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莎翁歷史劇《亨利八世》中之凱瑟琳皇后與矛盾

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摘　要

本文藉由探討莎翁歷史劇《亨利八世》(*King Henry VIII*) 中之凱瑟琳皇后一角，企圖凸顯劇中內含之矛盾，並以與女性相關之問題為出發點，強調《亨利八世》並非如一些批評家所言，其劇義是榮耀國王；而莎翁歷史劇亦非本質上就是男性中心。

本文將重新檢視劇中許多的精彩戲劇呈現手法，例如『休后』的整個審判過程，及精靈拜訪皇后的奇觀，以分析其中內含之矛盾點。此外亦會著重於劇中人物所作出的諷刺言論，及莎翁篡改歷史時序等面向加以討論，以探索女性角色及劇中內含之矛盾。本文意在編撰出一種另類讀法，並藉此另類讀法闡述應突破正統的禁錮，以多種閱讀角度切入，方能另創閱讀古典之奇趣。

關鍵詞：莎士比亞、亨利八世、女性、凱瑟琳皇后、矛盾

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Queen Katherine and Contradictions in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*

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Abstract

By foregrounding Queen Katherine, this paper presents the contradictions in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*. It asks questions which relate Shakespeare to us—women. It argues against the commonplace ideas that *Henry VIII* is meant as a glorification of the king, and that Shakespeare's history plays are naturally man-centered. Various elaborate dramatic representations, such as the "unqueening" process, and the spectacle involving fairies paying homage to the queen, comprise significant contradictory signals. Other aspects, such as Suffolk's sarcastic comments and the playwright's tempering with the chronological order of events, also contribute to the contradictions. By probing into women's part and the play's inherent contractions, this alternative reading self-reflexively (and self-consciously) argues for the right and the fun to do pluralistic readings.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Henry VIII, women, Queen Katherine, contradictions

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> [. . .] I hoped to prise open the Shakespearean text and make it accessible to investigations about women's place in culture, history, religion, society, the family.
>
> (Juliet Dusinberre xii)

Shakespeare is a significant cultural token. To have a Western critic comparing him to the Bible (Dusinberre xii-xiii), and to hear a Chinese critic stating that "Shakespeare has become a Chinese institution" (Zhang 175), no longer sound surprising to us. How far has such a literary token influenced us, however, is an issue that is still being underrated. Most people simply think of literature in general, or Shakespeare in particular, as something rather detached from our real lives. One of the main causes of this attitude is their perception of literature as fictions—fictive works that are merely for pleasure. Once the book is shut, or the TV set switched off (if one is watching an adapted version of a literary work), there it stops. What most people do not realize is that fictions can help to "reproduce social practices" (Kehler and Barker 4), and fictive figures can be mimicked and transferred into real life.

Jean E. Howard provides us with a useful stance to grasp the relationship between literature and our lives: "Literature is part of history," just as "the literary text [is] as much a context for other aspects of cultural and material life as they are for it" (25). To think of literature as something belonging to the reigns of aesthetics detached from our daily life is untenable. Literature is a constituent of history and culture.

When it comes to culture, our postmodern consciousness has already presented a completely different interpretation of the word. The traditional picture of culture as a domain elitist and neutral can no longer abide. In his renowned book, *Cultural and Imperialism*, Edward Said rips off culture's old mask of neutrality and brings forth a hideous aspect--the affiliation between culture and imperialism. The New Historicists and their Cultural Materialist cousins are equally aware of the political aspect of culture. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield proclaim that every cultural practice is filled with "political significance" (viii). When we put such views alongside Geertzian anthropology, which announces culture as "control mechanisms" (Geertz 44), we cannot help but get increasingly alarmed, as Stephen Greenblatt when he announces that: "[t]here were no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society" (256).

One thing that we cannot deny is that since cultural practices are political, a cultural token like Shakespeare, whose works are read, staged, and adapted in various forms, continues to impress us and to inscribe us. His fictive creations have transcended the bounds of aesthetics to the culturally real. Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps provide us with a good example of how potent this cultural token can be: in countless nineteenth-century debates on the nature of women, "Shakespeare's women were often discussed alongside historical figures, with the fictional characters given equal weight and often even prominence over actual women" (4).

Nevertheless, how we perceive Shakespeare's works is another important issue. Our understanding of his works is conditioned, or limited, to a large extent by existing interpretations. Louis A. Montrose informs us, "not only the poet but also the critic exists in history [. . .] the texts of each are inscriptions of history" ("Professing" 24). Male-centricism has always been a dominant critical attitude. Dusinberre tells us that in her university Shakespeare classes, she felt that she is under great pressure as to what kinds of questions are appropriate to be raised within class (xii). What wants critical attention in our postmodern era is whether male-centered critical attitude towards Shakespeare disempowers or disadvantages women in what seem to be neutral academic/cultural practices. With such awareness, alternative readings of Shakespeare by feminists or other minority groups should be regarded as politically significant moves.

By rereading Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, this paper aspires to share Peter Erickson's ideal. Erickson repeatedly tells us that rewriting the Renaissance or rewriting Shakespeare is the rewriting of ourselves ("Rewriting the Renaissance" 330; *Rewriting Shakespeare* 3). Since we are aware that women have been discursively shaped, we should believe that women could be discursively reshaped. Even in seemingly apolitical works, as Montrose suggests, there is a cultural power that can be politically useful ("Eliza" 112). Thus seen, even seemingly unimportant cultural practices, such as feminist rereadings of Shakespeare, can contribute to the overall cultural power for the reshaping of women. And this paper on *Henry VIII* wishes to be part of that cultural power.

Henry VIII is a special history play—special because when compared to Shakespeare's other history plays, its political landscape differs. Shakespeare's other nine history plays are marked by throne contention, civil war or clash with France. These create the necessary backdrop for the celebration of the heroic in the fashion of Talbot or Henry V, or for the elaboration of the tragic in the fashion of King Richard II and other deposed kings. In *Henry VIII*, however, the grandeur of history with its history making moments subsides into an atmosphere of comedy. The king does not share Henry V's heroism or Richard II's tragic magnitude. He simply eliminates his political enemies, gains ultimate control and fulfills his desire. The play is, from R. A. Foakes's stance, "a natural continuation from *The Tempest*" (xlv). It is "strongly colored" by, as Maurice Charney suggests, the assumptions of plays such as *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* (202).

It is remarkable that *Henry VIII* is wrapped up in a festive mood. It begins with a reference to the Cloth of Gold and ends with the celebration of the birth of Elizabeth. The play is filled with intrigues typical to Shakespeare's comedy: the king's disguise, Wolsey's mistakenly delivered inventory of his property, and the king's ring with which Cranmer saves himself. Charney describes the king as a "mythical, omniscient, and beneficent figure" (202). Peter Hyland claims that the play has a "moralizing function" as it depicts "the rise and fall of ambitious *men*, notably Buckingham and Wolsey" (my emphasis, 181). Jo McMurtry states that the play is "basically a pageant of Tudor virtue triumphing over the schemes of selfish villains such as Cardinal Wolsey" and it evokes "nationalistic emotion" (49). However, it is not difficult at all

to refute such a male-centered interpretation when we dig up the play's inherent contradictions. By contradictions, what I am referring to is the notion pointed out by Steven Mullaney:

> Elizabethan popular drama arises out of the growing contradictions between English society as it was in actuality and as it was portrayed by the official organs of government. The popular stage was one of the cultural contradictions which the unchanging and analogic hierarchy of Tudor ideology sought to suppress, and that ideology was frequently invoked against the theatricality of popular drama. (52)

Mullaney's observation highlights the "ambiguous" nature of the stage. *Henry VIII* can be a celebration of the Tudor reign, yet there are inherent "contradictions," or discrepancies between what the play seems to present and what it can invoke the audience to feel and think.

The paper argues that the enormous textual space endowed to Queen Katherine can be considered a landmark of contradictions that the play harbors. Mullaney's argument, in fact, can be used to empower the play's alternative dramatic spaces for women. On the surface, male authority seems to be the focal point of interest—just as Linda Bamber states that "the myth" of Shakespeare's history plays "does not involve mothers, daughters, or wives," and that though women bear men "sons," they only "serve the myth without participating in it" (163-164). Yet if we pay attention to what Shakespeare has allowed Queen Katherine to do, it isn't illogical to argue that the political authority of the king is invoked against the theatricality of the play, which allows the queen to interrupt and interfere.

Compared to Shakespeare's other nine history plays, the opening of textual space for Queen Katherine isn't peculiar. Female figures are not quiet or invisible in Shakespeare's history plays. The queen-mother in *King John*, for instance, is powerful and domineering. In the two tetralogies and *Richard III*, Queen Margaret is a powerful "she wolf of France"; while Joan la Pucelle is a threatening woman warrior. According to Phyllis Rackin, "[i]n a well-ordered patriarchal world, women are silent or invisible" (*Patriarchal* 81). Nonetheless, in the seemingly well-controlled world of *Henry VIII*, where a powerful patriarchal figure, the monarch, rules, Rackin's

description of a well-ordered patriarchal world still doesn't work. It is natural for us to infer, therefore, that there is no pure moment of "well-organized patriarchal world" in Shakespeare's history plays (or perhaps in history at all). There are always disturbing voices here and there pulling us from what seems to be the dominant ideology in the plays. The contradictory nature of the stage, as pinpointed by Steven Mullaney, can thus be a useful perspective with which we may approach Shakespeare in alternative stances.

Queen Katherine is a significant figure in *Henry VIII*. It is crucial that we recognize her dramatic importance as Foakes does: she is a "superb" role that has tempted actresses and attracted critics (xlvii). Queen Katherine's tragic fall is unique in the midst of a dramatic world where great men constantly fall from power and die. Both Buckingham and Wolsey's downfalls seem to be commonplace scenes within men's power struggle. Wolsey, in particular, deserves his fall because he is, in McMurtry's words, a "selfish villain" (49). When we compare *Henry VIII* with Shakespeare's other history plays, we see that the fall of Queen Katherine is different from that of the other queens. The other queens fall when their husbands fall. That is why most critics tend to take the queens in the history plays as having "no existence" except as the king's wife (e.g. Howard and Rackin 25). Queen Katherine, on the contrary, does not fall with her husband. Her husband's wish to unqueen her, paradoxically, individualizes her existence from his.

In the chronicles of Holinshed and Foxe, supposedly Shakespeare's sources, Queen Katherine does not master the kind of "strength" as she does in Shakespeare's play (Foakes xxxvii). Shakespeare has made, in Foakes's terms, two "most significant changes" in Katherine's long speech in her own defense (xxxvii). These include the additional proof of her loyalty (2,4, 29-32), and her passionate cry:

> [. . .] in God's name
>
> Turn me away, and let the foul'st contempt
>
> Shut door upon me, and so give me up
>
> To the sharp'st kind of justice [. . .]. (2.4.39-42)

These two changes, Foakes argues, "give the character of the Queen here a strength lacking in the chronicle" (xxxvii).

With Foakes's observation in mind, it is reasonable to believe that Shakespeare strengthens Katherine's importance to play up the cultural contradiction. If the playwright had simply wished to celebrate the omnipotent power of Henry VIII, why then has he portrayed Queen Katherine with such "strength?" One doubts why Queen Katherine is designed to be extremely impressive from the very beginning.

We do not see a meek wife like Queen Isabel in *Richard II*, who says her brief lines at an appropriate time, nor do we see an interrupting power-obsessed woman like the Queen Mother Eleanor in *King John*. We see a queen kneeling down on her knees and suing to her husband for the common people's welfare. By advising him that a heavily levied tax will impoverish the people, who will then vent their reproach on their king, she persuasively prompts him to cancel that tax.

This pleading scene symbolically naturalizes Katherine. In Shakespeare's other history plays, there are often anxiety and alienation towards English queens of foreign origin. In *Henry VI*, for instance, Queen Margaret is hated as the "she-wolf of France." But Queen Katherine is with the people. By getting herself involved in taxation policies, by speaking for the people, the Queen risks inviting discontent, if not from the king, at least from Wolsey or other behind-the-scenes policy makers.

Immediately after that, she involves herself in another political dispute by pleading for Buckingham. The fact that Buckingham is loved by the commoners (2.1.53), and is generally believed by them to have been set up by Wolsey (2.1.38-48), contributes to the positive image of the Queen who stands by him. Unlike other haughty alien queens, Katherine's voice sides with the people. She is symbolically heroicized as a protector or "mother" to them. This part of the play arouses from the audience an emotional affinity with the Queen, especially since the Elizabethan theater was made up of commoner audience. Katherine "put[s] the audience," as McMurtry observes, "firmly on her side" (51). By having the audience "firmly on her side," Katherine distracts the charismatic charm of the king. Henry VIII is actually her sole opponent in her divorce lawsuit. The emotional affinity she commands serves to alienate the audience from a king demanding to divorce such a good queen.

Queen Katherine's misfortune arouses a general anxiety towards a culture

demanding woman's subservience to her husband. Shakespeare's audience is not without women. The representation of a dutiful wife unrewarded but punished instead must have aroused sympathy, shock and discontent, especially among the female audience. Stories of virtuous women being subservient to their husbands were not rare within the cultural milieux of Shakespeare's time. *Homilies*, for instance, teaches women to be subservient to their husbands (Hansen 1-2). In view of the failure of marriage itself to serve as a political protection for Katherine, Dusinberre maintains that "Shakespeare uses the women who seem the most at the mercy of the male world to assert values which measure its worth and find it wanting" (293).

The spectacular representation of Queen Katherine's death is a unique feature. None of Shakespeare's other history plays depicts a female character's death in such an elaborate fashion. The two powerful mothers, Eleanor and Constance, for instance, are quickly eliminated in *King John* by a short report of their deaths:

> Messenger [to King John when he asks where she is]: My liege, her ear,
>
> Is stopp'd with dust: the first of april died
>
> Your noble mother, and, as I hear, my lord,
>
> The Lady Constance in a frenzy died
>
> Three days before: but this rumour's tongue
>
> I idly heard; if true of false I know not. (John, 4.2.119-24)

Though Joan la Pucelle in *1 Henry VI* is given a considerable textual space to curse and to be defamed as a witch by the English lords, the real execution is off stage. She simply exits guarded after which York proclaims: "Break thou in pieces and consume to ashes, / Thou foul accursed minister of hell!" (1H6, 5.4.92-93). Richard III's queen, Anne, ends up with a brief reported death and we are never told what really happens to the rest of the tragic women in *Richard III*.

Furthermore, in Shakespeare's other history plays, elaborate dramatic representations of death usually belong to heroes, for instance, Prince Arthur, King John, Salisbury, Hotspur, Talbot and his son. An anti-hero like Falstaff deserves only

a reported death. Thus viewed, the elaborate dramatization of Queen Katherine's death is exceptional. The fairies, the dream-like quality of the scene create a sense of dislocation--they belong to Shakespeare's comedies, to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to *The Tempest*. Ghosts and witches belong to Shakespeare's history plays. In *Richard III*, for instance, before the king is killed, ghosts of those he has murdered haunt him. Therefore, the surrealistic representation of fairies dancing and glorifying Queen Katherine is a spectacle that romanticizes her. Had there been a myth within Shakespeare's history plays, this is it. And what I mean by myth here is a notion contrary to the male-centered history making myth. This highly ritualistic spectacle of faeries dancing would become a meaningless pageantry if Queen Katherine belongs to the category of women, defined by Bamber as "serv[ing] the myth [of the history plays] without participating in it" (164).

The earlier Black-Friars scene, where the lawfulness of Katherine's marriage to the king is put on trial, foregrounds Katherine as an individualized being. Mary Beth Rose informs us that in the realm of the legal "a married woman in Renaissance England forfeited both agency and identity" (293). Women in the Renaissance, as Dusinberre points out, are not allowed independence from men either physically or spiritually (92). Nevertheless, Katherine is paradoxically granted an identity in this lawsuit. The whole legal procedure is aimed to deprive her of her identity as a queen. However, by refusing to succumb to the body of judges representing law, Katherine distinguishes herself as a resistant individual.

A remarkable thing about this Black-Friars scene is its highly majestic formalities. It begins with trumpets, sennet and cornets, followed by a parade-like entrance of judges and attendants. In this fashion, the court immediately creates an overwhelming authoritative atmosphere that diminishes the importance of a single woman. Nevertheless, when her name is called by the Crier, according to the stage direction, Queen Katherine "makes no answer but rises out of her chair, goes about the court, comes to the king, and kneels at his feet" (2.4). By ignoring the judges and appealing directly to her husband, Katherine holds the authority of the court in contempt. Instead of being drowned by all the earlier authoritative formalities, she empowers herself by refusing to cooperate.

Queen Katherine's subsequent plea to the king masters the audience's sympathy:

[. . .]. When was the hour

I ever contradicted your desire

Or made it not mine too? Or which of your friends

Have I not strove to love, although I knew

He were mine enemy? What friend of mine,

That had to him deriv'd your anger, did I

Continue in my like? nay, gave notice

He was from thence discharg'd? (2.4.25-32)

Katherine is, as Peter Milward states, "a heroine similar to Hermione, Imogen, Cordelia and Desdemona--all noble ladies who have been unjustly treated" (167). Carol Hansen observes that Shakespeare "time and again appear[s] to question this tradition" demanding female subservience (4). Her viewpoint appears to be sound here. Furthermore, with Foakes's observation on how Shakespeare has modified his sources to strengthen Katherine's part, we cannot help but believe that a value system that demands women's subservience is at stake here. Just as the many wronged heroines Milward compares her to, the Katherine Shakespeare creates in *Henry VIII* is terribly disturbing. Her ill fate generates anxiety and creates contradiction.

What subsequently comes into the spotlight is the vexing problem of law and justice. Katherine was a princess dowager to Henry's brother. Her marriage with Henry VIII was deemed lawful by "a wise council" "of every realm" gathered by the kings of England and Spain (2.4.50-51). But what was lawful is ironically being refuted by the council of judges gathered by Henry VIII--the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the learned and reverend fathers of his order. As Dusinberre notes, this council is "an impenetrable cabal of the learned" to which women have no access (223). The council's final judgment demonstrates that the institution serves the interest of the king.

"Conscience," which Henry VIII proclaims to have troubled him (2.4.168), is an important word in *Henry VIII*. Charney tells us that it appears twenty-four times in

the play outnumbering the thirteen in both *Richard III* and *Henry V* (147). It is a word the play sophisticatedly problematizes not only by the critical comments of others, but also by the arrangement of events itself. Graham Holderness informs us that although Shakespeare's history plays are "structurally framed by authentic historical events," they "reveal far less particularity in the depiction and delineation of time and space, far less specificity of historical vision" (42). Nevertheless, this lack of particularity may be considered a strategy for embodying the cultural contradictions inherent in theaters. Foakes, McMurtry and Alexander Leggatt point out that there is a radical alteration of chronological sequence within the play (Foakes xxxvii; McMurtry 49; Leggatt 219). This alteration generates a significant effect in *Henry VIII*.

The king meets Anne Bullen and takes a fancy to her in Act 1, after which he starts to speak of his conscience: "So sweet a bed fellow? But conscience, conscience; / O'tis a tender place, and I must leave her" (2.3.142-43). The Lord Chamberlain explains that: "It seems the marriage with his brother's wife / Has crept too near his conscience" (2.2. 16-17). However, such an explanation is immediately mocked by an aside made by the Duke of Suffolk: "No, his [the king's] conscience / Has crept too near another lady" (2.2.18-19). Had the sequence of the two events been reversed, Suffolk's remark would be invalidated.

Foakes points out that Anne "apparently did not attend" the masque where the king meets her (1527?) and that the king's marriage with Anne (1532) is brought forward to proceed the fall of Wolsey (1529) (Foakes's dates in parentheses xxxvii). Both Foakes and McMurtry observe that Katherine's death (1536) is brought forward to precede Elizabeth's birth (1533) (Foakes's dates in parentheses; Foakes xxxvii, McMurtry 49). The idea that the original audience, as McMurtry notes, "might perhaps have been aware of some drastic shifts in chronological sequence" (49), suggests to us that these arrangements are meaningful. They generate a special effect in view of the king's conscience.

It is thus remarkable that the king's meeting with Anne in the masque happens in Act 1. This early meeting renders it plausible to read an unpronounced intention into the king's subsequent fuss over his conscience. In Leggatt's words, Shakespeare has given "precedence" to this meeting "so that our memory of it may colour our hearing of the dignified statements in which he says nothing about her" (219). Furthermore,

by making the scene in which Anne is created Marchioness of Pembroke precede the Black-Friars scene, in which the divorce case is put on trial, the disturbing effect is further reinforced. Such an alternating arrangement of events between Anne's rise to and Katherine's fall from favor brings to the fore the main cause: the king's desire. It renders problematic the king's explanation about "the bosom of my conscience" (2.4.179-80). His story about how much he has been troubled by the Bishop of Bayonne doubting his daughter's legitimacy seems farfetched within this context.

Though no one officially refutes the king's explanation, the play is not without mistrusting voices: Suffolk's remark on the king's conscience that "has crept too near another lady" (2.2.19); the Old Woman's talk about Anne's prospect as queen--accentuated immediately by Anne being created Marchioness of Pembroke. It is evident that the different voices in the play, just as the commoner's firm belief in Buckingham's innocence, distance us from the perspective provided by the king.

Leonard Tennenhouse conceives that the play legitimizes the king's authority as the play itself authorizes genealogy (127-28). Charney believes that the play was associated with the elaborate public celebrations of King James's daughter. It is hence "a spectacular compliment to Queen Elizabeth and to James I" (203). This view backs up Foakes's belief that there is no "recrimination or blame attached to Henry" (liii). Foakes argues that on the one hand, "the youth and beauty of Anne, and the promise of a golden future in the birth of Elizabeth" afford a "compensation" for the fall of Katherine (xlvi); on the other hand, "the law operates in its normal course, and against it is always posed the justice of heaven" (liii). McMurtry also states that "[. . .] somehow, the king does not seem to blame" (51). Nevertheless, I contend that the play is not that monolithic. Holderness's understanding of Shakespeare's plays is a valuable stance at this point:

> [. . .] the plays themselves contain and transmit, the capacity to induce in an audience what S.L. Bethell called "multi-consciousness," and what Robert Weimann defines as a 'two-eyed view.' For every strategy of legitimation, the plays provide an alternative strategy of subversion; for every signal inviting the audience to accept the state's self-authorization and suppression of dissent, a contradictory signal encourages the spectators to interrogate the state's motive and purpose [. . .]" (59).

In spite of what might seem an elaborate legitimization of authority, or genealogy, there are “contradictory signals” (to appropriate Holderness’s term 59). The tragic fall of Katherine is not satisfactorily compensated even in the elaborate presentation of what appears to be her vision of fairies. What can be read as a critical “contradictory signal” is the elaborate play-up of the sharp contrast between fantasy and reality. As soon as Katherine wakes up, the fairies quickly vanish. What is left is not a sense of compensation but a solid sense of cruel political reality.

It is perhaps appropriate to recall, at this point, the arguments about whether providence and poetic justice are the ultimate guidance of history in Shakespeare's history plays. Robin Headlam Wells wisely argues that though many of Shakespeare's characters seemingly believe in the guidance of providence, to believe, “as some critics do, that Shakespeare endorses their belief” will be "reducing the plays to doctrinaire theological tracts" (8). "If there is one thing which clearly emerges from Shakespeare's dramatization of history," Wells maintains, "it is the complexities of political life and the intractability of its problems" (8).

Wells’s perspective contradicts the Katherine-is-compensated argument. What Katherine in *Henry VIII* presents to the audience/readers is a series of complicated political struggles in which feminine virtue has little effect on actual consequences. It is not hard at all to locate in Shakespeare’s other history plays virtuous women who are being wronged. Lady Anne and the Duchess of York in *Richard III*, for instance, are not compensated for being virtuous. They are completely unlike Joan la Pucelle or Margaret of Anjou who are militarily threatening to the English men. In fact, they are characterized by their complaints against power-thirst male figures and their laments for the loss of their loved ones. Such an elaborate characterization foregrounding their misery invokes sympathy from the audience/readers. Within the play, neither providence nor poetic justice can encompass their misfortune.

By the same token, there is simply no way to reduce Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* to "doctrinaire theological tracts" without having their inherent contradictions emerging. In *Henry VIII*, the playwright’s tempering with the chronological order of what happens to Queen Katherine and to Anne Bullen has a great consequence on how the audience/readers receive the king’s actions. As we have discussed, Katherine’s parts are not given such an elaborate play in texts that are believed to be Shakespeare’s

sources. Had the playwright no intention to play up the inherent contradictions or the ambiguity, he could have dutifully followed the original chronological order of events. But of course, it would be inappropriate and dangerous, indeed, to argue for what Shakespeare really intends after Roland Barthes has announced the death of the author. However, by conceptualizing reading as what Dusinberre calls "a complex transaction between writer, text and reader" (xvi), we feel a new freedom to dig up the play's contradictions.

It is obvious that had the playwright postponed Anne's scenes, or simply diminished the importance of Katherine, he could have reduced the audience's or the readers' suspicion towards the king's proclaimed conscience. In a nutshell, the more sympathetic he represents Katherine, the more he reduces his audience's/readers' approval of the king's divorce act.

Another important feature in *Henry VIII* is that Anne Bullen is represented as "an ornamental object of the King" (Charney 208), "depersonalized" in her coronation in the sense that she never speaks (Foakes lii). The ceremony is reported by gentlemen conversing in the streets. This seemingly refrains us from feeling emotional affinity with this new queen. In a sense, Anne can be considered dramatically alienated from the audience. Instead of a heroine actively exhibiting her personality, she becomes, in her speechless parade across the stage, an object for gaze. One of the gentlemen says while looking at Anne:

> Heaven bless thee!
>
> Thou hast the sweetest face I ever look'd on
>
> Sir, as I have a soul, she is an angel;
>
> Our king has all the Indies in his arms,
>
> And more, and richer, when he strains that lady;
>
> I cannot blame his conscience. (4.1.42-47)

This comment echoes Suffolk's remark on the king's conscience. It is clear that by depersonalizing this new queen, a very unusual effect is generated: Queen Katherine

remains the sole individualized female character in the play. Her charm is not surpassed by this new speechless queen. In her speechless parade, Anne reminds the audience/readers of her great contrast to Queen Katherine, the mouthpiece of the people.

What follows the coronation scene, ironically, is the scene in Kimbolton, where the unqueened Katherine dies. Such a "radical alteration of the historical chronology of events" (Foakes xxxvii) presents a great contrast between rise and fall, between what happens to Anne and what happens to Katherine. Foakes argues that Anne has "no personal triumph" (lii). Katherine, in great contrast, is highly individualized and heroicized. By making peace with her archenemy, Cardinal Wolsey, and by expressing her consideration for her daughter, her maids and servants, Katherine again proves to the audience/readers her kindness. Her fanatic vision of fairies visiting her, as we have discussed earlier, romanticizes her in a way no other heroes within Shakespeare's history plays ever enjoy.

A remarkable thing about this detour to an unhistorical, fantastic dramatic space is its sharp contrast with the ensuing historical space. Queen Katherine is not carried off to a sweet death by the fairies--that would have belonged to a comedy. From her short-lived fantasy, she awakes to find herself determined by historical reality, where she is still the miserable unqueened woman. The highlight on the temporality of fantasy and the ensuing sharp contrast between reality and fantasy serve to strengthen our sympathy for her.

What is really extraordinary about Queen Katherine, besides the pathos she commands, is her history consciousness. It is not unusual for history conscious men to populate Shakespeare's history plays. In *2 Henry IV*, when Hal defeats Hotspur, the two men are both aware that the dead one will be food for worms (2H4, 5.4.85-86). This proves their anxiety towards the amnesiac aspect of history. Another noteworthy example appears in *1 Henry VI*. Engaged in their expansionist project, the Talbots demonstrate their name-consciousness. "Wretched shall France be only in my *name*" (my emphasis, 1H6, 1.4.96), Talbot proclaims to the dying Salisbury. Then, John Talbot refuses to flee from his father's side in a sure-to-lose war by arguing: "Yes, your renowned *name*: shall flight abuse it?" (my emphasis, 1H6, 4.6.41). The senior Talbot, who also refuses to flee, claims that: "And leave my followers here to fight and

die? / My age was never tainted with such shame" (1H6, 4.6.45-46). Heroic obsession with name and honor compels both the father and the son to accept death readily. This obsession is climaxed when the junior Talbot proclaims to his father:

> Before young Talbot from old Talbot fly,
>
> The coward horse that bears me fall and die!
>
> And like me to the peasant boys of France,
>
> To be shame's scorn and subject to mischance!
>
> Surely, by all the glory you have won,
>
> And if I fly, I am not Talbot's son.
>
> Then talk no more of flight, it is no boot;
>
> If son to Talbot, die at Talbot's foot. (1H6, 4.6.46-53)

The Talbots' strong sense of history consciousness is phenomenal in Shakespeare's history plays.

To our amazement, Queen Katherine also poses herself as a history conscious subject. After hearing her gentleman-usher, Griffith, speaks charitably about Cardinal Wolsey, Katherine's bitterly hated enemy, Katherine says:

> After my death I wish no other herald,
>
> No other speaker of my living actions
>
> To keep mine honor from corruption,
>
> But such an honest chronicler as Griffith. (4.2.69-72)

This strong sense of history consciousness distinguishes Queen Katherine from the rest of the queens in Shakespeare's history plays. Instead of playing the role of a historian as many other women do, or an "anti-historian," as Rackin calls some women ("Anti-historians" 343-44), Katherine places herself into the same footing as the male

characters, who are conscious that their deeds will be remembered and retold. She has ascended from a bearer or witness of history into an important history-conscious subject.

Therefore, even though some critics believe that *Henry VIII* is a “pageant of Tudor virtue” (McMurtry 49) and that the king is a “beneficent figure" (Charney 202), it is tenable to argue that there are inherent contradictions. The textual space opened to Queen Katherine renders her one of the most remarkable female characters in the history plays. By foregrounding her, we tend to agree with Willaim Hazlitt that Shakespeare has created a “very disagreeable portrait” of Henry VIII marked by “cruelty” and “religious hypocrisy” (165). Katherine’s unique position in the play contradicts the monolithic approach focusing only on the king or on Tudor virtue.

When Katherine says before her death:

> Let me be us'd with honour; strew me over
>
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
>
> I was a chaste wife to my grave: embalm me,
>
> Then lay me forth; although unqueen'd, yet like
>
> A queen, and daughter to a king inter me. (4.2.168-172)

her identity as a chaste wife and unqueened princess becomes so pathetic that it is rendered unforgettable. When we compare her to the quickly dismissed Constance and Eleanor in Shakespeare’s *King John*, we would surely see how Katherine is empowered in her deathbed like a heroine. Hence, even though the titular hero is Henry VIII, Katherine enjoys a unique subject position in the play.

Nevertheless, even the "depersonalized" (Foakes lii) Anne cannot be dismissed as nobody in this history play. She plays an important role in the downfall of both Katherine and Wolsey. Initially Wolsey simply decides on "no Anne Bullens for him [the king]" (3.2.87). As a powerful man, he takes it for granted that he can easily wipe her out. Eventually, he has to admit: "[. . .] all my glories / In that one woman I have lost for ever" (3.2.408-409). And "that one woman" is Anne. How can anybody argue that women do not participate in the myth of the history plays when

Wolsey's statement testifies so clearly that women are not outsiders in history? It would be absurd to argue that Anne is not the cause of Wolsey's fall; it is the king who desires it. If that is how we should interpret the play, then in Shakespeare's *King John*, Arthur should be deemed nobody. He isn't the person who wishes to claim the English throne; it is Constance, the young prince's mother, who claims it for him. By the same token, Anne is an important factor in the play that causes the downfall of Wolsey and Katherine.

In short, female figures can command dramatic significance in Shakespeare's history plays. If we do not ignore Queen Katherine's part, we can add a new dimension to *Henry VIII*. We failed to recognize the significance of women in the history plays because we had been loaded down with male-centered criticisms already produced. It would thus be inappropriate to state, as Bamber does, that Shakespeare's history plays are "a celebration of the splendid and unambivalent passions of the world of men" and that "the myth" of Shakespeare's history plays "does not involve mothers, daughters, or wives" (163-164). Queen Katherine's role in *Henry VIII*, as the paper has discussed, manifests that we can logically refute the conventional monolithic male-centered approach by digging up the kind of cultural contradictions Mullaney suggests.

In conclusion, it would be inappropriate to read Shakespeare's history plays in general, and his *Henry VIII* in particular, with the belief that the male figures must be the sole centers of interest. Though R. A. Foakes, the editor of the Arden edition of Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*, and one who wrote a fifty-three-page introduction that precedes the play text itself, maintains that "in the play [. . .] the dramatic effect is to enhance the stature of Henry as God's deputy" (liv), this paper presents a completely different viewpoint.

Finally, this paper does not pretend that its female-centered perspective is in any way more legitimate than the traditional male-centered approach. In fact, it must self-consciously admit that the flaws of the conventional male-centered reading are still present, except that this time they are substituted by a female-centered perspective. Nevertheless, the paper hopes to re-enunciate the right to reinterpret Shakespeare—a right that so many contemporary critics have already asserted, though. It aims to draw attention to the fun and the significance of relating ourselves to a cultural token. Like Dusinberre, what I have done in the paper is to ask questions "from my perspective, not

from the impersonal one which I had been trained to adopt" (xii). Like Dusinberre, I too want to declare that this is "[m]y Shakespeare, not someone else's" (xii).

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