, "So fare you well, my little good lord cardinal" (349), the nobles exit, leaving Wolsey to speak his second soliloquy. Again he echoes the *de casibus* theme, and this time audience sympathy for him increases because he not only accepts his fate, he also experiences a spiritual rejuvenation: "I feel my heart new open'd" (366).

Through the agency of Queen Katherine, along with Wolsey's asides and conversations with his cohorts, the audience learned the blackness of the cardinal's policies. The audience's knowledge, however, is only privileged in as much as it has access to some small particulars of Wolsey's villainy not evident to the other characters. Otherwise, everyone in the play except King Henry shares this knowledge. So obvious is Wolsey's villainy that in the early part of the play the audience is lulled into a complacent sense of justice, as it is encouraged to adopt the easy perspective afforded by moral absolutism. But, at the point of Wolsey's fall, this "he's wrong, we're right" attitude breaks down. The spitefulness of the nobles, the blessedness reached by the cardinal, and the forgiveness granted Wolsey by Katherine, all serve once again to destabilize our earlier values. Wolsey was politically dangerous and unethical, but the nobles are politically weak. Wolsey finds

comfort in spiritual values, but he has destroyed the most powerful character in the play. (Wolsey's heart may open, but Katherine is practically beatified in her scene of transcendence.) In depicting Wolsey's fall, Shakespeare does not allow the audience to move from one moral absolute to another. "Black" Wolsey does not become "white" Wolsey. Instead, the values by which the audience judges Wolsey—and by which it attempts to answer political and ethical questions raised in the play—become a hazy gray: they are complicated, sometimes antithetical, never clearly resolved.

Just as Shakespeare positioned the spiteful nobles around Wolsey's soliloquies to complicate audience response, so, too, he uses scenic patterning elsewhere to force the audience to re-evaluate perspective. This technique is most noticeable the first time Shakespeare uses it—in Act 1, scene 1, Norfolk's account of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. At first, of course, Norfolk's re-creation of splendor and extravagance appears an appropriate reflection of royal glory. His hyperbolic and rhetorically florid descriptions provide him a means to approximate the visual magnificence of the display and to glorify the figures behind the display:

. . . Now this masque
Was cried incomparable; and th'ensuing night
Made it a fool and beggar. The two kings
Equal in lustre, were now best, now worst,
As presence did present them: him in eye
Still him in praise, and being present both
'Twas said they saw but one, and no discerner
Durst wag his tongue in censure. When these suns
(For so they phrase 'em) by their heralds challeng'd
The noble spirits to arms, they did perform
Beyond thought's compass, that former fabulous story
Being now seen possible enough, got credit
That Bevis was believ'd.

(1.1.26-38)

The spectacle of power serves its designed purpose—by physically embodying fantasy, it gives fantasy the appearance of reality, somehow making the audience suspend its disbelief in such a way as to credit the wearer of the fantastic costume with all the power, properties, and glory belonging to the fantasy. As Norfolk says, "All was royal. . . the office did /Distinctly his full function" (42-45); consequently, "Bevis was believ'd."

The audience for *Henry VIII* is led by Norfolk's account as easily as the tractable audience at the Field of the Cloth of Gold was led by the actual spectacle. The viewer accepts what he is told, does not "wag his tongue in censure," and believes the fantasy to be a realistic reflection of glory. However, no sooner does he become, like Norfolk, a "fresh admirer" of the golden pageant, than Shakespeare alters his perspective.¹⁰ The audience learns that the real power behind this vision of glory is Wolsey, not King Henry. For the characters in this scene, values are simply reversed. "Glory" turns to "vanity," magnificence to wasteful extravagance. The negative propaganda of political slander replaces the positive propaganda of political idealism featured in the earlier part of the scene, as the characters recount the number of English lords who

"Have broke their backs with laying manors on 'em / For this great journey" (1.1.84-85), a journey that served no actual political purpose since the peace treaty that inspired it has already been broken. The larger audience, too, must re-examine its values, but that audience is not allowed the luxury of Buckingham's simplistic reversal. If we, as viewers, simply exchange admiration for contempt, we will just as surely misread the other spectacles in the play as we did this one. Although we have had our initial set of values displaced, we have not been offered a replacement.

The opening scene with Norfolk's account of the Field of the Cloth of Gold is by far the clearest example of Shakespeare's method of scenic patterning, in which he uses one section of a scene to alter or blur the audience's perception developed in another part of the scene. However, Shakespeare employs the same technique several more times in the play. In Act 1, scene 3, the introduction between the French speaking Henry and Anne Boleyn during Wolsey's banquet is balanced by the previously created perception of the inappropriateness of French fashion in England. In Act 2, scene 3, the creation of Anne as Marchioness of Pembroke begins her rise to power, but Shakespeare places her newly acquired honor immediately subsequent to her conversation with the Old Lady, in which she pities Queen Katherine and claims by her "troth and maidenhead" that she "would not be a queen" (2.3.23-24). Shakespeare further complicates audience perception in this scene by the Old Lady's insistence that Anne is a hypocrite. Even in Act 4, scene 2, the scene of Katherine's vision, Shakespeare's scenic patterning is at odds with the audience's sense of what a blessed moment should be. Following her vision, Katherine appears to be dying before our eyes. Griffith and Patience prepare us for her death as they record what should be her last moments:

Pat. How long her face is drawn! How pale she looks,
And of an earthly cold! Mark her eyes!
Grif. She is going wench; pray, pray.
Pat. Heaven comfort her.
(97-99)

However, just as we are about to "leave her to heaven," a messenger enters and disturbs the saint-like queen. Her very earthly response jars us from our funeral mood: "You are a saucy fellow" (100), Katherine shouts. If Shakespeare's usual technique is to juxtapose two seemingly disparate scenes or sections of scenes in order that one mirrors the other, in *Henry VIII* he uses a funhouse mirror, in which each section distorts our view of the other.¹¹

The episode of the Field of the Cloth of Gold not only demonstrates how the technique of scenic patterning influences audience response, it also features Norfolk as an internal audience whose responses to a performance help control the larger audience response. Similar to his role in Act 1, scene 1, are the "Gentlemen," who appear twice in the play as internal audiences to gloss ceremonial performances for the larger audience. In both instances, their emotions are curiously disengaged. Although they are knowledgeable about the events and personalities at court, their tone is consistently that of the gossip and their approach to information and communication has the appearance of one-upmanship. As Ralph Berry notes, they offer "decorus" rather than genuine pity and the "illusion, not the reality of intimacy" with power.¹²

Krantz: Audience Response to *Henry VIII* and Cultural Destabiliz

They first appear in Act 2, scene 1, to report on Buckingham's trial and to watch, along with the larger audience, "the ceremony / Of bringing back the prisoner" (4-5). After they discuss the trial in detail, they turn their attention to Wolsey's tricks of state, but they do not commit themselves on questions of right and wrong. They merely report to each other, with knowing verbal winks, what "is noted," what "'tis likely / By all conjectures." Rather than choose sides themselves between Wolsey and Buckingham, they simply discuss what the "commons" think:

2 Gent. All the commons
Hate him [Wolsey] perniciously, and o' my conscience
Wish him ten faddom deep; this duke as much
They love and dote on; call him bounteous Buckingham,
The mirror of all courtesy.

(49-53)

When Buckingham enters, they position themselves "close" in order to "behold him." Buckingham's speech reveals his patience and forgiveness; it also warns those watching to "Be sure you be not loose" (127). But upon Buckingham's departure for the gallows, they hardly manage to express their pity, before their "loose" lips introduce another intrigue:

2 Gent. If the duke be guiltless,
'Tis full of woe; yet I can give you inkling
Of an ensuing evil, if it fall,
Greater than this.

(139-42)

And so, with that game of one-upmanship begins their "buzzing" that the cardinal is responsible for a separation between the king and queen. Although they both agree that Katherine's paying the price for the cardinal's malice is "woeful," they dismiss the matter with a *c'est la vie* urbanity: "The cardinal / Will have his will, and she must fall" (166-67).

When they meet again to watch the coronation, their conversation exhibits a similar tone of gossip, a similar illusion of intimacy with the great, a similar emotional distance. As they wait for the coronation parade to pass, the first Gentleman recounts the most recent news of Queen Katherine— now divorced, removed from court, and sick. To the news of her tragedy, the first Gentleman responds, "Alas good lady. / The trumpets sound: stand close, the queen is coming" (4.1.35-36). The Gentleman's mentioning of the two queens in the same breath helps the audience see his real priority. He is there as a curious, but disengaged, onlooker. The sounding of the trumpets and his position for the parade outweigh questions of morality and humanity. Like the audience at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, the gentleman simply views the two queens "now best, now worst, / As presence did present them." And presence now presents Queen Anne, whose appearance, like the kings at the vale of Andren, is heightened by the ceremony—"she is an angel; / Our king has all the Indies in his arms" (44-45). But these Gentlemen, unlike Norfolk, are not sufficiently distanced from the theatrical display of magnificence to accept the spectacle as reflective of royal glory. Their tongues may not exactly "wag in censure," but they wag in bawdy jokes which deflate the power of pageantry. The first Gentleman's sly "I cannot blame the king's conscience" (47), and the second Gentleman's sexual pun

that countesses are "sometimes falling stars (55), serve to contract the theatrical distance necessary for ceremony to work at the same time that they reveal a skepticism which denies to their speakers the possibility of involvement in the illusion. In short, the Gentlemen are curious, but neither the performances of royalty nor the intrigues of court are sufficient to engage their emotions or prompt them to ethical concerns. On the one hand, their participation as audience in the coronation parade, along with a throng of on-lookers so dense that "all were woven / So strangely in one piece" (4.1.79-80), appears to signal the kind of political resistance Bakhtin applauds as the "mass body": "The festive organization of the crowd must be first of all concrete and sensual. Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies acquires a certain meaning." On the other hand, however, the Gentlemen are never "an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body."¹³ In political terms, they subvert the power of the aristocratic pageant without opposing it. In socio-economic terms, they are neither aristocrat nor commoner, part neither of the crowd nor the pageant. And as such, they act as agents of disunification for both communities. As an internal audience for the larger audience of the play, they offer no real guidance.

In *Henry VIII* the dramatic devices customarily employed to shape audience response function to complicate, not clarify, the viewer's perspective. In this play, Shakespeare asks his audience to juxtapose antithetical systems of values—private vs. public, political vs. ethical, earthly vs. spiritual—and he denies the audience a way to reconcile the conflicts. Further, because he disallows us a comfortable definition of kingship, he asks us to question the boundaries of political authority. The spiritual transcendence experienced by the fallen characters should not, I think, be considered a preferable substitute for political authority represented in the play, for it is necessarily a personal, individualized state of blessedness reached only upon the abandonment of public concerns.¹⁴ In short, spiritual transcendence is not the opposite of politics; it is other *than* politics. It may seem desirable to keep one's eyes heavenward, but somebody has got to mind the shop.

I would suggest that the antithetical systems of values, the undefined boundaries of authority, the political ambivalence result not from a playwright experimenting with form, but from a playwright addressing sociopolitical issues for which there are no clearly defined answers.

The scene of Elizabeth's baptism—by all accounts the most directly positive statement on monarchy in the play—symbolically illustrates the complicated political ideology at the heart of the play's dramatic ambivalence. The baby Elizabeth is in the historic and poetic center of the two monarchs who frame her reign—her father and her successor. The first, as character in the play, has been arbitrary in exercising his power, has been duped by his advisor, has bestowed royal favor for personal reasons—has, quite simply, undermined the greatness of kingship. Earlier in his career Shakespeare gave us a very different description of King Henry. In his additions to *Sir Thomas More*, Shakespeare presents the audience with a panegyric on Henry VIII as God's deputy—a position that expects, demands, and deserves unquestioning loyalty from all Englishmen:

More For to the King God hath his office lent
Of dread, of justice, power and command,

Krantz: Audience Response to *Henry VIII* / *ems* and Cultural Destabiliz

And to add ample majesty to this
He hath not only lent the King his figure,
His throne and sword, but given him his own name,
Calls him a god on earth. What do you then,
Rising 'gainst him that God himself installs,
But rise 'gainst God? What do you to your souls
In doing this, O desperate as you are?

(Addition II, 11. 98-107)¹⁵

No such claims of divine right are made for the same king twenty years later. Instead, the differences, not the similarities, between God and King Henry are emphasized during those moments of transcendence reached only by characters fallen from Henry's "graces." Shakespeare has Wolsey allude, ironically I think, to the Baptism service from *The Book of Common Prayer* to stress a subject's need to recognize the disparity between King and God:

Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye;
I feel my heart new open'd. O how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!
(3.2.365-67 and note)

Not only is the later King Henry without God's "own name," he cannot expect, nor does he deserve, the unquestioned loyalty of his subjects. The weavers, unlike their earlier counterparts who "rise" against foreigners, do not need a reminder of royal prerogative; Henry needs a lesson in governmental responsibility. The subjects understandably "spit their duties out, and cold hearts freeze / Allegiance in them" (1.2.61-62). Their "grief" is the king's "primer baseness," to which he must give "quick consideration" and redress.

The differences in the presentations of King Henry in *More* and *Henry VIII* do not represent a "revisionist history" of an individual king; rather they represent an altered cultural perspective on the concept of kingship. The historical sources at Shakespeare's disposal remain virtually identical in the twenty or so years that separate the two plays; what has noticeably changed is the monarch reigning during the time of composition and the effectiveness with which the hegemony can create and perpetuate a political ideology. During Elizabeth's reign writers could centralize the concept of divine monarchical absolutism and nationalistic pride in the attractive myth of the Fairie Queen, and they could expect their audiences to apply the mythic construct to the various situations of power and authority they created. Stephen Greenblatt has recently analyzed the Elizabethan dependence on audience participation in sustaining authority:

Queen Elizabeth [was] a ruler without a standing army, without a highly developed bureaucracy, without an extensive police force, a ruler whose power is constituted in theatrical celebrations of royal glory and theatrical violence visited upon the enemies of that glory.... Elizabethan power. . .depends upon its privileged visibility. As in a theater, the audience must be powerfully engaged by this

University of Dayton Review, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1993), Art. 14
distance from it. "We princes," Elizabeth told a deputation of Lords and Common in 1586, "are set upon stages in the sight and view of all the world."¹⁶

Both the "respectful distance" and the powerful engagement of audience are lacking in *Henry VIII* as well as in the larger theater of Jacobean England at the time of the play. The first record of audience response to the play is Sir Henry Wotton's now famous account of the burning of the Globe on 29 June 1613. At that performance, at least, we know that the ceremonies in the play did not include the requisite distance to inspire respect and awe in the audience: on the contrary, the spectacle was "sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous."¹⁷ It is difficult to determine to what extent the responsibility of such failure belongs to the performance or to the text of the play itself. Nonetheless, Wotton's account of the audience's failure to be impressed by spectacle has at its core a lack of sufficient distance, and I believe this lack of respectful distance was political as well as theatrical.

William Baillie has documented much of the Jacobean history relevant to Shakespeare's writing *Henry VIII*; and, although he draws different conclusions than I do, I, too, believe that the political climate at the time of the play is important in our attempts to understand it. The threat of the new Armada, compounded by the king's propensity to consider marrying his heir to the Spanish Infanta and the distrust of the English over the peace alliance with Spain, made much of the English citizenry question the king's judgment and, at times, mock his authority.¹⁸ One anecdote, recorded by Francis Osborne, includes the sarcastic opinion that King James will be "Crowned in the Pope's Chair."¹⁹ At least in part because of the perceived Catholic tolerance, more and more of the English had already begun leaning toward Puritanism and its insistence on the primacy of individual conscience.²⁰ On the other hand, the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot a few years earlier had increased James's fears and had instigated his crackdown on Roman Catholics, thus exacerbating their suspicions about the king.²¹ Through all this, James remained convinced of his absolute authority, but many others, from his Parliament on down, did not. Baillie is correct when he points out that "The recurring problem of defining the royal prerogative was growing especially acute during the first half of the year [1613]. The issues raised and left unsettled in the Parliament of 1610-11 had only worsened in the interim; acrimony on both sides was building to the intransigence which paralyzed the fruitless 'Addled Parliament' of 1614."²² Baillie is also correct to note, as have so many others, that the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to the Count Palatine of the Rhine was a joyous occasion for all but the Catholics in England and that that occasion modified the grief the English felt over the death of Prince Henry, their hoped-for Protestant savior, in 1612. But this one spectacle could no more rejuvenate the political ideology that had been fragmenting and disintegrating for a decade than could the spectacles in *Henry VIII*.²³

I do not wish to imply that *Henry VIII* depends on the audience's ability to de-code any particular topical allusions in order to be "understood." Rather it is a play which cannot be divorced from the overall topicality of a destabilized culture. Perhaps, Shakespeare infused the play with romance elements in an attempt to place it in a

Krantz: Audience Response to *Henry VIII* and Cultural Destabiliz-
"timeless" world.²⁴ Perhaps the lavish spectacle and especially the glorification of James in Cranmer's prophecy were intended to re-create a political ideology reminiscent of the Tudor Myth. By restating the Phoenix riddle popularized at the time of James's coronation to symbolize the continuity of political power as well as its mythic proportions, Shakespeare once again attempts to realign his audience's values, but, of course, this is poetry that cannot be put to the test of reality. For an audience to believe a myth, it must be inclined to believe, and the Jacobean audience was much less inclined than the Elizabethan.

Shakespeare's audience is never sufficiently engaged in sustaining the images of power in *Henry VIII*. In that respect it mirrors the larger audience for James himself. Like Shakespeare, James produced and reproduced the spectacles of power, especially in the masque. However, it is always the decision of the audience as to whether or not a spectacle reveals or conceals reality. Without willing audience participation art, either creative or reflective of power, cannot impress. As Fulke Greville noted in *Mustapha*, "For Power can neither see, worke, nor deuse / Without the people's hands, hearts, wit, and eyes."²⁵ And, although Shakespeare was author for *Henry VIII*, he was among the people as audience for the larger drama of James and his times.

University of New Orleans

- ¹ *Henry VIII: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988).
- ² The debate on authorship has died down recently; however, Thomas Merriam, although he disagrees with Spedding's act-scene breakdown dividing the play between Shakespeare and Fletcher, maintains the case for collaboration. See his "What Shakespeare Wrote in *Henry VIII*: Part One," *The Bard* 2 (1979): 81-94; "Part Two," *The Bard* 2 (1980): 111-18; "*Henry VIII* and the Integrity of the First Folio: Part Three," *The Bard* 3 (1981): 69-73. M. W. A. Smith takes exception to Merriam's methodology in "Stylometrics '84—A Workshop for Authorship Studies," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 34 (Winter 1984): 44-45. I remain, like Smith, unconvinced by stylometrics and in this paper I will refer to Shakespeare as the sole author of *Henry VIII*.
- ³ The criticism in the various camps is too vast to document here, but a few works deserve special mention. Among those who see the play as episodic are Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 271,291; and Anthony Herbold, "Shakespeare, Calderon, and *Henry the Eighth*," *East-West Review* 2 (1965): 17-32. In the "history" camp are Frank Cespedes, "We are one in fortunes": The Sense of History in *Henry VIII*," *ELR* 10 (1980): 412-38; and Kristian Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 145-58. The "masque" proponents include Clifford Leech, "Masking and Unmasking in the Last Plays," *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol Kay and Henry Jacobs (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978) 40-59; John Cox, *Henry VIII and the Masque*," *ELH* 45 (1978): 390-409; Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare and the Awareness of Audience* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985) 128-41; and Edward Barry, "Henry VIII and the Dynamics of Spectacle," *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979): 229-46. Closely allied and arguing for "romance" are Northrop Frye, "Romance as Masque," *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol Kay and Henry Jacobs (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978) 11-39, see especially 29-39; and Eugene Waith, "Shakespeare and the Ceremonies of Romance," *Shakespeare's Craft: Eight Lectures*, ed. Philip Highfill (Carbondale: U of Southern Illinois P, 1982) 113-37. Those discussing the play as a "hybrid" are Matthew Wikander, "Strange Truths: English Historical Drama in the Seventeenth Century," *Genre* 9 (1976): 193-214; Alexander Leggatt, *Henry VIII and the Ideal England*," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985): 131-43; and Paul Dean, "Dramatic Mode and Historical Vision in *Henry VIII*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986): 175-89.
- ⁴ Reprinted in, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, ed. Eugene Waith (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 168-79.
- ⁵ If, as some readers believe, Fletcher wrote the Prologue and the Epilogue, then the classical frame serves as earliest audience response for the text and further invites us to examine the questions of authorial control.
- ⁶ William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: New Arden, 1955). All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.
- ⁷ I have adapted this concept of authorial agency from Eugene Waith, "'Give Me Your Hands': Reflections on the Author's Agents in Comedy," *The Author and His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, ed. Louis Martz and Aubrey Williams (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978) 197-211.
- ⁸ Qtd. in Foakes 193; see also 26n.

- 9 Krantz, "Audience Response to *Henry VIII* and Cultural Destabiliz-
 See Robert Ornstein, *Questions of Genre and Audience in the Achievement
 of Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972) 206.
- 10 Kristian Smidt contends that, "When expectations are specifically raised and then disap-
 pointed, they concern relatively unimportant matters, or there are fairly plausible explana-
 tions for their not being fulfilled" (150). I believe audience expectations are distorted or
 destabilized over matters of considerable importance—thematic matters involving the nature
 of authority, dramatic matters involving characterization and plot.
- 11 Hereward T. Price first coined the expression, "mirror-scenes," in "Mirror-Scenes in
 Shakespeare," *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. James McManaway et al.
 (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948). Price demonstrates how Shakespeare uses
 one section of a scene, not to advance the action, but to focus the thematic concerns of the
 larger unit. In this play, Shakespeare uses the same technique to blur the focus.
- 12 Berry 129, 138.
- 13 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.:
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968) 255.
- 14 See G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays*
 (London: Oxford UP, 1947) 256-335.
- 15 *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1693. I accept the early 1590's
 as the date of composition for *More*; the exact date of the play is not germane to my argument,
 my point simply being that *More* is an Elizabethan play and *Henry VIII* is a Jacobean one.
- 16 "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *V*," *Political
 Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edd. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan
 Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 44.
- 17 Letter to Sir Edmund Bacon, 2 July 1613, qtd. in *The Riverside Shakespeare* 1842.
- 18 See "Henry VIII: A Jacobean History," *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979) 247-66. Baillie
 discusses the rumors of a new Spanish Armada in 1613 and mentions the marriage question.
 For a good account of the English reaction to the Spanish/English peace alliance, see Robert
 Kenney, "Peace with Spain, 1605," *History Today* 20 (March 1970): 198-208; and Sir Walter
 Raleigh's letter to King James, urging him to take up arms against, rather than negotiate
 peace with, the Spanish (*The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh*, vol 8 [Oxford, 1829; New York: Burt
 Franklin, (1965)] 300-316; see especially 307).
- 19 Osborne's record of the anecdote appears in the appendix to Sir Charles Cornwallis, *The Life
 and Character of Henry-Frederic, Prince of Wales . . .* (London, 1738) 98.
- 20 See Margot Heinemann's account of the growing Puritan faction in James's government in
 Chapters 1 and 2 of *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under
 the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980).
- 21 King James re-enacted the penal laws against the Catholics in 1604, and although he did
 little to enforce those laws—even in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot—Catholics felt
 acutely threatened, especially at the time of the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth.
- 22 Baillie 254-55.
- 23 Frederick Waage, Jr., "Henry VIII and the Crisis of the English History Play," *Shakespeare
 Studies* 8 (1975): 297-309, discusses the despair that gripped England at the time of Prince
 Henry's death and argues that the play reflects that sense of loss. Although I agree, I believe
 that the death of Prince Henry is just one, albeit a major one, of the cultural influences at work
 in this play.

- University of Dayton Review, Vol. 22, No. 1 [1993], Art. 14
- ²⁴ The time is a little later, but see especially Denis Donaghue, *The Sovereign Ghost: Studies in the Imagination* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976) 207-29.
- ²⁵ "Mustapha," in *The Works in Verse and Prose Complete of the Right Honourable Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, vol. 3 (1870; New York: AMS, 1966), 352.