

**shakespearean  
criticism**

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**2**



# shakespearean criticism

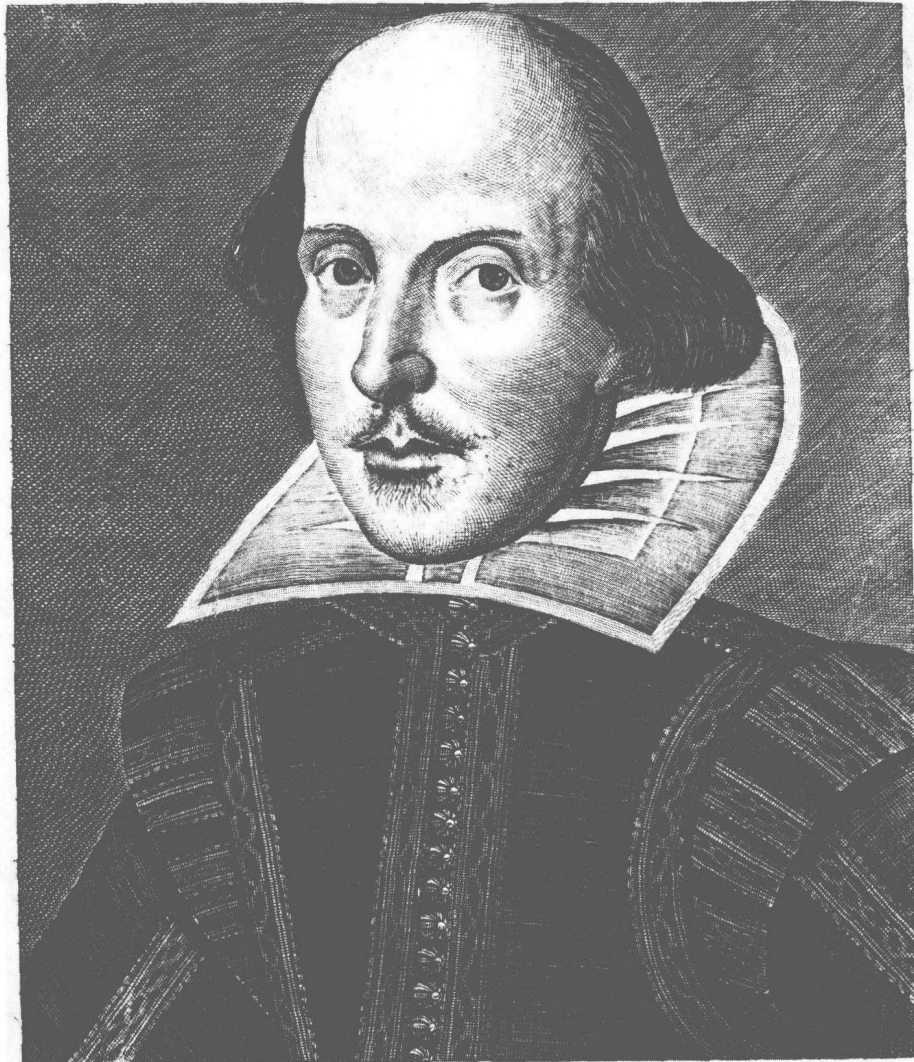
"Thou art a Monument without a tomb,  
And art alive still while thy Book doth  
live  
And we have wits to read and praise to  
give."

*Ben Jonson, from the preface  
to the First Folio, 1623.*

MR. WILLIAM  
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*Martin Droeshout sculpsit London.*

**L O N D O N**  
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Volume 2

# shakespearean criticism

Excerpts from the Criticism of  
William Shakespeare's Plays and Poetry,  
from the First Published Appraisals  
to Current Evaluations

**Laurie Lanzen Harris**  
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# Preface

The works of William Shakespeare have delighted audiences and inspired scholars for nearly four hundred years. Shakespeare's appeal is universal, for in its depth and breadth his work evokes a timeless insight into the human condition.

The vast amount of Shakespearean criticism is a testament to his enduring popularity. Each epoch has contributed to this critical legacy, responding to the comments of their forebears, bringing the moral and intellectual atmosphere of their own era to the works, and suggesting interpretations which continue to inspire critics of today. Thus, to chart the history of criticism on Shakespeare is to note the changing aesthetic philosophies of the past four centuries.

## The Scope of the Work

The success of Gale's four existing literary series, *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, and *Children's Literature Review (CLR)*, suggested an equivalent need among students and teachers of Shakespeare. Moreover, since the criticism of Shakespeare's works spans four centuries and is larger in size and scope than that of any author, a prodigious amount of critical material confronts the student.

*Shakespearean Criticism (SC)* presents significant passages from published criticism on the works of Shakespeare. Seven volumes of the series will be devoted to aesthetic criticism of the plays. Performance criticism will be treated in separate special volumes. Other special volumes will be devoted to such topics as Shakespeare's poetry, the authorship controversy and the apocrypha, stage history of the plays, and other general subjects, such as Shakespeare's language, religious and philosophical thought, and characterization. The first seven volumes will each contain criticism on four to six plays, with an equal balance of genres and an equal balance of plays based on their critical importance. Thus, Volume 2 contains criticism on one major tragedy (*King Lear*), one major comedy (*Measure for Measure*), one minor comedy (*Love's Labour's Lost*), one history (*Henry VIII*), and one romance (*Pericles*).

The length of each entry is intended to represent the play's critical reception in English, including those works which have been translated into English. The editors have tried to identify only the major critics and lines of inquiry for each play. Each entry represents a historical overview of the critical response to the play: early criticism is presented to indicate initial responses and later selections represent significant trends in the history of criticism on the play. We have also attempted to identify and include excerpts from the seminal essays on each play by the most important Shakespearean critics. We have directed our series to students in late high school and early college who are beginning their study of Shakespeare. Thus, ours is not a work for the specialist, but is rather an introduction for the researcher newly acquainted with the works of Shakespeare.

## The Organization of the Book

Each entry consists of the following elements: play heading, an introduction, excerpts of criticism (each followed by a bibliographical citation), and an additional bibliography for further reading.

The *introduction* begins with a discussion of the date, text, and sources of the play. This section is followed by a critical history which outlines the major critical trends and identifies the prominent commentators on the play.

*Criticism* is arranged chronologically within each play entry to provide a perspective on the changes in critical evaluation over the years. For purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece. For an anonymous essay later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets at the beginning of the excerpt and in the bibliographical citation.



Within the text, all act, scene, and line designations have been changed to conform to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, published by Houghton Mifflin Company, which is a standard text used in many high school and college English classes. Most of the individual essays are prefaced with *explanatory notes* as an additional aid to students using *SC*. The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including: the importance of the critics in literary history, the critical schools with which they are identified, if any, and the importance of their comments on Shakespeare and the play discussed. The explanatory notes also identify the main issues in the commentary on each play and include cross references to related criticism in the entry. In addition, the notes provide previous publication information such as original title and date for foreign language publications.

A complete *bibliographical citation* designed to facilitate the location of the original essay or book follows each piece of criticism.

Within each play entry are *illustrations*, such as facsimiles of title pages taken from the Quarto and First Folio editions of the plays as well as pictures drawn from such sources as early editions of the collected works and artist's renderings of some of the famous scenes and characters of Shakespeare's plays. The captions following each illustration indicate act, scene, characters, and the artist and date, if known. The illustrations are arranged chronologically and, as a complement to the criticism, provide a historical perspective on Shakespeare throughout the centuries.

The *additional bibliography* appearing at the end of each play entry suggests further reading on the play. This section includes references to the major discussions of the date, the text, and the sources of each play.

Each volume of *SC* includes a cumulative index to plays that provides the volume number in which the plays appear. *SC* also includes a cumulative index to critics; under each critic's name are listed the plays on which the critic has written and the volume and page where the criticism appears.

An appendix is also included that lists the sources from which the material in the volume is reprinted. It does not, however, list every book or periodical consulted for the volume.

### **Acknowledgments**

No work of this scope can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people. The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpts included in this volume, the permissions managers of the book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reprint rights, and the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the University of Michigan libraries, and the Wayne State University Library for making their resources available to us. We would especially like to thank the staff of the Rare Book Room of the University of Michigan Library for their research assistance and the Folger Shakespeare Library for their help in picture research. We would also like to thank Jeri Yaryan and Anthony J. Bogucki for assistance with copyright research.

### **Suggestions Are Welcome**

The editors welcome the comments and suggestions of readers to expand the coverage and enhance the usefulness of the series.

# **shakespearean criticism**

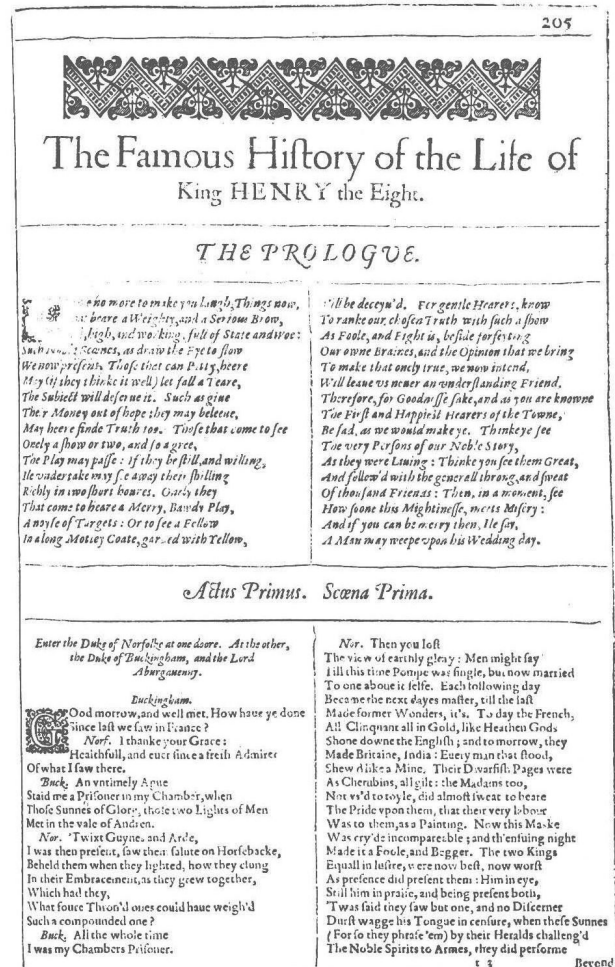


# Henry VIII

**DATE:** Although several critics have speculated that Shakespeare composed *Henry VIII* as early as 1593 or 1602, most scholars agree that the play was written in late 1612 or early 1613. Stylistic and thematic similarities between *Henry VIII* and Shakespeare's romances suggest the later dates, as do the drama's parallels to controversial issues that were contemporary with the early Stuart era. For example, Henry's role as prosecutor or judge in the four trial scenes reflects the debate over the king's relationship to common law prevalent during the first decades of the seventeenth century, and his divorce from Katharine in the play suggests the divorce proceedings conducted against the Earl of Essex in 1613. In addition to the internal evidence, there exists a letter written by Sir Henry Wotton on July 2, 1613, in which he refers to "a new play called *All Is True*"—a title critics generally accept as the original one Shakespeare applied to *Henry VIII*. Scholars also rely on Wotton's letter to determine the first performance of the play, which is suggested as June 29, 1613, the date the original Globe Theater burned down. Wotton writes that the accident occurred when "certain Cannons" were fired at the appearance of King Henry at Wolsey's masque, a fact which further substantiates the assertion that *All Is True* and *Henry VIII* are the same play, since stage directions in the Folio edition of the play call for the firing of cannons at the beginning of that scene. Finally, most commentators suggest that, although it is not listed among the fourteen plays performed to celebrate the wedding of England's Princess Elizabeth and Germany's Prince Frederick on February 4, 1613, it is likely that *Henry VIII* was composed specifically for this occasion, but was withdrawn after its tone and subject matter were deemed unsuitable for a wedding celebration.

**TEXT:** No quarto edition of *Henry VIII* exists. It was originally published as the last history play in the First Folio of 1623 as *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth*. Accumulated evidence indicates that the Folio edition was based on a fair copy—a corrected version of the author's manuscript—rather than a prompt-copy. The text contains act and scene divisions, with complete and intricate stage directions that are often directly quoted from Shakespeare's historical sources. Variations in the speech prefixes assigned to characters in *Henry VIII* can be attributed to the compositors of the Folio, but the discrepancies of characters' names within the text are probably the fault of the original manuscript. These irregularities indicate that the text could not have been taken from a prompt-copy, which would have required definite, distinct speech headings.

Although the text of *Henry VIII* presents few difficulties that can be ascribed to textual corruption, its various verse patterns have prompted an important controversy surrounding the play. In 1850, James Spedding proposed that John Fletcher had collaborated with Shakespeare on *Henry VIII*, thereby accounting for what the critic perceived as two different styles in the drama. He based his theory on an analysis of the play's language and meter, and for the next eighty years scholars generally accepted his hypothesis. However, most recent critics either deny the dissimilarities in style or regard them as intentional on Shakespeare's part, and many attribute the play totally to Shakespeare.



Title page of King Henry VIII taken from the First Folio (1623). By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

**SOURCES:** Critics agree that Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (second edition, 1586-87) served as the primary source for the first four acts of *Henry VIII*, while John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1597) supplied Shakespeare with Cranmer's story, which appears in Act V. Several passages in *Henry VIII* closely resemble lines from Edward Hall's *Chronicle of the Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1540), and portions of Wolsey's farewell speeches were apparently taken from John Speed's *The History of Great Britain* (1611). Many scenes in the play closely follow their sources; in fact, some are simply the prose passages of Holinshed or Foxe transcribed into verse. Critics have also noted numerous alterations in the chronology of certain historical events. For example, Katharine's death actually occurred in 1536, three years after the birth of Elizabeth, and Cranmer's trial took place after 1540; in *Henry VIII*, Elizabeth is born after Katharine dies, and Cranmer's trial takes place before Elizabeth is christened. Scholars generally attribute this rearrangement of events to dramatic license and consider it of little importance other than providing a sense of temporal continuity to the play's action.

**CRITICAL HISTORY:** Opinion of the value of *Henry VIII* has ranged from Samuel Pepys's comment that the drama is a simple patchwork of little merit, to Hermann Ulrici's complaint that it offends historic and poetic justice, to the assertion of G. Wilson Knight that it is the ultimate statement unifying Shakespeare's "whole life-work." The fundamental point of contention behind this diversity of interpretation appears to be the question of structural unity. Prior to the twentieth century, most commentators characterized the play as disjointed, a premise that led directly to the authorship controversy and to arguments over its date of composition. Since the 1930s, however, an increasing number of critics have argued that *Henry VIII* is more structurally and thematically cohesive than earlier commentators perceived. To demonstrate this point they have focused on the role of King Henry in the drama, the meaning of the tragedies of Buckingham, Wolsey, and Katharine, and the relation of Cranmer's prophecy to the rest of the play.

The air of controversy that permeates criticism of *Henry VIII* began in the seventeenth century with conflicting assessments of the play's pageantry. Wotton complained that the majesty and splendor in the play are made "very familiar, if not ridiculous," whereas Pepys considered the masques and processions the only parts "good or well done," an opinion echoed by Samuel Johnson in the following century. Critics of both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also debated over characterization in *Henry VIII*, as well as Shakespeare's moral purpose. Although most praised Shakespeare for his portraits of Katharine of Aragon and Wolsey, they nevertheless questioned his presentation of these two figures in the same play—since both appear to contend for our sympathy—and, more importantly, the appearance of such characters in a drama that seemed concerned with other matters. Neoclassical critics like Johnson and Charlotte Lennox cited these shortcomings as the reason for the disunity they perceived in *Henry VIII*.

Most eighteenth-century critics devoted their attention to examinations of the characters in *Henry VIII*. Unlike Rowe and Lennox, Edward Capell studied Henry's portrait and declared that it was a "finish'd" representation. By pointing out Anne Boleyn's "addiction to levities," Capell was also the first critic to question the traditional acceptance of that character's innocence. Both Nicholas Amhurst and Elizabeth Griffith focused on Wolsey's role in the play, the former claiming that he represents greed and ambition in human nature, the latter interpreting his tragedy as a depiction of the instability of worldly greatness. Katharine was the only character in *Henry VIII* who elicited universal admiration. Rowe praised her virtue and dignity and wished that she had received a more pleasing fate, while Johnson considered her portrait, along with the pageantry, the only redeeming aspects of the play. Griffith regarded Katharine as the central figure in *Henry VIII*, the one character whose tragedy eclipses even the play's final celebration.

Critics did not examine the stylistic and thematic complexities in *Henry VIII* until the middle of the eighteenth century. Richard Roderick was the first commentator to notice "peculiar" measures in the poetry. He insisted that the instances of extra-syllable line endings in *Henry VIII* are double the number contained in any other Shakespearean play. He also discovered "unusual" pauses and remarked that Shakespeare's dramatic emphasis often clashes with the rhythm of the verse. Roderick's assessment significantly influenced the conclusions of James Spedding, the nineteenth-century critic who firmly established the theory of dual authorship that has influenced *Henry VIII*

criticism to the present day. Roderick himself, however, did not regard the play as the work of any writer other than Shakespeare. That idea was first suggested by Johnson, who maintained that the prologue, epilogue, and other portions of the play show the characteristics of Ben Jonson's work. Over a decade later, Edmond Malone—the first scholar to attempt to establish the original date of *Henry VIII*—concurred with Johnson on the possibility of dual authorship. Malone asserted that the favorable portraits of Henry and Anne and the fact that Elizabeth, rather than James I, is the main subject of Cranmer's prophecy all indicate that the play was composed as a tribute to Queen Elizabeth in 1603. He also suggested that Jonson later added the pageantry and the references to James I in Cranmer's prophecy prior to the first performance of the play in 1613.

Critical discussions of the structural and thematic unity of *Henry VIII* continued in the nineteenth century, with many commentators attempting to ascertain the play's meaning as well as offering numerous theories on its lack of cohesiveness. However, the most influential nineteenth-century discussion of the play is Spedding's "Who Wrote Shakspeare's *Henry VIII*?" In this essay—the first disintegrationist reading of *Henry VIII*—Spedding examined the inconsistent verse structure that had been described by Roderick nearly a hundred years earlier. After a close analysis of the play, he concluded that Shakespeare had not written it alone and suggested that John Fletcher had worked alternately upon portions of it. Spedding's study included a chart that illustrated his contention, attributing introductory scenes to Shakespeare and the remainder to Fletcher. Until the middle decades of the twentieth century, Spedding's theory was widely accepted. Algernon Charles Swinburne was the only commentator of the nineteenth century to totally reject Spedding's ideas. An avid reader of Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, Swinburne regarded Spedding's verse-analysis test as misguided and his conclusion unfounded. He considered Fletcher incapable of creating many of the scenes that Spedding attributed to him, and therefore believed that Shakespeare was the sole author of *Henry VIII*.

In their interpretations of the major critical issues surrounding *Henry VIII*, nineteenth-century critics introduced several new topics. August Wilhelm Schlegel initiated the theory that Shakespeare's ten English histories form "an historical heroic poem" that "furnishes examples of the political course of the world, applicable at all times." He perceived *Henry VIII* as the epilogue to this series and saw it as a dramatization of the transition in Europe from feudalism to modern governmental policy. Hermann Ulrici interpreted *Henry VIII* as a comment on the beginning of an absolute monarchy in England and "a new era in history." Ulrici also introduced another important idea to criticism of the play: he was the first critic to examine the disparity between its joyful ending and the suffering experienced by Buckingham, Katharine, and Wolsey. Ulrici asserted that the final scenes of the play, in which Henry wins a new wife and the blessings of a great daughter, violate both poetic justice and the justice of God, and therefore discredit the entire play. G. G. Gervinus put forth a similar interpretation some years later, and it has since become a major topic of contention in twentieth-century criticism of *Henry VIII*.

Characterization, an important subject in the Neoclassical criticism of *Henry VIII*, continued to receive substantial consideration during the nineteenth century. Katharine was the most frequently discussed character, although both Wolsey and King Henry acquired greater interest among commentators on the



play. The most important character studies included those by William Hazlitt, Anna Brownell Jameson, H. N. Hudson, Karl Elze, and Denton J. Snider. Hazlitt referred to Katharine as "the most perfect delineation of matronly dignity" and commended Shakespeare's unflattering portrait of Henry. Jameson was the first commentator to compare Katharine with Hermione, the heroine of *The Winter's Tale*, a topic that received further consideration in the essays by G. Wilson Knight, R. A. Foakes, and Hugh M. Richmond in the following century. Jameson was also the first critic to emphasize the contrast between Katharine's "truth as a quality of the soul" and Anne's "absolute femalities." Hudson further developed this point when he argued that Shakespeare specifically designed Anne as a foil to Katharine, the young, impetuous bride illuminating the rejected Queen's personality through her inability to achieve or understand "womanly principle and delicacy." Elze maintained that the fates of Katharine and Wolsey represent the fall of Catholicism, while the rise of Cranmer and Anne symbolize "the approaching dawn of Protestantism." Snider advanced a similar idea when he suggested that the central concern of *Henry VIII* is the conflict generated by the political and moral impact of the Reformation, represented on the political level by the defeat of Wolsey, and on the moral level by the divorce of Katharine and the coronation of the Protestant queen Anne.

Discussion of the composition date of *Henry VIII*, a topic introduced by Malone in the eighteenth century, continued into the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Schlegel supported Malone's theory that Shakespeare first wrote the play in 1603, and that Ben Jonson revised it in 1613. Elze combined the conclusions of Malone and Spedding, claiming that Shakespeare wrote *Henry VIII* in 1603 and that both Fletcher and Jonson revised it ten years later. Taking an opposing view, Ulrici, Charles Knight, Spedding, and Hudson all contended that *Henry VIII* was originally composed in 1613. Ulrici explored the possibility that the play was written as a "court piece" for James I and that Shakespeare had planned to add a second part in which the play's conflicts would be resolved. Knight believed that evidence was inadequate to support those hypotheses that attributed an earlier date to the play, and he accepted Wotton's reference to *Henry VIII* as "a new play" as meaning just that. Spedding argued that Shakespeare and Fletcher collaborated on *Henry VIII* to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth in 1613. Hudson concurred with both Knight's and Spedding's findings, pointing to the information presented in Wotton's letter and to other internal matter as evidence for the later composition date.

The focus of *Henry VIII* criticism in the twentieth century shifted from questions of disunity to the recognition and analysis of its structural and thematic integrity. This gradually led critics to dispute the dual authorship theory and to regard Shakespeare as the sole author of *Henry VIII*; it also led to the discovery of internal parallels to contemporary issues that indicate 1613 as the date of composition. Critical debate in recent years has centered on the exact relationship between *Henry VIII* and Shakespeare's earlier plays. A number of critics emphasized the thematic and symbolic links with the romances, while others concentrated on the structural and thematic parallels to the histories; still others have interpreted the play as a synthesis of both the histories and the romances. Scholars have also discussed the play's examination of the nature of truth, the importance of the mythic wheel of fortune motif, the dramatic function of the pageantry and spectacle, the meaning of the play in light of the tragedies of Buckingham, Katharine, and Wolsey, and the work's prophetic ending.

The shift in critical emphasis in the first half of the twentieth century began as a reaction against Spedding and his supporters. Peter Alexander was one of the earliest modern critics to maintain that Spedding's assumptions were either unsubstantiated or contradicted by available evidence. In naming Shakespeare the sole author of *Henry VIII*, Alexander prepared the foundation for much of the twentieth-century criticism of the play. He based his conclusion on the contention that those linguistic characteristics which Spedding "claimed as peculiar to Fletcher" are often found in Shakespeare's later works, and that many of Spedding's "Fletcherian" oddities can be found even in those parts of the play he assigned to Shakespeare. However, a number of critics continued to question the authorship, and therefore the integrity, of the play. Sir John Squire referred to *Henry VIII* as "one of the worst-shaped plays that was ever put upon the stage"; for this reason, he regarded Shakespeare's contribution as minimal, though he offered no other suggestions concerning a possible second author. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon explained that the imagery in the play exemplifies Shakespeare's habit of seeing "emotional or mental situations" as continually repeated pictures of physical activity, but she attributed only a few of Spedding's "Fletcherian" scenes to Shakespeare. Mark Van Doren labelled *Henry VIII* "an imitation of Shakespeare," but he was unable to ascertain whether Shakespeare had imitated himself or had been emulated by another dramatist. Clifford Leech, reflecting a more current attitude, stated that a definite answer to the authorship question is impossible. Robert Ornstein, the only critic in the past two decades who has supported Spedding's argument, was convinced that Fletcher had a "preeminent" collaborative role in the play's composition. He considered *Henry VIII* an aimless and dissatisfying work and attributed to Fletcher its lack of motivation and psychological insight, its element of self-abasement, its indefinite structure, and its contrived ending.

G. Wilson Knight's detailed discussion, one of the most important studies of *Henry VIII* in the twentieth century, greatly influenced critics' recognition of the structural and thematic unity in the play. He examined the major topics that had been treated in previous years, such as the authorship controversy, the relationship of *Henry VIII* to Shakespeare's earlier plays, and the meaning of the play itself and put forth his own theory that the drama recapitulates Shakespeare's earlier histories while it is "modulated and enriched by the wisdom garnered during intermediate works," such as *Macbeth*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Pericles*. Knight based several points of his argument on the findings of Edgar I. Fripp, who was the first critic to note a parallel between the imagery of *Henry VIII* and that of Shakespeare's romances and tragedies. Besides discussing the relation of *Henry VIII* to Shakespeare's other plays, Knight also argued that the "broken metre" of the drama, which such critics as Roderick and Spedding had claimed was so unlike Shakespeare, is in reality reflective of the "deeper, spiritual aristocracy that underlies all Shakespeare's noblest thought." He also defined the pageantry in the play as a "realistic and more directly social" extension of the natural tempests in the romances and maintained that the themes of reconciliation and self-awareness display Shakespeare's abiding concern for England as a nation. Knight concluded his essay by stating that Shakespeare, in Cranmer's final prophecy, not only defines the "indwelling spirit of his nation", but also represents the culminating statement of Shakespeare's "whole life-work."

Although many twentieth-century critics employed an eclectic method of analysis to classify the genre and achieve a fuller

understanding of *Henry VIII*, they often emphasized single aspects of the play. Utilizing a historical approach, Frank Kermode characterized *Henry VIII* as "an anthology of falls" from the grace of God, and as a seventeenth-century descendant of the medieval morality play, *Mirror for Magistrates*. Northrop Frye employed the methods of myth criticism and found that the wheel of fortune motif organizes the drama into an unending series of falls. Lee Bliss and Frank V. Cespedes investigated the mythic wheel of fortune motif in connection with the ambiguity, linguistic complexity, and historic irony inherent in *Henry VIII*. Bliss discovered that Cranmer's vision offers "a solution to the world's political sickness and corruption and an escape from the endless repetitions of history" represented in the fates of Buckingham, Katharine, and Wolsey. Cespedes, like Frye, maintained that fortune's wheel continued to turn, and that the ending of the play still proclaims "the alarming ambiguities of history." Paul Bertram and C. B. Purdom interpreted the play as a depiction of the political education of a king and as a study of the value of kingship to English society.

Many twentieth-century critics, including R. A. Foakes, Howard Felperin, and Bernard Harris, regarded the structural, thematic, and linguistic elements that define *Henry VIII* as similar to those in the late romances. Foakes contended that the "heart of the play" presents the conflict between "public interest and private joy and suffering," which is illustrated in the juxtaposition of the pageantry and the personal visions. Like the romances, Foakes argued, *Henry VIII* contains the repeated suggestion that self-awareness is gained only through the exercise of patience, and it is toward this realization that the characters evolve. Felperin remarked that the fall-conversion structure of the play is a Christian adaptation of the mythic process of reconciliation developed in the romances. Echoing G. Wilson Knight, Felperin concluded that "truth" in *Henry VIII* resides in "the eternal relevance of the great Christian myth upon which it rests." Harris proposed that Cranmer's prophecy patiently rebukes the belief among Shakespeare's contemporaries that England's destined struggle with the Catholic Church would be troublesome and violent. He equated the expansion of peace under Elizabeth with the prophecy of peace that concludes the final reconciliation scene in *Cymbeline*.

A number of recent critics have maintained that *Henry VIII* combines the political conflicts and motives of Shakespeare's earlier histories with the symbolism, self-conscious searching, and masques characteristic of the romances. Frances A. Yates explored the relationship between the presentation of mythical history in *Cymbeline* and the evidence of Tudor imperialism in *Henry VIII*. She concluded that Shakespeare's view of history in *Henry VIII* combines "the ancient purity of British chivalric tradition" and the "purity of royal and Tudor reformation" within the conciliatory atmosphere of the romances. Tom McBride claimed that the moral disparity in the play, especially surrounding the actions of King Henry, can be resolved if we see the drama as positing "two ultimately valid moral codes"—one Christian, the other Machiavellian. McBride considered *Henry VIII* primarily a study of Henry's development into a Machiavellian ruler; he thus characterized the play as a "Machiavellian romance" in that it achieves romantic ends through the political manipulations of its protagonist. Hugh M. Richmond analyzed the characters of Anne, Katharine, and Elizabeth as illustrations of the feminine approach to life that Shakespeare explored in the romances. In the character of Katharine, as well as in the reign of Queen Elizabeth alluded to in the play, Richmond sees Shakespeare expressing his model for earthly existence—an ideal which stresses the values of

virtue, honesty, compassion, and the acceptance of providential will beyond human understanding. Eckhard Auberlen identified in *Henry VIII* a number of political issues prominent during the Stuart reign. He contended that the play's themes of patience and reconciliation—concepts which, he noted, *Henry VIII* shares with the romances—offer a compromise solution to the political conflicts of the period.

The complex linguistic and thematic design of *Henry VIII*, its stylistic anomalies, and its relation to both the earlier histories and the later romances have inspired disparate interpretations and have made the play one of the most controversial in Shakespeare's canon. Although the focus of recent criticism has shifted from external questions, such as the play's authorship, to an examination of its aesthetic merits, critics generally agree that much remains to be explored in the play. The only accepted certainty is that *Henry VIII* is no longer considered an inferior drama. In fact, many modern scholars maintain that its concluding vision reveals Shakespeare's plan for the future of England and outlines, as G. Wilson Knight stated, "that greater peace . . . whose cause that nation was, and is, to serve."

#### SIR HENRY WOTTON (letter date 1613)

[Wotton's reference to "a new play called All Is True" in his account of the June 29, 1613 Globe Theater fire is often quoted by critics attempting to date the first performance of *Henry VIII*. "All is True" is considered by most critics to be the original subtitle of *Henry VIII*. In the following excerpt, Wotton complains about the excess of pageantry in the play—an objection that is countered by Samuel Pepys (1664), Samuel Johnson (1765), and many twentieth-century commentators.]

Now, to let matters of State sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what hath happened this Week at the Banks side. The King's Players had a new Play, called *All is true*, representing some principal pieces of the Reign of *Henry the 8th*, which was set forth with many extraordinary Circumstances of Pomp and Majesty, even to the matting of the Stage; the Knights of the Order, with their Georges and Garter, the Guards with their embroidered Coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make Greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King *Henry* making a Masque at the Cardinal *Wolsey's* House, and certain Cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the Paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the Thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoak, and their Eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole House to the very ground.

This was the fatal period of that virtuous Fabrique; wherein yet nothing did perish, but Wood and Straw, and a few forsaken Cloaks; only one Man had his Breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broyled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with Bottle-Ale.

*Sir Henry Wotton, in a letter to Sir Edmund Bacon on July 2, 1613, in The Shakspeare Allusion-Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakspeare from 1591-1700, Vol. I, edited by John Munro, Books for Libraries Press, 1970; distributed by Arno Press, Inc., p. 239.*

## SAMUEL PEPYS (diary date 1664)

[A diversified background of travel, intellectual pursuits, and public office gave Pepys both the opportunity and the initiative to act as a close observer of English society in the seventeenth century. His unique Diary is an unreserved study of the affairs and customs of his time. His personal revelations create a document of unusual psychological interest and also provide a history of the Restoration theater. The excerpt below comes from his Diary in which he states that the pageantry in Henry VIII is the only aspect of the play that is "good or well done." This comment contradicts that of Sir Henry Wotton (1613) but is supported by Samuel Johnson (1765).]

Went to the Duke's house, the first play I have been at these six months, according to my last vow, and here saw the so much cried-up play of "Henry the Eighth;" which, though I went with resolution to like it, is so simple a thing made up of a great many patches, that, besides the shows and processions in it, there is nothing in the world good or well done.

Samuel Pepys, in a diary entry of January 1, 1664, in *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakspeare from 1591 to 1700*, Vol. II, edited by John Munro, revised edition, 1932. Reprint by Books for Libraries Press, 1970; distributed by Arno Press, Inc., p. 91.

## NICHOLAS ROWE (essay date 1709)

[Rowe was the editor of the first critical edition of Shakespeare's plays and the author of the first authoritative Shakespeare biography. In his edition of *The Works of William Shakespeare*, Vol. I, published in 1709, Rowe became one of the first critics to regard Shakespeare as an "untutored genius" and to excuse his often-cited violation of the Neoclassical rules for correct drama on grounds that he was unaware of their existence. In the following excerpt, taken from his biographical and critical preface to his edition of Shakespeare, he justifies Shakespeare's rather favorable portrait of Henry VIII as conceived out of respect for Queen Elizabeth, a view also supported by Charlotte Lennox (1754), Edmond Malone (1778), and Karl Elze (1874). Shakespeare's treatment of King Henry is a major topic of contention in Henry VIII criticism; he has been variously interpreted as an uncivilized ruler, a divine agent of providence, the historical counterpart to Shakespeare's *Prospero*, and the definitive expression of Shakespeare's fascination with kingship. For examples of these readings, see the excerpts by William Hazlitt (1817), Denton J. Snider (1890), Frank Kermode (1947), G. Wilson Knight (1947), R. A. Foakes (1957), Paul Bertram (1962), and Howard Felperin (1966).]

In [Shakespeare's] *Henry VIII* that Prince is drawn with that Greatness of Mind and all those good Qualities which are attributed to him in any Account of his Reign. If his Faults are not shewn in an equal degree, and the Shades in this Picture do not bear a just Proportion to the Lights, it is not that the Artist wanted either Colours or Skill in the Disposition of 'em. But the truth, I believe, might be that he forbore doing it out of regard to Queen Elizabeth, since it could have been no very great Respect to the Memory of his Mistress to have expos'd some certain Parts of her Father's Life upon the Stage. He has dealt more freely with the Minister of that Great King, and certainly nothing was ever more justly written than the Character of Cardinal Wolsey. He has shewn him Tyrannical, Cruel, and Insolent in his Prosperity; and yet, by a wonderful Address, he makes his Fall and Ruin the Subject of general Compassion. The whole Man, with his Vices and Virtues, is finely and exactly described in the second Scene of the fourth Act. The Distresses likewise of Queen Katherine in this Play, are very movingly touch'd; and tho' the Art of the Poet has skreen'd

King Henry from any gross Imputation of Injustice yet one is inclin'd to wish the Queen had met with a Fortune more worthy of her Birth and Virtue. (pp. 199-200)

Nicholas Rowe, in an extract from Shakespeare, the *Critical Heritage: 1693-1733*, Vol. 2, edited by Brian Vickers, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. 190-202.

## [NICHOLAS AMHURST?] (essay date 1727)

[The following character sketch of Cardinal Wolsey is taken from an anonymous article in the November 18, 1727 issue of the *Craftsman*. This political journal was established in 1726 by Nicholas Amhurst, who opposed the Whig administration of Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole. To illustrate his contempt for Walpole and the Whigs, Amhurst filled the *Craftsman* with numerous literary and historical examples of political corruption, particularly from the works of Shakespeare; for this reason, the essay below is generally attributed to him. In it, he declares that Wolsey's role demonstrates that greed and ambition are inherent in human nature, a maxim that exemplifies the Neoclassical penchant for extracting a moral lesson from a work of art.]

I went the other Night to the Play called *The Life of Henry VIII*, written by Shakespeare, designing not only to treat my Eyes with a *Coronation* in Miniature and see away my three Shillings, but to improve my Understanding by beholding my Countrymen who have been near two Centuries in Ashes revive again, and act and talk in the same Manner as they then did. Such a Representation as This, given us by so great a Master, throws one's Eye back upon our Ancestors; and while I am present at the Action I cannot help believing my self a real Spectator and Contemporary with our old Huff-bluff English Monarch, Henry VIII, so much does the useful Delusion of a well-written Play delight and instruct us beyond the cold Narrations of a dry Historian. But the principal Figure, and that which stood fullest out to me, was the great Minister. There you see an ambitious, proud, bad Man of Parts, in the Possession of a wise and brave Prince, amassing Wealth, taxing the griev'd Commons, and abusing his Trust and Power to support his Vanity and Luxury. As it is usual with this Sort of great Men, all the Errors He commits are his Master's and every Thing that may be praise-worthy his own. We find a very remarkable Instance of This in the second Scene of this Play. Good Queen Katharine intercedes with the King that some heavy Taxes might be mitigated, which the People complained were levied upon them by the Order of this wicked Minister. . . . The King, very justly alarmed and moved with the Recital of these Hardships which his People laboured under, commands the Cardinal to write into the several Counties forthwith, and gives his Orders that these Taxes should immediately cease, and free Pardon be granted to all who had denied the Payment of them; upon which the Minister turns to Cromwell and gives his Instructions in these Words:

—A Word with you.  
Let there be Letters writ to ev'ry Shire,  
Of the King's Grace and Pardon. The griev'd Commons  
Hardly conceive of Me. Let it be noised,  
That thro' OUR INTERCESSION this Revokement  
And Pardon comes. [l. ii. 102-07]

There cannot be an Instance of a more shocking Insolence. The Minister injures, and the Minister forgives. He wrongs the People, and is so gracious as to forgive the People whom he has wrong'd. What a Figure does a great and a brave Prince make under the Wing and Tutelage of such a Servant! A Min-

ister like *This is a Sponge* (as the same excellent Author says in *Hamlet*) who sucks up the King's Countenance, his Rewards, his Authorities.

Shakespeare has chosen to bring this Minister upon the Stage in his full Lustre, when he was in high Favour and just after the Peace and League concluded with France. . . . (pp. 443-44)

Buckingham describes the Minister as a partaking of the Natures of a Fox and a Wolf (equally ravenous and subtle, prone to Mischief and able to perform it) and compares this Peace to a Glass that broke in rinsing; and then he says

This cunning Cardinal  
Th' Articles of the Combination drew  
As himself pleased, and they were ratify'd  
As he cry'd, thus let be, to as much End  
As give a Crutch to the Dead. [I. i. 168-72]

A little after This he says the Emperor grew jealous of this new Amity between France and us for that

From this League  
Harms peep'd that menac'd him. He privately  
Deals with our Cardinal; and, as I trow,  
Which I do well, for I am sure the Emperor  
Paid ere he promised, whereby his Suit  
Was granted ere 'twas ask'd; but when the Way was made  
And paved with Gold; the Emperor thus desired  
That he would alter the King's Course  
And break the aforesaid Peace. Let the King know  
(As soon he shall by me) that thus the Cardinal  
Does buy and sell his Honour as he pleases,  
And for his own Advantage. [I. i. 182-93]

At length we behold this great Administrator declining. The Favour of the King is gone. . . . (pp. 444-45)

He is found guilty of a *Praemunire*, and all his Goods seized into the King's Hand. And now this Man, who made so very bad a Figure as a Minister, makes a very good one as a *Philosopher*. He became his Disgrace very well; and Shakespeare has put some Words into his Mouth which all good Ministers will read with Pleasure and bad ones with Pain. Wolsey says to Cromwell,

Mark thou my Fall, and That which ruin'd me.  
Cromwell, I charge thee fling away Ambition.  
By that Sin fell the Angels. How can Man then  
(The Image of his Maker) hope to win it?  
Love thyself last. Cherish those Hearts that hate thee.  
Corruption gains no more than Honesty.  
Still in thy right Hand carry gentle Peace,  
To silence envious Tongues. Be just, and fear not.  
Let all the Ends thou aim'st at be thy Country's;  
Thy God's and Truth's. [III. ii. 439-48]

Thus, Sir, I have thrown together some of the Out-lines by which the Character of this ambitious, wealthy, bad Minister is described in the very Words of Shakespeare. Reflecting People may observe from this Picture how like human Nature is in her Workings at all Times. (pp. 445-46)

[Nicholas Amhurst?], in an extract from Shakespeare, the Critical Heritage: 1693-1733, Vol. 2, edited by Brian Vickers, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. 442-46.

[CHARLOTTE LENNOX] (essay date 1754)

[Lennox was an American-born novelist and Shakespearean scholar who compiled a three-volume edition of translated texts of the sources used by Shakespeare in twenty-two of his plays, including some analyses of the ways in which he used these sources. The following excerpt is taken from her study *Shakespeare Illustrated*, first published in 1754. Lennox devotes the majority of her essay to demonstrating Shakespeare's dependence on Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but she also argues that Shakespeare's combination of both *Katharine's* and *Wolsey's* personal tragedies in Henry VIII destroys "the Unity of his Fable." Lennox further maintains that Shakespeare purposely left his portrait of King Henry incomplete in order not to offend Queen Elizabeth. This opinion was also voiced by Nicholas Rowe (1709), Edmond Malone (1778), and Karl Elze (1874); however, Edward Capell (1779), as well as most nineteenth-century critics—including August Wilhelm Schlegel (1808), William Hazlitt (1817), Hermann Ulrici (1839), and H. N. Hudson (1872)—regard Shakespeare's treatment of King Henry as realistic.]

[*King Henry VIII*] might be properly called the Fall of Cardinal Wolsey, if the Action had closed with the Marriage of the King to Anna Bullen. . . .

[But] the Action could not be considered as one and entire, while Queen Catharine's Sufferings make so large a Part of it, and which, from the Dignity of her Character, and the great and sudden Reverse of her Fortune, cannot, with any Propriety, form only a subordinate Incident in a Play, whose Subject is the Fall of a much less considerable Person than herself. (p. 225)

The Fate of this Queen, or that of Cardinal Wolsey, each singly afforded a Subject for Tragedy. Shakespeare, by blending them in the same Piece, has destroyed the Unity of his Fable, divided our Attention between them; and, by adding many other interconnected Incidents, all foreign to his Design, has given us an irregular historical Drama, instead of a finished Tragedy. (p. 226)

Tho' the Character of King Henry is drawn after [the historian Holinshed], yet Shakespeare has placed it in the most advantageous Light, in this Play he represents him as greatly displeased with the Grievances of his Subjects and ordering them to be relieved, tender and obliging to his Queen, grateful to the Cardinal, and in the Case of Cranmer, capable of distinguishing and rewarding true Merit. If, in the latter Part of the Play, he endeavours to cast the disagreeable Parts of this Prince's Character as much into Shade as possible, it is not to be wondered at. Shakespeare wrote in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, a Princess who inherited more of the Ambition of her Father Henry, than of the Tenderness and Delicacy of her Mother Anne Bullen: And however sensible she might be of the Injuries her Mother endur'd would not have suffered her Father's Character to have been drawn in the worst Colours, either by an Historian or a Poet. Shakespeare has exerted an equal degree of Complaisance towards Queen Elizabeth by the amiable Lights he shews her Mother in, in this Play. . . . (pp. 229-30)

[Charlotte Lennox], "The Life and Death of 'King Henry the Eighth'," in her *Shakespeare Illustrated*; or, The Novels and Histories, on Which the Plays of Shakespeare Are Founded, Vol. 3, A. Millar, 1754, pp. 171-230.

MR. [RICHARD] RODERICK (essay date 1756?)

[Roderick was the first critic to suggest that two apparently different writing styles are evident in Henry VIII. The following excerpted essay, believed to have been first published in 1756, is often cited by critics who, like James Spedding (1850) and Karl