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# Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*: What 'Reformation'?

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## Abstract

Shakespeare never used the words 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' in his plays, even when the main action centers around religious conflict, as in *Henry VIII*. Most of the polarizing diction of denominational or internecine Christian conflict is missing in Shakespeare. Denominational vocabulary aimed at Catholics or Protestants is rare. Sectarian terms like 'puritan' do not appear in the histories, and 'Puritans' are never referred to in the plural. Shakespeare did not employ much of the lexicon of religious polemics of his lifetime, including that found in plays by other dramatists. The lexicon is either omitted entirely, extremely rare, or discredited by the speaker. The principal personages of flaming religious divide also go mostly unmentioned, even in *Henry VIII*. This pattern established throughout Shakespeare's entire writing career must have been tested to the utmost, but the play sustains it. Vocabulary choices in *Henry VIII* shed further light on the dual authorship of *Henry VIII* and on the authors' use of their sources. The cruder religious terms used by some characters shed further light on their characterization. And honey-tongued Shakespeare's sweet avoidance of ugly polemics offers another way to unify the series of trials and interrogations in four of five acts in *Henry VIII*.

William Shakespeare never used the words ‘Protestant’ or ‘Catholic’ in his plays. Neither word occurs in any form in any Shakespearean plays, or in any parts of plays on which Shakespeare collaborated. This observation may seem narrow as an approach to the works, but it is not just that the two names, found in contemporaneous discourse, are missing in Shakespeare. Like the terms ‘Catholic’ (‘Catholick,’ ‘Catholicke,’ ‘Catholique’) and ‘Protestant,’ most of the polarizing internecine Christian diction of Shakespeare’s lifetime is missing.<sup>1</sup> As a playwright, Shakespeare chose not to employ much of the lexicon used in religious polemics in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries--’Anti-Christ’ or ‘Reformation,’ ‘heresy’ or ‘idolatry.’ Polarizing terms appear either never, rarely, or in non-religious contexts. (Table 1) When they do appear, the exception proves the rule; their usage is discredited, usually transparently, by the character of the speaker.

Thus, one of the bloodiest divisions in England and in Europe during Shakespeare's lifetime, the overt and covert conflicts between Protestantism and Catholicism, went literally unnamed in the entire corpus of Shakespeare's works. The divide may be seen and felt in Shakespeare's plays, but most of the explicit terms for it are either omitted or discredited—even when the main action centers around the conflict, as in the early *King John* and in the late project *Henry VIII* in 1613. (Table 1) The focus of this paper is Shakespeare and John Fletcher’s *Henry VIII*, where the lexical acts and omissions are truly remarkable. However, the context for *Henry VIII* is still the overall Shakespeare corpus. To apply this kind of lexical analysis to *Henry VIII*, one must begin with summary points about the lexicon overall.<sup>2</sup>

Among terms aimed at Catholicism, no Shakespeare play names the ‘Vatican’ or even the ‘church of Rome’; the pejorative ‘popery,’ ‘papisty,’ or ‘papistical’ do not appear; nor do the more respectful ‘papacy’ or ‘papal’; there is no ‘Romish’ in the church sense. Cleopatra complains about Rome more than do the Protestant figures in *Henry VIII*. No play mentions a ‘Jesuit,’ ‘Jesuits’ in general, or the ‘Jesuitical.’ Ribaldry about friars or nuns may be voiced in other plays but not in the histories; conversely, references to cardinals or bishops or archbishops occur *only* in the histories, where the titles identify individual characters, onstage or off. The same holds for ‘monk’ and ‘monks,’ which occur very few times and only in the history plays. The latter is voiced only once, by Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII*, not pejoratively.

Denominational vocabulary aimed against Protestants is likewise rare. Sectarian terms generally do not appear in the histories, and in other plays that do contain them, ‘Puritans’ in the plural are never referred to in Shakespeare. Nor is the ‘puritanical’; the author knew how to make a noun into a questionable or satirical adjective, as in Rosalind’s ‘thrasonical,’ but credible Shakespearean characters do not do so with religion. Similarly, the word ‘heresy’ appears only in comedies and only in the context of romantic love, directly or indirectly. The broader word ‘heresies’ appears in the context of historical religious strife only in *Henry VIII* or *King John*, a total of four occurrences, and is discredited. ‘Heretics,’ as a plural, appears only twice in Shakespeare, in tragedies, never in the history plays. The word ‘apostate,’ like the word ‘idolater,’ does not appear anywhere. Contemporaneous sectarian terms either do not appear or appear only in comic, off-color, or otherwise non-exemplary contexts.

To test this proposition, one need only revisit the occasional usage that might seem exceptions or near-exceptions. In the overall body of Shakespeare’s work, when individual

characters engage in the language generally shunned, the exceptions prove the rule. That the omissions are deliberate can be deduced partly from the characterization behind the seeming exceptions. 'Popish' is used only by Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, not a role model (5.1.75-79).<sup>3</sup> 'Papist' is used only in the Fool's off-color but indifferent reference in *All's Well That Ends Well*, and not as an adjective; 'for young Charbon the Puritan and old Poysam the Papist, howsome'er their hearts are severed in religion, their heads are both one; they may jowl horns together like any deer i' th' herd' (1.3.51-56). The lines connect religions, if perversely, rather than divide them.

Only four plays contain the word 'Puritan,' and in three, the term is discredited by the speaker--the Fool in *All's Well*, quoted, the Clown in *Winter's Tale* (4.3.45-47), and the Bawd in *Pericles* (4.6.9-10). In the other example, the term is immediately and interestingly retracted. It occurs in *Twelfth Night*, when Sir Toby Belch, Maria, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek discuss Malvolio.

MARIA. Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan.

ANDREW. O, if I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog!

TOBY. What, for being a puritan? Thy exquisite reason, dear knight?

ANDREW. I have no exquisite reason for 't, but I have reason good enough.

MARIA. The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser[.] (2.3.138-146)

Maria promptly self-corrects her characterization of Malvolio, condemning him not as a 'puritan' but as an insincere self-advancer. The dialogue displaces religious denomination as an ethical axis with a broader, more generic, lower-case ethic. The playwright was a Church of England man, but ethics surmount denominations.

In other words, generally the names are not used as name-calling. Even the history plays, dramatizing issues still vital in Shakespeare's lifetime, are not thronged with the most virulent religious rhetoric from the time. The name of 'Rome' appears often in Shakespeare (approximately 259 times), but overwhelmingly in the plays set in Rome, from *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* to *Coriolanus* and *Cymbeline*, not in the history plays. Similarly, 'Roman' occurs approximately 145 times, but again overwhelmingly in the Roman plays. The English history plays contain only seven occurrences, none pertaining to 'Rome'-related accusations against English Catholics. (The word 'Romish' is used only by Imogen, *Cym.* 1.6.781, in a very different context.) Of the total 25 times 'Rome' is mentioned in the English histories, twenty occur in *King John* and *Henry VIII*, where it would be hard to omit. Remarkably, the word 'Roman' does not occur even in *Henry VIII* or in *King John*. In Shakespeare's word play with names—including his own name—the relationship between identity and either naming or name-calling is highly variable.

Not only the principal terms but the principal personages of the flaming religious divide in Elizabethan and Jacobean England went mostly unmentioned in Shakespeare's plays. Although forms of the word 'pope' appear in *Henry VIII* and *King John*, where the pope is a significant offstage presence, no Shakespeare play names any pope living in Shakespeare's lifetime, from Pius IV through Leo XI. Aside from *King John*, no play, not even the histories,

name a pope living *before* Shakespeare's lifetime. The sole exceptions occur when the papal envoy in *King John*, refers in 3.1 to 'Pope Innocent' and the 'holy see.' The word 'pope' is used ten times in *King John*—but always by, to, or about the papal legate, Cardinal Pandulph, and the historical pope is, again, barely named and remains offstage. Much earlier, the three plays of *Henry VI* mention a 'pope' a total four times, but again the plays do not identify an individual pope during the lifetime of the historical Henry VI. Forms of the word 'pope' appear six times in *Henry VIII*, naturally enough, but even *Henry VIII* does not name Clement VII or Paul III. Holinshed names Pope Clement, but the play does not; nor are the names 'Calvin' or 'Tudor' ('Teuther' in Holinshed) uttered.<sup>4</sup>

To approach a large topic like Shakespeare's lexicon and a larger one like contemporaneous public discourse invites caveats and requires care. The lexical omissions in Shakespeare indicate partly that public discourse has changed since the seventeenth century, when the names of world religions did not appear in annually assigned history schoolbooks. Given the sense of 'catholic' as 'universal,' Protestant authors did not always use it, although some did—John Donne, for example. Conversely, terms like 'Protestant' or 'Reformation' could be shunned entirely rather than used for name-calling, by Catholic writers who disputed them. Any of the lexicon would naturally appear more in avowedly polemical writing or in statecraft than in the theater.

Still, the blatant language that Shakespeare eschewed could be heard on stage. Obvious examples include plays by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637), arguably the two canonical playwrights who bookended Shakespeare's lifetime. The anti-Catholic *Massacre at Paris, with the Death of the Duke of Guise*, attributed to Marlowe and

performed by 1593, dramatized the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, with ample representation of villainous Catholics and repeated references to both Catholics and Protestants. The play also dramatized the assassination of the Catholic Duke of Guise--with copious references to individual French nobles and prelates--and the ascension of Henry of Navarre to become the first Protestant king of France.<sup>5</sup>

At the other end of the denominational Christian spectrum, aspersions on Puritans or Anabaptists or other non-orthodox sects were also more common elsewhere than in drama. But they also could crop up in plays, alongside straightforward polemic works and exclusionary statecraft. Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, performed in 1610, featured two Anabaptists named Ananias and Tribulation, gulled like other characters by their own greed into paying for fraudulent alchemy. Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, first staged on Halloween in 1614, featured a Puritan named Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Like similar characters in Jacobean drama, Busy is portrayed as a hypocrite and a glutton whose religiosity is mainly pretext for self-interest.

Contemporaneous examples of explicit religious language on stage include one of the sources for *Henry VIII*. Like *Henry VIII*, Samuel Rowley's episodic *When You See Me You Know Me*, published in 1605 and regarded as a source for Shakespeare, mentions both 'Lutheran' and 'heresies,' but more often and—oddly--more interestingly. When Queen Katherine expresses concern for the poor, Henry responds by calling her a 'Lutheran,' presumably jokingly; Cardinal Wolsey's faction later continues to call her one, not jokingly. Shakespeare and Fletcher's play does not opt to include the aspersion against Katherine. As in *Henry VIII*, Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, accuses Cranmer of heresies, but more repeatedly. Unlike *Henry VIII*, Rowley's play also uses the names 'Catholics' (once) and



‘Protestant’ (twice), with phrases like ‘friends of Rome,’ and its repeated references to the pope considerably exceed those of *Henry VIII*.<sup>6</sup> Rowley’s play is also blunter than Shakespeare and Fletcher’s play about the queen’s inability to produce a male heir.

Two years later, Barnabe Barnes’ play *The Devil’s Charter*, subtitled *Tragedie Conteining the Life and Death of Pope Alexander Sixt*, veered back from anti-Puritan to anti-Catholic terrain. The pope thus named and embodied, Alexander VI (1431-1503), secularly named Rodrigo Borgia, was the father of Cesare Borgia (1475-1507) and part of the colorful popular legacy about the house of Borgia in Italy, more flamboyant even than the house of Tudor in England. The subject of the play would not be ‘visions of pleasure’ or ‘amorous discourse,’ the Prologue informs the audience, but ‘Murther, foul Incest, and Hypocrisie,’ featuring ‘the Strumpet of proud Babylon.’<sup>7</sup> The play was performed for King James I.

For more animadversions against Puritans, a more obscure and wittier example can be found in the satirical *Muse’s Looking Glass*, by Thomas Randolph (1605-1635), one of the Sons of Ben. In this little-known play, a character named Mrs. Flowerdew retails how a fellow Puritan has ranted against the theaters, naming the most prominent playhouses. ‘It was a zealous prayer I heard a brother make, concerning playhouses,’ that each theater be destroyed in a manner appropriate to its name—the Phoenix ‘burnt to ashes,’ and so forth. For the Blackfriars theater, punning on the name, ‘He wonders how it ‘scaped demolishing/ I’ th’ time of reformation.’<sup>8</sup> Later in the same play, a character named Colax proclaims flamboyantly, ‘The word, Puritan,/ That I do glorify,’ going on to revel in the ways ‘Puritan’ is used as name-calling by the ‘prophane.’<sup>9</sup> Randolph was dramatizing extremes, not endorsing them.<sup>10</sup>

Randolph’s play is distinctive not in its presentation of Puritans but in its historically conscious

use of the term ‘reformation,’ explicitly in connection with religion, on stage. No character in *Henry VIII* does so--although the word itself is used, with deliberately ugly irony, when Chancellor More and Gardiner attempt to condemn Cranmer in 5.2 (58-82). It is in the same speech that Gardiner refers to ‘our neighbors,/ The upper Germany,’ a rare Shakespearean reference to German Protestantism (80-81).

Shakespeare’s non-use or discrediting of schismatic name-calling holds as a pattern even in *Henry VIII*. When the author collaborated in retirement on *Henry VIII*, the pattern established throughout his writing career must have been tested to the utmost. Yet he kept to it; even in *Henry VIII*, the name of ‘Rome’ is connected mainly with Cardinal Wolsey and his downfall; the word ‘heresies’ appears in a theological context just once; and Cranmer is termed a ‘heretic’ only by characters—More and Gardiner--whose usage foretells their own downfall, as with the vaguer ‘sect’ and ‘sectary.’ Although the main action of the historical Henry’s reign centered around the break with Rome, as does the action of *Henry VIII*, the play does not name the cardinal in England at the time, Lorenzo Campeggio, or Henry’s ambassador at the Vatican, Gregorio Casali; the former is fictionalized as ‘Cardinal Campeius’ and the latter as ‘Gregory de Cassado.’ The name and the death of Archbishop of Canterbury William Warham are omitted.

The demonstrable vocabulary choices in *Henry VIII* raise questions and suggest some answers, which this paper begins to address. Shakespeare’s lacunae may shed further light on the joint authorship of *Henry VIII* and on the authors’ use of their sources. (Table 2) Religious crudities used by a few characters including Wolsey further clarify their characterization. Honey-tongued Shakespeare’s sweet avoidance of ugly polemics may offer another way to

unify the series of trials and interrogations portrayed in four of five acts in *Henry VIII*. And looking at the subject optimistically, Shakespeare's comparative sensitivity or diplomacy may have influenced public thinking, in the long run, about how to deal with religious differences in public policy.

The joint authorship of *Henry VIII* has been tackled since Edmond Malone in 1790 and in depth since James Spedding and Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1850.<sup>11</sup> Recent work includes that of Thomas Merriam, whose articles on *Henry VIII* contain arguments with which I concur.<sup>12</sup> (Table 2) Briefly, word frequency can be illuminating, short lists developed by several previous scholars can be helpful, and ordinary words are key. I also concur with Merriam that King Henry's self-serving appeal to 'conscience' in speaking of Katherine and his daughter in 2.4 connects with similar language in Anne's scenes in 2.2 and 2.3.<sup>13</sup> The reiteration further connects several scenes in the play; it also connects Katherine's present situation with Anne's future fate, as the audience would likely remember.

Merriam also argues for mixed authorship of 4.2, which contains Katherine's oddly clunky dream-vision, following the much better dialogue about the death of her nemesis Wolsey.<sup>14</sup> One of the attempts at artistic unity in *Henry VIII* is the sequence of characters who learn a lesson from their downward turn of the wheel of fortune—Buckingham, Wolsey, Katherine—but Katherine's deluded validation by the pageant-like vision is regression. Her fleeting teachable moment is revoked. There is a delicate parallel with 3.1., in which Katherine stands up temporarily to the two cardinals—who she knows are not on her side--but then allows herself to be persuaded by them.

The application for this paper is that the scenes and parts of scenes convincingly attributed to Shakespeare also display the pattern summarized above. The ugliest polemics of the period are either absent, as in most of Katherine's and Anne's speeches, or discredited, as in Thomas More's and Bishop Gardiner's speeches. When Thomas Lovell uses the word 'reformation' in Act 1, it is ironic (1.3.25-26). When Thomas More and Stephen Gardiner use the words 'reformed' and 'reformation' in Act 5, as pretext for prosecuting Cranmer, the irony is uglier; it also precedes their own defeat with dramatic irony (5.2.70,71). Neither scene explicitly names the Protestant Reformation—not even the latter, in which Gardiner refers to it by geographical location.

Indeed, the pattern intensifies in *Henry VIII*. When Henry and his daughter Mary finally, belatedly appear in Shakespeare, their family name does not, and the dramatic possibilities of the historical King Henry and Anne Boleyn are frustratingly scanted. To a jaw-dropping extent, the historical personages involved in the central action of the play go unnamed. The short story about *Henry VIII* is that neither naming nor name-calling is a good idea.

A deeper point is that both naming and not naming look suspect. *Henry VIII* is loaded and tense. Not-naming is important in the play, like background music unheard by the characters but at least partly sensed by the audience. The atmospherics are established by the unmentioned history behind the play, by the unmentioned future of significant characters ahead of it—the beheadings of several, and the Marian persecutions--and by the importance of unnamed figures in it. Unnamed Gentlemen on the street provide vital commentary in 2.1 and 4.1; Anne's character is established largely through her dialogue with the nameless Old Lady in

2.3; an unnamed Man fills in the action with the Porter in 5.4; an unnamed Prologue and Epilogue (sometimes identified as Chorus) provide a cryptic, baffling frame to the play. The fired Surveyor who incriminates Buckingham is not named. Unnamed ladies and gentlemen appear as extras in courtly pageants and processions and in elaborate but disembodied stage directions. One author of the play was not named for many years. And the play itself was the only Shakespearean history called a ‘history,’ as scholars have long noticed; it is also the only history play given a subtitle—‘All Is True’—enabling commentators like Henry Wotton to refer to it without naming Henry.<sup>15</sup>

Whether the playwrights curtailed naming and name-calling from a sense of danger or for more elevated reasons, or more likely both, might be open to debate. But there is no question that naming is dangerous as well as spiritually or ethically fishy; the observation applies to the characters and the plot. Like diagetic music in film, spoken names intensify the atmosphere of jeopardy. Characters who speak on-the-nose in *Henry VIII* are doomed. In the old cliché of despotisms, he who raises his head above the crowd gets it lopped off; the same holds for someone who uses too many names or uses them too many times. Such is the fate of Buckingham, Cardinal Wolsey, and to some extent Stephen Gardiner in *Henry VIII*.

In calling names and in naming names, the negative example or object lesson is provided early in the play by Buckingham. The play opens with action centering around Buckingham, and Buckingham speaks eloquently and explicitly against Wolsey, in lines that do suggest traditional anticlerical imagery.

This holy fox,

Or wolf, or both,—for he is equal ravenous

As he is subtle, and as prone to mischief  
As able to perform't; his mind and place  
Infecting one another, yea, reciprocally—  
Only to show his pomp as well in France  
As here at home, suggests the king our master  
To this last costly treaty, the interview,  
That swallow'd so much treasure, and like a glass  
Did break i' the rinsing. (1.1.187-197)<sup>16</sup>

The Shakespearean lines in which Buckingham, Norfolk, and Abergavenny discuss Wolsey set the stage with some parallels to *Henry V*, another play that opens by revealing the underpinnings of the honor of going to France with the king, exposing the cost to England of an expensive contest with France. At the beginning of *Henry V*, the action is explicitly set in motion by two clergy, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely; at the beginning of *Henry VIII*, the action discussed second-hand has been arranged by Cardinal Wolsey. The representation of Wolsey as wolf in sheep's clothing or fox in the henhouse is validated by the action of the play, but it is perilous for Buckingham.

Beyond the critiques of and warnings about Wolsey, there is also a dimension of specifics less immediately pertinent to Wolsey than to Buckingham himself. Specifics mean jeopardy, centered at this point around Buckingham. When Buckingham and the others discuss Wolsey, they also discuss dealings with France, and 'Charles the emperor,' in England ostensibly to visit 'the queen his aunt' but really to scheme with the cardinal (205-221). At the close of the scene, Buckingham and Abergavenny are arrested, as are four other people,

offstage but specifically named (232-263). Great matters; minor characters; historical relevance; jeopardy: when Buckingham next appears, in 2.1, he is on his way to execution.

The first scene of Act 2 is an awkward combination of the cryptic and the prolix, but the awkwardness is deliberate; in this reading, it stems not from the play's dual authorship but from the characters and the situation. (An enacted collaboration between the older Shakespeare and the younger Fletcher would make a good podcast, with the two dividing up lines and speeches —'You gave me the stage directions!'—'Yes, and you turned them into two pageants, a procession, and a dream vision.') Buckingham's trial is over and done, not shown onstage—although some accusations were voiced onstage, in 1.2, without Buckingham present--and offstage means foregone conclusion. Two unnamed Gentlemen on the street in Winchester summarize what has happened. Four offstage 'witnesses' have accused Buckingham, one the unnamed Surveyor, the other three named—'Sir Gilbert Peck his chancellor, and John Car,/ Confessor to him, with that devil-monk, Hopkins, that made this mischief' (2.1.26-28). As in 1.1, the discussants blame events on the scheming Wolsey. The cardinal masterminds not only Buckingham's fate but that of other persons named and unnamed, 'first, Kildare's attainer,/ Then deputy of Ireland; who removed,/ Earl Surrey was sent thither, and in haste too,/ Lest he should help his father' (52-55). The scheming is part of Wolsey's characterization and is ongoing:

This is noted,

And generally: whoever the King favors,

The Card'nal instantly will find employment,

And far enough from court too. (59-62)

As someone also popular with ‘the commons,’ who hate the cardinal ‘perniciously,’ Buckingham represented a special threat (63-67).

Buckingham’s long speech to the crowd involves further specific names but not much reasoning. Buckingham’s self-revealing allusions present his story as a series of episodes of the high brought down by the low. Buckingham himself is ‘now, poor Edward Bohun,’ now lined up in a chronicle list behind ‘My noble father, Henry of Buckingham,’ ‘usurping Richard,’ ‘his servant Banister,’ ‘Henry the Seventh,’ and ‘Henry the Eighth’ (127-138). As Buckingham draws the moral, he like his father was betrayed by a loved and trusted servant, and he warns the crowd not to trust aides and confidants blindly (141-151). The final entourage that conducts Buckingham to the deadly barge includes more bold-face names, specifically mentioned--Sir Nicholas Vaux, Sir Thomas Lovell, Sir Walter Sands—with other ‘Common people, etc’ not named in stage directions.

Interestingly, with all these specifics, neither Buckingham nor anyone else in the play voices the historical fact that Buckingham and King Henry are cousins. Nor does Buckingham’s speech identify the elephant in the room—Henry’s effort to divorce Katherine--for which his phrase the ‘long divorce of steel’ is poetic displacement. Cryptic exposition falls to the unnamed Gentlemen on the street, who at the end of the scene drop the ‘buzzing of a separation/ Between the King and Katherine’ (161-174). The news, previously called ‘rumor’ and ‘slander,’ ‘Is found a truth now’ (174-182). Again, the discussants blame the Cardinal’s plotting for what is happening to Katherine (182-195).

Another historical fact not made clear is the extent of the Duke of Norfolk’s relationships. If ‘All Is True,’ then Norfolk is a particularly interesting character. The Dukes of



Norfolk were important in the historical Tudor era, and the stage Norfolk is an important figure in *Henry VIII*. When the play opens, Norfolk enters, Buckingham's interlocutor and the first character after Buckingham to speak. In a scene dominated by Norfolk and Buckingham, Norfolk describes the French and English kings' encounters in detail, warns Buckingham about Wolsey, and cautions the former to be more diplomatic. After the arrest of Buckingham and the others, however, Norfolk falls silent.

Norfolk also figures prominently early in the next scene, ushering in Queen Katherine to petition the king on behalf of the overtaxed commons, and he endorses her statement and expounds in detail on the problematic taxation. But again, after the accusations against Buckingham, who is absent at this point, he falls silent. Katherine defends Buckingham; Norfolk does not. Despite his professed concern for Buckingham in 1.1—'take it from a heart that wishes towards you/ Honor and plenteous safety' (124-125)—and his opposition to Wolsey, he is never shown speaking on Buckingham's behalf. The conduct becomes a pattern. Although Norfolk blames Wolsey for the divorce and sympathizes with Katherine, he also does not speak on Katherine's behalf in 2.2, when Henry decides on the divorce, and he is conveniently absent in 2.3, when Katherine stands up to Henry. Despite sympathizing with Cranmer in Act 5, when Cromwell and Gardiner accuse Cranmer in 5.2, Norfolk again does not speak openly on Cranmer's behalf.

Eerily, this play about Henry VIII's first divorce and remarriage to Anne Boleyn, in which Norfolk is a significant character, never mentions that the senior Duke of Norfolk is Anne Boleyn's grandfather and that his son, the Earl of Surrey, is Anne Boleyn's uncle. The words 'niece' and 'uncle' are not uttered in *Henry VIII*—although the fact that 'Charles the

emperor' is 'nephew' to his 'aunt' Katherine arises more than once. Not only is the Norfolk kinship not mentioned, not disclosed in dialogue; there is no sense of it even when the onstage conversations concern Anne. In 2.2., for example, Suffolk and the Lord Chamberlain (not named) gossip with Norfolk that Henry's 'conscience' 'Has crept too near another lady' (15-16). They mean Anne, but there is no verbal sign that she is Norfolk's granddaughter. Norfolk's response is to depone further on Wolsey's plotting; not mentioning Anne, he expounds on Wolsey, geopolitics, and Katherine's virtue (28-42). In 3.2, when Norfolk, Surrey, and Suffolk discuss the king's divorce and remarriage, again there is no mention of Norfolk's kinship to Anne. The discussants refer to 'Anne Bullen' here only as 'A creature of the Queen's' (45). The emphasis is overwhelmingly Wolsey's self-incriminating papers and his downfall. Nor does the Second Gentleman mention the kinship in 4.1, naming the Duchess of Norfolk in Anne's coronation entourage (61-63). Nor does Henry himself mention it in 5.2, when he refers to the Duchess as godmother to the infant Elizabeth (242-242).

Unmentioned history, in combination with unnamed characters and unmentioned family names, makes some of the conversations nearly surreal. In the action of the play, the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk become related to the king by marriage, but no one mentions the fact. Nor does anyone mention that Buckingham is a blood relative of Henry's, perhaps because the fact does not jibe with Tudor mythology as ending bloodshed between York and Lancaster. The unfortunate Buckingham is identified chiefly as father-in-law to Surrey (2.1; 3.2). Yet more weirdly, the play never clarifies—or mentions--that Surrey is Norfolk's son. Surrey, the future third Duke of Norfolk, is identified chiefly in relation to Buckingham. Other characters and Surrey himself refer to Surrey's relationship to Buckingham, as in 2.1 and in 3.2, without

acknowledging his relationship to his own father. Surrey never addresses or refers to Norfolk as his father—whether speaking to Norfolk himself or to others—nor does Norfolk mention their kinship. Throughout the drama of 3.2, as Wolsey's ill-acquired wealth comes to light, Surrey and Norfolk are engaged together in either dialogue or asides. At no moment is there any direct or indirect reference to the kinship. Unlike Shakespeare's other history plays, there are no terms of endearment between the related characters, no 'my father Norfolk' or 'my son Surrey,' no equivalent to 'Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle' to attest the genealogy and reaffirm the family tree.

Adding to the fog of war, Anne's maternal family name was Howard, another surname not mentioned in the play—the family name of the Dukes of Norfolk and of Anne's young cousin Catherine Howard, later Henry's fifth wife and second spouse to be beheaded. With all its anomalies, Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* aligns in this respect with Shakespeare's other English histories. Like the names 'Tudor,' 'Boleyn,' and 'Stuart' or 'Stewart'—so much for later melodrama over 'Mary Queen of Scots'--the name 'Howard' is never mentioned in Shakespeare's plays.

Yet their titular family name 'Norfolk' appears often in the histories, sometimes in colorful episodes. The name 'Norfolk' is not safe, not sanitized, not neutral. From the past, one of the princes killed in the tower in *Richard III* was a child Duke of Norfolk. In the future, the next Earl of Surrey--Surrey's future son, Anne Boleyn's cousin, a well-known poet—will be Henry's last beheading. The current Earl portrayed in the play will lose his estates under Henry and will have them restored under Mary Tudor.

If the lacunae about family names seem to reflect political considerations, they do not make the play feel safer, less edgy. Expedience is not safety. Their very arbitrariness intensifies the atmosphere of jeopardy, as with the name ‘Surrey,’ freely used in this play about Henry the Eighth despite the widely known fate of the poet. The lacunae that submerge Norfolk’s relationship to Surrey simply make the play feel more collusive with Norfolk, without ennobling Norfolk. Although one might consider the play’s chivalrous treatment of Katherine and Anne nearly whitewashing, or bowdlerizing, it does not create a brighter, cleaner, clearer atmosphere. Rather, Katherine and Anne’s virtue makes the scheming of Norfolk and Wolsey and Henry’s shuffling self-justifications look worse by contrast. A historical reference is implied even in Norfolk’s strategic silences. Like the elder Norfolk on stage in *Henry VIII*, the real-life Norfolk failed to protect his niece when she was condemned and executed on trumped-up charges of treason. As Catholics, the historical Dukes of Norfolk like their onstage versions opposed the divorce and remarriage. However, the play never identifies them as Catholic recusants, either; Norfolk’s characterization is focused almost exclusively on his enmity against Cardinal Wolsey.

Wolsey is central to much of the action in *Henry VIII*. While the pattern of lexical choices overall may reflect the political climate under James I, when the play was produced, the internal action occurs during Henry’s reign, and the premier example of dangerous name-dropping and -calling is Cardinal Wolsey. ‘Rome’ is named ten times in the play, exactly the number of times it is named in *King John*; five of the mentions come from Wolsey, three from persons speaking to Wolsey, and the other two refer to actions by Wolsey or by the so-called Cardinal Campeius.<sup>17</sup> Wolsey’s own mentions of Rome are unwitting references to the sinking

rock upon which Wolsey stands, his rock turned into an anchor—in the non-iconographic sense--by other characters, including the king.

Along with his over-reliance on ‘Rome,’ no longer a name of power in England, Wolsey also slips by voicing explicitly sectarian language against others. The denominational ‘Lutheran’ appears only once in Shakespeare, and it is Wolsey who uses it, calling Anne ‘a spleeny Lutheran’ while acknowledging her virtue (3.2.130). In engaging in such polemics, Wolsey is preceded by Buckingham in Act 1 and to some extent by Katherine in Act 2 and is followed by Gardiner and new Chancellor Thomas More in Act 5. When a character in *Henry VIII* uses such polemics, the usage is a harbinger of the character’s downfall, and Wolsey is the dominant example, with the deepest fall from grace. In simple terms, the characters themselves perceive their language as expression of power—Buckingham’s fulminating against Wolsey, Katherine’s accurate but helpless characterization of the ‘cardinals,’ Wolsey’s reliance on his position in the church, Gardiner’s ugly wish that Anne die in childbirth, and his and More’s premature interrogation of Cranmer. But in a series of dramatic ironies, such expression discloses their own vulnerability and places them in jeopardy.

The central action of *Henry VIII* suggests that its titular figure has substituted his advisors for conscience, but the rise and fall of successive counselors further indicates that his true inner guide is his own convenience. Wolsey’s machinations relate to geopolitics, as other characters recognize. Geopolitics connects the episodes of the play, with the emblematic Wheel of Fortune as ersatz theology—the world stage. Despite its dramatic possibilities, the Wheel of Fortune is grand pageantry itself, not serious philosophy--a superficial kind of theology, showy on the temporal scale but not sublime. Creation as a rolling hoop is not a spiritually elevated

image. If it were, someone as ethically negligible as Henry would not be able to give it a push. It is not the wheel of fortune turning against the major characters, but their own mindset, voiced with dangerous explicitness.

The same holds for much use even of proper names. Again, following Buckingham, Wolsey serves as main example. By Act 3, Anne's last name as well as her first has been mentioned more than once, but only Wolsey harps on it. When the king remarries, Wolsey fulminates in soliloquy,

It shall be to the Duchess of Alencon,  
The French king's sister: he shall marry her.  
Anne Bullen! No; I'll no Anne Bullens for him:  
There's more in't than fair visage. Bullen!  
No, we'll no Bullens. Speedily I wish  
To hear from Rome. The Marchioness of Pembroke! (3.2.1942-1947)

Again, his repeated sneers at 'Bullens' are sign and harbinger that his own toppling approaches. His fall, unlike Anne Boleyn's, occurs within the play and is validated by the action of the play.

The object lesson is further pointed up by the contrast between Wolsey and Anne. Anne does not speculate about plots and histories; nor does she engage in negative remarks about a character on any grounds including religious. Her impending downfall in historical actuality lies ahead, as the audience would know, but the play treats Anne kindly by portraying her as kind to others. Unlike Wolsey, Thomas More, and Stephen Gardiner, she does not provoke fate by questionable applications of theology; and unlike Buckingham, Katherine, and Henry, she does not engage in negative discussion of persons. She sympathizes with the woman treated

historically as her rival, Queen Katherine, commiserating over Katherine's situation with the unnamed Old Lady. Only in naming the elephant in the room does she echo Buckingham.

O, God's will! Much better

She ne'er had known pomp: though't be temporal,

Yet if that quarrel, fortune, do divorce

It from the bearer, 'tis a sufferance panging

As soul and body's severing. (2.3.14-18)

Like Buckingham, Anne connects divorce metaphorically with execution, her metaphor looking back with poetic unity to Buckingham's fate and looking forward with dramatic irony to her own.

There are two jaw-dropping examples of respectively naming and not naming in the play to round out the topic. The first occurs in the dialogue between Anne and the Old Lady in 2.3. The exchange itself is closely reminiscent of that between Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*, when Desdemona declares that she would not be unfaithful to her husband 'for all the world,' and Emilia retorts, 'for the whole world --Why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?' (4.3.71-87). Desdemona then reiterates her declaration, and Emilia plays it off with science-fiction humor about owning the whole world (88-93). The very similar exchange between Anne and the unnamed Old Lady in *Henry VIII* nearly repeats that in *Othello* but inserts a striking example of specific naming.

Anne. I swear again, I would not be a queen

For all the world.

Old Lady. In faith, for little England

You'd venture an emballing. I myself

Would for Carnarvanshire, although there long'd

No more to th' crown but that. (2.3.55-60)

The conversation is interrupted by the entrance of the unnamed Lord Chamberlain, announcing that Anne will be created Marchioness of Pembroke (71-91). He then exits with encomiums on Anne's virtue and an informal prophecy about the birth of Elizabeth I, not named but her first mention in the play, 'a gem/ To lighten all this isle' (95-96). The Lord Chamberlain, the Old Lady, and Anne all verify that Anne has not given the king anything for her promotion to Pembroke; this is rewriting history with a vengeance but not vengefully. Anne replies with gratitude but confides to the Old Lady, 'Would I had no being/ If this salute my blood a jot. It faints me/ To think what follows' (123-125).

Her seeming premonition drives home what underlies the preceding dialogue—the echo, in her conversation with the Old Lady, of another play about a husband who kills his wife. The driving home is furthered by the Old Lady, who consciously or not swings a metaphorical arrow of blame around to point at King Henry. 'Carnarvanshire,' the oddly specific location she names, is known historically as the birthplace of Owen Tudor, grandfather of Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty. Owen Tudor is another historical figure never named in all Shakespeare. Welshman Owen Glendower comes up several times in the history plays, Owen Tudor not once; nor does the historical alliance between Glendower and Tudor.

The converse example is the near omission of Henry's daughter Mary Tudor, unpopularly known in history as 'Bloody Mary'. In a striking example of not naming, the play comes near never mentioning her. In this regard, it also aligns with much of Shakespearean



drama; Shakespeare used the name 'Mary' close to never, a total of nine times in all plays, four of which refer to Maria in *Twelfth Night*. Of the remaining five uses, two occur in *Henry VIII*, as might be expected in a play named for Mary's father. Yet of the two, only one refers to Mary Tudor.

My conscience first received a tenderness,  
Scruple, and prick on certain speeches uttered  
By th' Bishop of Bayonne, then French ambassador,  
Who had been hither sent on the debating  
A marriage 'twixt the Duke of Orleans and  
Our daughter Mary. (2.3.190-195)

Furthermore, Henry's sole, negligible mention of her has the purpose only of raising doubts about her legitimacy.

I' th' progress of this business,  
Ere a determinate resolution, he,  
I mean the Bishop, did require a respite  
Wherein he might the King his lord advertise  
Whether our daughter were legitimate,  
Respecting this our marriage with the dowager,  
Sometime our brother's wife. (2.3.195-201)

In a speech referring to his 'conscience' and blaming his doubts on the French ambassador, Henry in effect repudiates Mary as his daughter--after Katherine exits. The indifference toward Mary strongly suggested becomes one of Henry's patterns of conduct by the end of the play. In

Act 5, after Cranmer prophesies future glories for the newborn Elizabeth, Henry rejoins, ‘O lord Archbishop,/ Thou hast made me now a man. Never before/ This happy child did I get anything’ (5.4.73-75). There seems to be no recollection of his older daughter, Mary.

Henry’s disregard is subtly accentuated when he absentmindedly uses the name ‘Mary’ elsewhere, in an unrelated context. With unwitting irony, as Henry is poised to intervene on Cranmer’s behalf in Act 5, he exclaims, ‘By holy Mary, Butts, there’s knavery!’ (5.2.42). The speech is anomalous even aside from the blankness about his daughter of the same name. Henry’s phrase ‘holy Mary’ occurs nowhere else in Shakespeare. The plays are largely devoid of expressed Mariolatry. (Table 1) There are only seven references to the figure of the Virgin Mary in all of Shakespeare, all in history plays.<sup>18</sup> Yet Henry—despite his break with Rome—refers to her twice. With a promising future glimpsed, this is an odd time to lapse into regressive phrasing--as Henry also did in the previous scene, also referring to Cranmer’s situation, by exclaiming ‘God’s blest mother’ (5.1.187).

The reversion suggests that despite his ‘conscience,’ Henry has not broken inwardly with the outward forms of the old church. *Henry VIII* does not uphold the scheming, vicious old guard represented by More and Gardiner as well as by Wolsey, but neither does it validate Henry’s selfish thuggery and machinations. In this view, while Shakespeare was an Anglican Protestant, he presented Henry’s indifference toward his older daughter as homologous with the shallowness of his separation from the older church. That it is Henry who twice refers—absentmindedly--to the Virgin Mary and to a ‘Mary,’ each instance one of only a handful in the Shakespeare corpus, is subtle critique of the historical Henry as represented in the play. The dismissive absentmindedness about his daughter and about his professed religion are parallel

unwitting self-disclosure. Despite the central action of the play—Henry’s break with the church of Rome--the ethic being upheld is more generic, or more ecumenical, than schismatic.

There is no assumption here that authorial choice can be completely analyzed where matters of fact are not completely known. Some authorial choices in *Henry VIII* diverge from sources and from historical actuality; some do not. Some choices may have been prudential, although how much they stemmed from concerns over political safety cannot be calculated and should not be overestimated as a starting assumption. The reign of Henry VIII was not a safe choice of subject matter to begin with, and in its Shakespearean scenes this early seventeenth century play portrayed onstage Henry’s being duped by Cardinal Wolsey, Henry’s willingness to blame his actions on other people (2.3), and his draconian turnover in counselors driven by his convenience. The kindness with which the play treats both Katherine and Anne may or may not have pleased James I—the sympathy for Katherine, the avoidance of any appearance of catfight, the respect with which decent characters treat Anne. But either way, there is no basis for assuming that the play’s kindness toward its main female characters was dictated by a motive to please James.

Any artistic choices—by any author--stem partly from individual temperament and situation. Shakespeare’s mother's name was Mary; his wife's name was Anne; his granddaughter’s name was Elizabeth. His plays largely steer clear of all three names except when borne by historical figures—and sometimes even then, as in the spectacular example of *Henry VIII*, where Anne is named seldom (four times, aside from stage directions), Elizabeth twice, and Mary once.

Part of the author's sweetness of choice was practical sensitivity, marrying sweetness to prudence. Boosting human behavior from the bottom strengthens an entire society, as Shakespeare was smart enough to see. While the artistic choices served artistic purposes, the purposes are ethical as well as artistic. Excessively on-the-nose references are suspect or self-referential in *Henry VIII* as throughout all of Shakespeare's plays; narrowly or myopically material details or topicalities, without being interestingly textured, appear for what they indicate in characters or situations. Overall, the plays uphold respect and fairness. One can flesh out this overall point in detail; in summary, it applies across the board to Shakespeare's entire lexicon as used in the plays. The peculiar example is *Henry VIII*, where given the historical reign, flaming schism could have been stridently vindicated and where instead vocabulary and characterizations are governed by an ethic of reconciliation.

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**Table 1. Lexicon of religious divide in Shakespeare (overview)**

**Terms missing entirely, not found in Shakespeare corpus including *Henry VIII*:**

Anti-Christ, antichrist	papacy
Bible, biblical, Holy Bible	papal
blessed Virgin	papistical
Calvin	papistry
Catholic	pontiff
communion, holy communion	popery
crucifix, crucifixion	Protestant
Erasmus	Puritans (plural)
evangelical	revelation
heretical	tonsure
Holy spirit	Trinity
holy virgin	Tudor
Howard	Tyndale
Jesuit	Vatican
liturgy	Virgin Mary
Mother Mary	
mother of God	

**Relevant lexicon found only in the English history plays:**

abbot	cardinal/s
archbishop	Holy Land
archdeacon	prelate
arch-heretic ( <i>Henry VIII</i> , <i>King John</i> )	See, Holy See ( <i>King John</i> )
bishop/s	

**Relevant lexicon found only in *Henry VIII*:**

Lutheran (3.2)
popedom (3.2)

**Lexicon found in the plays but not in *Henry VIII*:**

Christ, Jesus, Jesu	purgatory
damnation	Roman (also not in <i>King John</i> )
prelate	salvation



savior

See, Holy See

**Table 2. List view: *Henry VIII* authorship--acts and scenes**

Each scene is listed below with traditional or recent attribution first, attribution by predominant “em” or “them” next,\* and my attribution by handling of polemics (either omitted or discredited) third.

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Prologue. Shakespeare; Shakespeare [1 *them*]; Shakespeare

1.1. Shakespeare; Shakespeare; Shakespeare

1.2. Shakespeare; Shakespeare; Shakespeare (suspect minuteness of unnamed Surveyor)

1.3. Fletcher; Fletcher [7 *em*]; Fletcher (unwittingly ironic ‘reformation,’ unvalidated praise of Wolsey)

1.4. Fletcher; Fletcher; Fletcher

2.1. Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher [4 *em*]; Fletcher-Shakespeare

2.2. Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare (‘conscience,’ valid critique of Wolsey)

2.3. Shakespeare; Shakespeare [0 either term]; Shakespeare (‘Carnarvanshire’?)

2.4. Shakespeare; Shakespeare [2 *them*]; Shakespeare (‘conscience’; ‘Mary’)

3.1. Fletcher; Fletcher [5 *em*]; [Fletcher-Shakespeare] (Katharine persuaded by the cardinals)

3.2. Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare (Wolsey’s fall)

4.1. Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare (processional; names and titles)

4.2. Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare; Fletcher-Shakespeare (Katharine forgives but has a pageant-like vision)

5.1. Shakespeare; Shakespeare [4 *them*]; Shakespeare (Cranmer accused; offstage childbirth)

5.2. Fletcher; Fletcher [3 '*em*']; [Fletcher-Shakespeare] (another kangaroo court; the king's ring)

5.3. Fletcher; Fletcher [3 '*em*']; [Fletcher-Shakespeare] (Porter, unnamed Man)

5.4. Fletcher; Fletcher [12 '*em*']; Fletcher

5.5. Fletcher; Fletcher [1 '*em*']; Fletcher

Epilogue. Fletcher; Fletcher [2 '*em*']; Fletcher

\*The words 'them' and 'em' represent a selection of ordinary words preferred by respectively Shakespeare and Fletcher. Scenes with bracketed totals for one word have none of the other.

The rest are mixed, though most have a preponderance of one term or the other, except for 2.3, which has neither.

<sup>1</sup> References to individual words discussed signify all contemporaneous spellings, indicated by one modernized spelling for convenience.

<sup>2</sup> For occurrence of individual words and names, see OpenSourceShakespeare, George Mason University (2003-2021), <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org>; within plays, *Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, MIT (1993-2021), <http://shakespeare.mit.edu>.

<sup>3</sup> Citations to the other plays refer to the Folger Shakespeare Library edition. At <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org>.

<sup>4</sup> On the Tudor name as 'an embarrassment in England' and on some changes in usage, see Cliff Davies, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Massacre at Paris* (London, 1600); see 11, 44, 49, 55; 35, 45, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Rowley, *When You See Me You Know Me* (1874), ed. Elze. See for example 16, 19; 42; 39, 54; 58.

<sup>7</sup> Barnabe Barnes, *The Devils Charter* (London, 1607), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Randolph, *Muse's Looking Glass* (1790), ed. Reed, 175.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Scodel, 'Pleasures of Restraint,' *Criticism* 38.2 (1996), 248.

<sup>11</sup> For overview, Thomas Merriam, 'One or Two Katherines in *Henry VIII*?' *Notes and Queries* 67.2 (2020); A. R.

Humphreys, *Henry VIII* (Harmondsworth, 1971), 'Introduction,' 18-22, 'Further Reading,' 52-54.

<sup>12</sup> As in 'Simplicity of Means,' *Notes and Queries* 59.4 (December 2012); 'Untangling the Derivatives,' *Literary & Linguistic Computing* 24.4 (December 2009); 'Low Frequency Words, Genre, Date, and Authorship,' *Notes and Queries* 53.4 (December 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Merriam, 'Henry VIII, All Is True?' *Notes and Queries* 65.1 (2018); 'Though this Be Supplimentary, Yet there Is Method In't,' *Notes and Queries* 50.4 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Merriam, 'One or Two Katherines in *Henry VIII*?' *Notes and Queries* 67.2 (2020).

<sup>15</sup> Humphreys, 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> Citations to the text of the play refer to 'William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*,' Folger Library Shakespeare. At <https://www.folger.edu/henry-viii>.

<sup>17</sup> By Wolsey at 2.2.1137, 2.4.1354 and 2.4.1456, 3.2.1947 and 3.2.2098; to Wolsey at 2.2.1148, 3.2.2213 and 3.2.2229.

<sup>18</sup> Of the five other references, four occur in the first tetralogy, one in the second. At *1H6* 1.2.79; *2H6* 2.1.57; *R3* 1.3.325, 3.7.2; *R2* 2.1.62.