

## ABSTRACTS FOR SAA *HENRY VIII*: NEW PERSPECTIVES SEMINAR

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### “History and Ideology: Taking sides in *Henry VIII* and *La cisma de Inglaterra*”

History is a major theme in the dramas of Shakespeare and Calderón. Renaissance theorists like Machiavelli and Juan Luis Vives shared the assumption that nature always remained the same so the lessons of history were applicable to different times and places. However, as history was a matter of interest and theatrical concern in England and Spain, playwrights used it with a deeper sense for the theatrical interpretation of past events. The initial title of Shakespeare's and Fletcher's play, *All is True*, might have been intended a contrast with Shakespeare's last plays where fictional and unrealistic plots prevail as historical truth became a central preoccupation in it though conditioned by the context in which it was written.

*Henry VIII* (1613) and *La cisma de Inglaterra* (1626-7) dramatize the workings and conflicts of the English Reformation during the reign of Henry VIII. Both plays have been significant in terms of performance because of their spectacular court ceremonies and trials, though neither of them has been regarded as Calderón's and Shakespeare's best and most popular plays. Despite the difference in the sources (Holinshed and Ribadeneira) available to the two dramatists, the historical theme was substantially the same for both. The paper will show how they portray historical events under certain assumptions and give us their own interpretation of key moments like the rise and fall of Cardinal Wolsey; Henry's divorce from Katherine of Aragon, which led to England's break with Rome; and his marriage to Anne Boleyn.

Calderón and Shakespeare were not indifferent to the political and religious situation and their dramatization of the historical material reveals how they take sides in the staging of history which should be viewed from a dichotomized discourse characteristic of Reformation polemic. I will conclude that *CI* can be best discussed in conjunction with *H8*. A comparison between the two plays written in different languages and within different dramatic traditions and sources may provide further insight into the historical episodes they dramatize.

**Brian Harries**  
**Concordia University Wisconsin**

### “Of Spleen and Memory: An Echo of Luther in *Henry VIII*”

In Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, Wolsey objects to the proposed marriage between the king and Ann Boleyn, saying “I know her for / a spleeny Lutheran!” (*Henry VIII* III.ii.98-9). While this seems on the surface to be a humorous jab at a group of perceived outsiders, it may not entirely be a throwaway line. If we consider the two most famous dramatic characters associated with Lutheran Wittenberg, Hamlet and Faustus, neither of them are particularly happy people. Moreover, the adjective “spleeny” in Shakespeare's day points to a specific kind of unhappiness. It's important to know and remember that in the

medieval understanding of physiology, the spleen was the organ responsible for melancholy. A disorder of it, therefore, gives us a person who is, according to the OED, “characterized by, melancholy or depression of spirits.” So when Wolsey suggests that the Lutherans in London at the time of Henry VIII are “spleeny,” he’s characterizing them as a group as people who are someplace on the spectrum between chronically morose and just plain irritable. Aligning Ann as specifically Lutheran asks the audience to engage with this freighted confessional label as an integral part of the historical retelling. By calling on various kinds of memory, both on-stage and in the audience, about the associations of Luther(anism) and Henry’s court, the play shapes audience perception in significant ways.

## **The Cardinal: Staging Wolsey**

**Mark Houlahan**  
**University of Waikato**

My paper will focus on the afterlife of *Henry VIII* and, in particular, the representation of Cardinal Wolsey. The play was frequently performed from 1613-1900, and Shakespeare and Fletcher’s depiction of Wolsey framed a strong influence on cultural memory. The play’s Cardinal emerges from earlier chronicles, and is multi-layered, from the scarlet robed omni-schemer, a creature of influence and subject of constant rumour, to the sympathetic figure we see through his fall in Act 3, one whose lambent eloquence in defeat is such a marked feature of the play, an open invitation senior actors have relished.

As Hornbeck shows in his useful survey of commemorations of Wolsey, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen strong versions of Wolsey on film and television, and in fiction. Here I will focus on two stage plays, Robert Bolt’s iconic *A Man For All Seasons* and Howard Brenton’s *Anne Booleyn*. Both plays, in part, rework the dramaturgy from the 1613 *Henry VIII*. This is especially striking in Brenton’s 2010 play as, in its first performance at Shakespeare’s Globe, Wolsey was returned to the open public stage of London’s South Bank, where he been seen almost four hundred years before.

**Melissa Jones, Eastern Michigan University**  
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### **Alter Egos/Alter Eros: Shakespeare and Henry VIII in Popular Culture**

This essay explores Shakespeare’s work and his influence through a cultural studies lens that reads the rise of Donald Trump’s misogynistic and white supremacist platform as concordant with an ongoing erotic fascination with the figure of Henry VIII—a tyrant whose violent consumption of women’s actual bodies offers a crude template for feminism’s worst nightmares about pornography. In most sixteenth-century depictions of Henry, such as Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577) or William Shakespeare’s play, *Henry VIII: All Is True* (1613), the king’s uxoricide operates as the invisible “quilting point”/“*point de capiton*” of monarchical authority, masculinity, and

the English nation. The question today is: why do we continue to depict men like Henry VIII as powerful sex symbols? How has this “great history” become attached to libidinal versions of masculinity that brand misogyny explicitly as sexy? The ascension of Donald Trump on a tide of sexual innuendo (“look at those hands”) and pornographic detail (“grab ‘em by the pussy”) seems symptomatic of this much older embrace of vulgar misogyny; only in recognizing it and naming it can we begin to challenge it.

**Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich**

### **“View These Ladies”: Gender and Masquing in *Henry VIII***

My paper offers a close reading of Scene 1.4 of *Henry VIII*, when a masque of noble “Strangers” staged at Cardinal Wolsey’s banquet facilitates the meeting of Henry and Anne Bullen. This two-page section of the folio text is often attributed to John Fletcher, and through allusions to masques in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Timon of Athens*, it explores the utility and limitations of these devices. The scene also serves an outsized role in the play’s representation of female agency and objectification. It establishes Anne as a sympathetic character and exposes the dangers of public spectatorship for women.

This paper is drawn from my in-progress book, *Remaking Shakespeare’s Masques*. I argue that masques defined identity at the Tudor-Stuart court, and when Shakespeare and his collaborators repurposed this courtly form for the public stage, they built upon its associations with identity to interrogate their culture’s assumptions about gender, sexuality, race, and social rank. By analyzing texts and adaptations of inset masques at different historical moments, I investigate shifting views of identity across centuries.

**Stuart M. Kurland**  
**Duquesne University**

### **Succession Anxiety and *Henry VIII***

I am most interested in the political, and topical, aspects of *Henry VIII*, though I am (frankly) unsure of the exact direction my paper will take. The issue of royal succession hovers over the play as it did the reign of the historical Henry VIII, but the play treats it in a curious fashion, simultaneously direct and oblique. Buckingham’s fall is justified by his alleged designs on the crown (should Henry die without legitimate male issue), while Katherine’s is necessitated by her inability to produce what Henry most wants. Katherine’s daughter, who would reign briefly if memorably as Queen Mary, is completely absent from the play, mentioned only indirectly when Katherine reminds Henry of the children she has borne him. At play’s end, the apotheosis of the infant Princess Elizabeth in Cranmer’s prophecy at her christening gestures towards the reign of Queen Elizabeth and, eliding the failure of bodily succession that made the Stuart dynasty possible, that of her successor, King James VI and I, whom Cranmer implausibly terms an “heir / As great in admiration as herself” (5.5.42-43). This is not how a modern would think of Henry VIII—or his legacy. What I wish to explore, I think, is how this legacy might have appeared in 1613, a decade into James’s rule, after his honeymoon ended and nostalgia for Elizabeth supplanted the

early enthusiasm for his kingship, and not long after Prince Henry's unexpected death upended the politics of the English court.

**Gaywyn Moore**  
**Santa Clara University**

“[T]o bring his euill purpose to passe”: Architectural Ambitions  
and Court Rivalries in *Henry VIII*.

Both Buckingham and Wolsey engage in architectural ambitions in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. Buckingham is undone in part by a rankled ex-employee, a surveyor. Wolsey's York Place hosts the event in which Henry and Anne meet, thus becoming the seed of Wolsey's fall from grace in which York Place is rechristened Whitehall. Buildings and building projects, whether intentionally or not, threaten existing power structures. This seems particularly relevant in *Henry VIII* and plays about Henry VIII—lords with grand architecture fall, and Henry co-opts that power by redistributing real estate into his own properties. Historically, behind the scenes, monasteries were toppling, building materials and land were redistributed, and while church building slowed down, home building increased—the great rebuilding. Shakespeare himself had finally moved into New Place in 1610 and thus was living in a substantial status upgrade at the time *Henry VIII* was being written and performed. Through the shift in architectural projects from religious to domestic, *Henry VIII* performs the new building practices begun in his reign, and continued well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting the schismatic roots of this seismic shift in how architectural ambitions rival court power and politics.

**David Morrow**

**“A hand as fruitful as the land that feeds us”: Grounding Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII***

This paper makes the case that the land (in the senses of territory, property, and soil) is central to the action and social significance of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. Most directly, land serves as the source and site of much of the conflict between Wolsey and his noble antagonists. These staged conflicts reveal the play's enmeshments in ideological struggle around agrarian change. The play's noble landholders use language associated with traditional forms of rural social relations that stressed subsistence farmers having access to land, including common land. In this way they echo politicians and preachers of the era who attempted to alleviate the social crises linked to rural dispossession, including hunger, poverty, vagrancy, and migration to London. For his part, Wolsey embodies individualist greed and other threats to that traditional order. While social crises are implied in the conflict among elites, Shakespeare and Fletcher also address such issues through the play's tragicomic-romance form, in its four crowd scenes (described or staged) and in Cranmer's concluding prophecy. This paper's emphasis on social relations and

struggle on the land distinguishes my ecocritical method from those whose engagements with “the material” are limited to that which can be touched. I suggest here that social reproduction, labor, and access to land are vital ecocritical questions worth exploring in this play and other works of the era.

**Lori Humphrey Newcomb, University of Illinois**  
**“Enrolled ’mongst wonders”: recounting *Henry VIII*, or *All Is True***

*Henry VIII* notoriously complicates attempts to schematize the Shakespearean canon by period or genre (or authorship, though I take Fletcher’s participation as given). Scholars agree that four plays—*Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* -- form a striking set, although they disagree on whether to call them Blackfriars plays, late plays, romances, or tragicomedies. *Henry VIII* is routinely excluded from all these categories; Kiernan Ryan even refused to consider it among his titular *Last Plays*, commenting briskly that “A strong case could doubtless be made for expanding this group to include *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*, but on balance it seems wiser to regard them as beyond the remit of this book” (1). Even as a history, *Henry VIII* often goes uncounted.

Instead of considering this play as beyond any remit, I treat it as an edge case that tests classificatory parameters. If we took *Henry VIII* to be an extreme member of some Jacobean dramatic set, what would be the commonalities of that set? Gordon McMullan, in his preface to the Arden Third edition of the play, offers a description of the plays surrounding *Henry VIII*:

Around the time the Company occupied the Blackfriars theatre, he began to write plays of a quite different type, expansive plays with elements obviously drawn from romance, grim comedies, tragicomedies, or plays which have all the elements of tragedy but conclude with a familial miracle. (113)

“[A]ll the elements of tragedy but conclud[ing] with a familial miracle”? This final phrase fits *Henry VIII* uncannily well, and McMullan goes on to argue that *Henry VIII* is continuous with the other four if the set is redefined as Shakespearean-Fletcherian “romantic tragicomedy” (115). I would like to go further, and (as an exercise) use *Henry VIII* to redefine the entire set.

If this *Henry VIII*-centered set of plays has a family resemblance, it begins, of course, with the family, above all the problem of descent along the female. Other affiliated features include doubt conquered by wonder, theophany that rewrites religion as spectacle, and final acts that recast all truth itself. We might see *Henry VIII* as testing how many of these qualities can be sustained by an English historical narrative—or we might even consider whether England’s succession demanded a new epistemology, wonder-ful past belief, that would span and disrupt traditional genres.

## Fletcher Plays with English History

Michael M. Wagoner

“History is time that won’t quit” – Suzan-Lori Parks

By 1613, John Fletcher had written comedies, tragedies, and pretty much invented the idea of tragicomedy. But he hadn’t broached that unique early modern genre – the English history play. However, with both *All is True*, co-written with William Shakespeare, and *Bonduca*, he launched himself into the territory dominated by his newfound collaborator. This paper aims to then consider *All is True* not in light of Shakespeare’s career at all, but in connection to Fletcher’s. What might we learn about the play in reading it as Fletcher’s early foray into the unique genre of history plays. What temporalities was Fletcher coalescing in this moment? Both King’s Men plays feature powerful queens destroyed by masculine machinations; both end with a consideration of the heir in the final scene. Importantly though, what both plays centrally do is a dispersal of character authority. In both plays, no single character dominates the overall vision of the text itself and therefore offers a spread out theatrical energy. In doing so, Fletcher (with Shakespeare in *All is True*) uses theatrical presentation to deemphasize central poles of power both politically and religiously. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of these texts derives from a formal construction that connects back to Fletcher’s engagement with a new genre. By looking at *All is True* through the lens of *Bonduca*, we can see Fletcher’s view of history then is one that deconstructs centralized power by highlighting the performative nature of narrating the past.

**Mikaela Warner**

**Paper: Invisible Magnificence and Disability in Henry VIII**

**Abstract:**

Roderick H. McKeown argues that Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* is a play distinctly concerned with pageantry and royal performance. Interestingly, for Henry’s role, this performance is strikingly disembodied. The central issue of Henry’s divorce and the pursuit of an heir requires the king’s body; however, Henry’s body is noticeably absent from the text. In a deft continuation of Tudor propaganda, *Henry VIII* deflects suspicion of disability and impotency away from Henry’s body. The play is concerned with other embodiments such as: the hungry bodies of rebelling subjects, Katherine’s dying yet honorable body, and the evil and executed body of Wolsey. However, I argue this embodiment is too dangerous to extend to Henry himself, the center of an increasingly centralized English monarchy. Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* perpetuates a literary trend inherited from Henry VIII’s reign as seen in Edward Hall and Thomas More’s writing for his coronation, one where the body of the king remains perfect, nondisabled, and unmentionable. For a text influenced by Elizabeth’s patronage, a royal body even more heavily scrutinized than her father, continuing the Tudor propaganda would prove advantageous to secure political power. This propaganda distanced disability and far from the body of the English sovereign.