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# A DIFFERENT KIND OF POPULAR HISTORY: SHAKESPEARE AND THE TUDOR MONARCH PLAYS

by

ALLISON LEMLEY

Scholarship has long considered the history play's heyday to have been largely limited to the 1580s and 1590s, with its popularity waning after James I succeeded Elizabeth I. This perception has been based, in part, on definitions of history plays as tragedies about post-Norman English kings. Recent scholarship, such as Amy Lidster's *Publishing the History Play in the Time of Shakespeare: Stationers Shaping a Genre*, has demonstrated the long-lasting influence of Shakespeare's First Folio as originating this impression of history plays. Lidster's work not only deconstructs the definition of the genre and establishes the need for further generic description and expansion. In this article, I turn to two Jacobean history plays about Henry VIII to exemplify that history plays not only remained popular after Elizabeth I's reign, but also that the playwrights' experimentation with the form portrays new types of histories and audience engagement with their own recollections of the past.

James I's reign allowed for the portrayal of Tudor monarchs, a trend that Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer have discussed in *English Historical Drama, 1550–1660: Forms Outside the Canon*. They identify six "Tudor monarch plays" which experiment with various genres, including Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1605), William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *King Henry VIII or All Is True* (1613), both about Henry VIII, and Thomas Heywood's two-part *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605/1606), covering events from Elizabeth I's reign. This article will discuss Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me* (henceforth *WYSM*) and William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *All Is True* (1613), later retitled *King Henry VIII* in the First Folio.<sup>1</sup> The Tudor monarch plays discussed by Grant and Ravelhofer establish the playwrights' interest in blending other genre conventions with the history play. Tudor monarch plays, besides featuring either Henry VIII or Elizabeth I, share other similarities. They are often episodic in structure and have providential endings, which celebrate the monarch as blessed by Fortune and the fulfiller of God's divine plan. Some plays might portray this message in a straightforward way, such as *WYSM*, while others, such as *All Is True*, use contemporary trends to subvert broadly affirming themes. By considering the ways in which these plays recall history, I assert the flexibility of the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, I will continue to use *All Is True* for the 1613 context of the play. I have made this decision to emphasise the original context of both plays, including the similarity in titling conventions. I also follow both play's spelling conventions when referring to the character based on the historical person (i.e. Anne Bullen for Anne Boleyn in *All Is True*) and modern accepted spelling of a historical person's when discussing the historical person (i.e. Catherine Parr, who is called Catherine Parry in *WYSM*).

history play as a genre and its enduring popularity from the Elizabethan into the Jacobean period.

*WYSM* was first printed in 1605 and again in 1613, the same year that performances of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *All Is True* first appear in records. *WYSM*'s popularity in print, along with other providential histories, meant that interest in this genre and Tudor histories would have been topically relevant when Shakespeare and Fletcher began work on *All Is True*. Both *WYSM* and *All Is True* experiment with the role of providence in structuring their narratives. Providence, broadly understood as the fulfilment of God's divine plan, was one part of the wheel of fortune, a cycle in which great men rose or fell from power: the virtuous are rewarded while the sinful are punished. Early modern audiences would have been familiar with this through the proliferation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, a collection of poetry in which select great men of history give fictionalised speeches about the sins which led to their falls. Boccaccio's work and other similar collections, such as the *Mirror for Magistrates*, had long-standing popularity in English print culture which also influenced English drama.

Scholars have noted such influence on Shakespeare's other history plays, which often question the ways in which the powerful construct their rise in providential terms. Isabel Karremann's analysis of *Henry V* in *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays* explores such framings. In one significant example, she details how Act One, Scene One's praise of Henry V is partially "a narrated memory picture... that prospectively prepares for his new image as 'mirror of all Christian kings'" (Karremann 130). For early modern audiences, the "mirror of all Christian kings" would have recalled the *Mirror for Magistrates*. The purpose of this "mirror" is to provide an example of how men should behave, either through avoiding vice or emulating virtue through recollection of historical figures. In framing the titular Henry V as this "mirror", the "memory picture" that emerges validates his rule as an exemplar. History plays are ultimately recollections of the past. They remediate historical sources, such as Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but further, they remediate memory. Similarly, Lukas Lammers' *Shakespearean Temporalities* examines a selection of history plays that discuss the ways in which history plays intertwine different temporalities. History plays portray the past and characters frequently make future-oriented statements. For the audience, this imagined future is in their past. The "future-past", in Lammers' terms, highlights the role of recollection in reception of history plays (Lammers 67). In Karremann's example, she points out voices within the text that undermine those in power. This is a feature that appears in *All Is True* as well, but the effects of the "future-past" function differently for audiences within – at most – three generations of the play's events. As a result of this temporal proximity, there are different ways in which *WYSM* and *All Is True* anticipate potential audience recollections.

As I will demonstrate in comparing *WYSM* and *All Is True*, the plays' respective playwrights were aware that audiences would recall events or historical persons from Henry's reign, but embedded memories of these within the text to different ends. In the first section of this article, I will demonstrate how *WYSM* uses recollection as a part of its order of events to create a heroic picture of Henry as king over the course of the play. The second section will examine an example from *All Is True* in which both the order of its episodes and audience recollection unmoor any sense of 'truth'. In the final section

of this article, I will examine how the use of providence in *WYSM* affirms Tudor and Stuart monarchs in contrast with *All Is True*'s ironic usage of providence.

### Samuel Rowley's *Henry VIII*: Didactic Comedy

Rowley's *WYSM*, written for the Prince's Men and performed around 1604, instigated a Jacobean trend for history plays about Tudor monarchs. It was written at an early stage in James's reign, ostensibly for the young Henry Frederick, James's heir. *WYSM* portrays a series of events that allows a proto-Protestant Henry VIII and Prince Edward to overcome the usurping designs of Cardinal Wolsey, who plans to gain the papacy and with it, earthly power above the king's divine rights. Its concern with English sovereignty in opposition to Catholic usurpers, embodied by the play's Cardinal Wolsey, both glorifies and advises the new Stuart rulers of England. *WYSM* is not wholly uncritical of Henry VIII or its Stuart audience; for example, Henry's fool, Will Sommers, openly critiques Henry's reliance on poor advisors and his sexual appetites. *WYSM*'s criticisms are subsumed into the use of romance conventions, however, which reconcile Henry with his queen Catherine Parry, his son Edward, and his country.<sup>2</sup> This reconciliation allows Henry to overcome Catholic schemes against his rightful rule and English sovereignty. In the final scene, a visit from the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, serves to affirm the achievement of these political goals. *WYSM*'s conclusion illustrates what good English kingship should be, ostensibly to show Henry Frederick the future leadership wished for by his subjects. *WYSM* experiments with providence to comedic ends, which ultimately affirms Tudor and Stuart monarchy; in recalling Henry's reign, the play uses genre conventions from comedy and romance to contain potentially disruptive memories.

*WYSM*'s events are episodic but ultimately create an arc for Henry and his son Edward to develop as kings of England who reject foreign Catholic influence. The play opens with Wolsey scheming with French ambassadors to gain the papacy and to become more powerful than Henry. The next scenes include the death of Jane Seymour and the birth of Edward, as well as the start of a subplot concerning the marriage of Henry's sister to the King of France. What can be considered the first act largely establishes Henry's melancholy after Jane Seymour's death.<sup>3</sup> The rest of the play's events show Henry shaking off this melancholy and taking back control over his kingdom from false advisors. Henry's night walk through London, dramatised from Stowe's account, reveals the corruption of his court and is part of Henry's discovery of false advisors. Edward's arc in the play corresponds to his father's experiences as Henry learns who can be trusted, while Edward proves himself to be a trustworthy advisor and heir to Henry. *WYSM* uses historical events or figures in whichever way best suits its narrative

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<sup>2</sup> The names of historical figures within the plays will use the play's spelling of their names, while references to the historical person will use the modern standardised spelling of names. For example, Catherine Parr is called Catherine Parry in *WYSM*.

<sup>3</sup> My references to *WYSM* are taken from the 1604 quarto edition printed by Nathaniel Butters available on EEBO, although Joanna Howe in her publicly available doctoral dissertation edited *WYSM* to create a critical edition. As the EEBO edition does not have act or scene divisions, my references will be to the abbreviated title only. I have lightly modernised spelling and grammar conventions.

purposes, a common feature of history plays. Rowley reimagines Tudor history to show Henry and Edward's rejection of 'popish' influence.

Dialogue helps to orient the audience within the play's arrangement of temporal events and also confirms Henry's position as the centre of order. This can be seen during Henry's night walk, which takes place at approximately the midpoint of *WYSM*. This episode shows Henry's test of London's watch. As Henry walks through the city in disguise, he meets the murderer Black Will. They fight, are both arrested by the watch, and Henry spends most of the night in the counter, a debtor's prison. While held with the other prisoners, Henry hears the plight of one prisoner who has been falsely accused by one of Wolsey's servants. Henry, incensed that someone would abuse their power in this way, promises that the falsely accused prisoner "shall have remedy" (*WYSM*). Henry also judges correctly that other prisoners are lying and actually guilty of the crimes of which they are accused. Eventually Henry is rescued by his advisors who reveal his identity. After paying the jailor for his release, Henry asks one of his rescuers, "what further news?" (*WYSM*). This signals a turn in the final part of the scene, as the last lines begin the transition to the king's conflict with Wolsey. The men are still passing through London when Henry hears that the King of France has died, leaving his sister widowed, and he sends Brandon to bring her back to England. Henry next adds:

HENRY.                   Commend me to the Lady Catherine Parry,  
                                   Give her this ring, tell her on Sunday next  
                                   She shall be queen, and crowned at Westminster.  
                                   And Anne of Cleaves shall be sent home again.  
                                   Come sirs, we'll leave the City, and the counter now.  
                                   The day begins to break, let's hie to court,  
                                   And once a quarter we desire such sport. (*WYSM*)

Henry's lines, which end this scene, serve multiple functions. They orient the audience temporally within historical events they can recall and help them anticipate upcoming episodes. Henry's words quickly summarise a historically complex series of events to keep the action focused on his struggle against Wolsey. These lines also quickly gloss events that have happened and establish Henry's upcoming marriage so that the next scene can then show Wolsey's reaction to the King of France's death.

The dialogue further anticipates the audience's recollection of the "future-past" and attempts to create a narrative of Henry's marriages through the inclusion and exclusion of his wives. In this case, the audience is prepared to see Henry's final wife, Catherine Parr, and are reminded of Anne of Cleves. The lines omit Catherine Howard, who directly preceded Catherine Parr, but the reference to Anne of Cleves may have prompted the audience to recall Henry's comparatively generous attitude towards Anne of Cleves. Within the play, Henry asks for Anne of Cleves to be "sent home". This is an ambiguous reference to her divorce from Henry, which prevented her from returning to her brother's court in her native Cleves, but it also works as a reminder of Henry's magnanimity in naming her "the king's sister" and providing a settlement that allowed for her relative independence. The dialogue here establishes time within the play, as Jane Seymour was succeeded by Anne of Cleves. However, by skipping Catherine Howard, the play only references wives Henry did not unpopularly divorce, such as Catherine of Aragon, or behead, such as Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. The play prompts

recollection of Jane Seymour, who died giving birth to Henry's longed-for male heir, or Anne of Cleves and Catherine Parr, who outlived Henry. In choosing to portray Henry's marriage to his final queen, Henry's "future-past" from that point is free from the complications of divorce and execution.

These references work in connection with Henry's final reflection on the night's "sport" in testing the watch, which further characterises him as a benevolent, heroic figure. The overall effect of the scene, especially Henry's promises to the prisoners, establishes Henry as a monarch concerned for his people. The events in this section are fast-paced and comedic, demonstrating Henry's fighting prowess against Black Will. The swordplay and later, wordplay, with Black Will show Henry actively reclaiming his duties as monarch, which he had let lapse after Jane Seymour's death. These scenes are also moments of comedy – Henry is portrayed as a swashbuckling hero who can both fight and be merciful to his subjects. Henry's encounters with the prisoners illustrates his discernment in meeting out justice, which also sets up a later scene in which Henry punishes high-placed servants at court who abuse their power to falsely imprison others. This scene combines generic conventions of comedy but also romance conventions, as Henry takes steps to reassume his proper political authority.

The next scene reinforces the contrast between a selfless Henry and a self-interested Wolsey who is plotting to open English sovereignty to dangerous foreign influence. It begins with Wolsey and one of his bishops, Bonner, receiving the same news regarding the King of France. Where Henry expressed concern for his sister in the wake of a broken political alliance, Wolsey laments that "[o]ur trusty friend, the king of France is dead, / And in his death, our hopes are hind'ered" (*WYSM*). The play asserts a close connection between Catholic beliefs and loyalty to foreign powers above the English sovereign as a central tension that Henry must resolve. Henry's recollections of some of his marriages and anticipation of his marriage to Catherine Parry acknowledge historical events that audiences may recall while meaningfully excluding others. This moment is further significant as it embeds these references within a particular sequence of events to rehabilitate Henry's melancholy after Jane Seymour's death. This rehabilitation turns Henry away from his bad advisors, including Cardinal Wolsey, and towards the good Protestant advisors he finds in his heir Edward and wife Catherine Parry. As a result, the tension for the audience is focused on whether or not Henry will discover the plots against him and throw off Catholic influence. The Henry in *WYSM* is not completely without flaws or unchallenged, but since the source of *this* Henry's troubles is externalised as a fight against Catholic – and foreign – interference, the play recalls the historical Henry's imposition of religious reformation as part of a benevolent, proto-Protestant monarchy.

The play's final scene stages Henry's political and personal reconciliations, conventions of romance anticipated in his night walk through London. The ending brings together Henry, his sixth wife, and son Edward as a family unit, resolving turmoil sown by Wolsey. Besides affirming Henry's rule as divinely blessed, this resolution also affirms Edward as Henry's heir. This providential ending culminates in a visit from the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The Holy Roman Emperor, Henry's nephew through his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, could certainly have been an evocative figure. The

emperor's role is to affirm Tudor rule and English sovereignty, as he exclaims to Edward:

CHARLES.           Thou dost amaze me, and d[o]st [m]ake me wish  
                           I were a second son to Englan[d's] Lord,  
                           In interchange of my imperial seats  
                           To live with thee... (*WYSM*)

As with other moments or figures of recollection within the play that could counter the narrative of Tudor and Stuart ascension, Charles is used to voice unequivocal wonder at Prince Edward, King Henry, and English superiority. Charles V's presence helps to further uncover the schemes against Henry, as the emperor questions the break in their alliance. Wolsey's secret plot to align England with France and break with Charles V to advance his papal ambitions is fully revealed. The picture painted by *WYSM*'s providential ending is one of completeness, which can be continued or destroyed if only Stuart monarchs heed Catholic interference on English rule, a position voiced in the final act by Charles V.

*WYSM*'s dramatic tension lies in the audience's awareness of the schemes of Henry's bad advisors. When Wolsey and his bishops plot against Catherine Parry, the audience knows about their self-interested schemes. They further hope that Edward's intercession with Henry will work, resolving both a familial and political problem. The conflict allows for comic relief of this tension in various ways, including slapstick-style comedy provided by Will Sommers. Will Sommers uses his rights as a court fool to criticise Henry's reliance on self-interested Catholic advisors throughout the play. Sommers has his own role in helping young Prince Edward become his father's best advisor and heir. By including episodes which show Wolsey and his bishops openly planning treason alongside Will Sommers' comedic undermining of Henry's bad advisors, the play conveys a clear message that any turmoil during Henry's reign was the result of bad-faith actors. The play attempts to keep tight control over audience recollection of the "future-past" through careful selection of references and a central conflict that revolves around Henry's defence of English sovereignty. Once Henry clears his court of foreign interference, he is finally able to rule England properly. The hopefulness of such an ending is achieved with the play's blending of history and romance.

### **Shakespeare and Fletcher's Henry VIII: A Network of Events**

The similarities between *WYSM* and *All Is True* in their uses of episodic structures and Henry VIII's reign underscore different kinds of experimentation with the history play as a genre. The tonal differences in both plays' handling of Tudor history lies in part within their own initial performance contexts. The first recorded performance of *All Is True* was in 1613, in the immediate aftermath of James I's policies of uniting England and Scotland, his search for a Spanish match for Henry Frederick, and Henry Frederick's death in late 1612. While there are, of course, further events that shaped the intervening years between 1604 and 1613, these examples demonstrate differences in political climate from Rowley's hopefulness early in James' English reign by 1613. The Henry of *All Is True* has proclaimed 'truths' that attempt to assert his authority as king. As the

play sequences events or commentary to destabilise Henry's reframing of the past, Henry's 'truths' are not safe from his own conflicting desires, from observations by his courtiers, or from audience recollection. The audience is meant to recall events alongside the play's episodes and take note of inconsistencies in how Henry and others attempt to control the 'truth.' As a result, the episodes in the play become a network of events that audience members recall in later scenes. These moments of recollection from within the play also anticipate early modern audiences' varied memories of the Tudor past. The play includes moments of recollection for the characters, but also the "future-past" as a mode that directly prompts audience recollection. *All Is True* portrays events within two to three generations of its 1613 audience, and potentially closer in time with uses of the "future-past".

Henry's desires in the play include Anne Bullen, whom he meets at Wolsey's banquet in Act One, Scene Four. They dance together as a part of masked revels, and Henry declares that Anne's "[t]he fairest hand I ever touched. O Beauty, / Till now I never knew thee" (*Henry VIII* 1.4.75–76). In Act Two, Scene Three, the audience watches the Lord Chamberlain elevate Anne Bullen, as Henry bestows on her the title of the Marchioness of Pembroke. Act Two, Scene Four stages the legatine court at Blackfriars, a historical event that was part of Henry's attempts to divorce Katherine of Aragon, which confirms the unreliable reports in Act Two, Scene One. At the start of the scene, Katherine is given priority. Eschewing legal formalities, she kneels before Henry and pleads her case for their marriage, stating her loyalty to him: "... I have been your wife in this obedience / Upward of twenty years, and have been blessed / With many children by you..." (*Henry VIII* 2.4.33–35). Ivo Kamps has discussed Katherine's legal arguments in detail, summarising the differences as "the authority of history and custom" besides her "convincing case for having been the perfect Queen and wife" (203). After Katherine leaves, Henry opines at length at how his "conscience" was troubled by concerns about the legitimacy of his marriage, despite Katherine's loyalty to him as his queen. Kamps usefully describes Henry's argument as "an intangible appeal to consciences, providence, and manufactured 'evidence'" (203). While "manufactured" is a loaded term, Henry uses the clergymen as witnesses to his "conscience," externalising an internal processing of personal sin, which has profound political ramifications: "My consciousness first received a tenderness, / Scruple and prick on certain speeches uttered / By th'... French ambassador" (*Henry VIII* 2.4.167–169). The ambassador questions whether Mary is legitimate, as Henry had married his brother's widow. Despite the pope's special dispensation for his marriage, Henry's lack of a male heir has led him to consider this divine judgement against him (*Henry VIII* 2.4.190–196). He asks the assembled clergy to:

HENRY.                    Prove but our marriage lawful, by my life  
                                   And kingly dignity, we are contented  
                                   To wear our mortal state to come with her,  
                                   Katherine, our Queen, before the primest creature  
                                   That's paragoned o'th'world. (*Henry VIII* 2.4.223–227)

His speech is cut off by Campeius, a cardinal sent from Rome to oversee this trial, who ends the court due to Katherine's absence. After Campeius's attempt to end the court proceedings, Henry's magnanimous mood sours. In an aside, he complains about

“dilatory... tricks of Rome” and anticipates the return of his “learned and well-beloved servant, Cranmer... / With thy approach I know / My comfort comes along” (*Henry VIII* 2.4. 234–237).

The legatine trial at Blackfriars is a complex episode. Kamps has thoughtfully analysed Katherine and Henry’s arguments in an early modern legal context. Setting aside the precise legal workings of their arguments, their respective recollections of the past create meaningful narratives in themselves. Katherine’s appeals are to the previous decisions handed down by both secular and religious authorities that allowed them to marry. She further argues for her loyalty to Henry and the children they have had together. Henry’s “conscious” as the source of trouble is his attempt to turn his private confessions to the gathered clergy into public testimony. In this reframing, Henry turns Katherine’s general reference to their shared children into a specific reference to Mary, their only surviving child, and alludes to the political ramifications of this sole daughter as his heir. From Katherine’s “many children,” Henry attempts to use recollection to turn his insecurities regarding succession into a personal rift with God, exemplified by potential divine punishment. It is notable that Henry only begins this argument once Katherine has left. Both Katherine and Henry focused their speech on recollecting a shared past, but Henry’s anger in being delayed in his efforts to divorce Katherine shifts him into hoping for a better result with Cranmer. The scene ends in the “future-past”, without any attempt to assert what that future may look like.

The revelation in these lines directly reveals the stagecraft behind Henry’s public relation of private confessions. As the first reference to Henry’s rising favourite Cranmer, his lines imply that Cranmer will grant Henry “comfort” in the form of the longed-for divorce. Unlike Henry’s long speeches about his “conscious” that reframe Katherine’s arguments, this reference to Cranmer relies on the audience’s recollection of the historical Cranmer’s role in Henry’s divorce. This reference is open-ended, since the exact “comfort” Cranmer will provide is ambiguous within the text itself, but a pointed reference for audiences to recall events relating to Henry’s divorce. His own recollections may still be challenged by Katherine’s previous speeches or audience memory, which Henry’s own appeals to memory within the scene encourage. The audience, however, can recall events within the play’s narrative itself as well. The sequence of events between scenes undermines Henry’s declaration that Katherine is the “primest creature / ... paragoned o’th’world” clashes with his declaration of Anne as the “fairest” at their first meeting (*Henry VIII* 2.4.226–227; *Henry VIII* 1.4.75). Henry’s insistence at Blackfriars that he wants the gathered clergy to “[p]rove... our marriage lawful” so he can clear his conscience and remain married to Katherine feels hollow. Henry’s public claims clash further with Henry’s continued private pursuit of Anne. The play’s narrative unsettles Henry’s attempts to control recollection and achieve his will. His public framing of his desires is further contradicted by his desire for Cranmer in the “future-past.” Audience recollection additionally contains the potential to complicate his hoped-for future. After all, Henry’s newest rising favourite, Anne, would someday fall. The play’s deployment of the “future-past” anticipates audience recollection to further its exploration of overreaching power, allowing audiences to compare what is hoped for within the play to events within relatively close memory.

### Providential Structures and *All Is True*'s Irony

Where *WYSM* used providence to affirm Tudor, and by extension Stuart, monarchy, *All Is True* experimented with providence to question the construction of historical narratives. This is largely due to the ways in which each narrative structure anticipates audience recollection. In *WYSM*, the narrative portrays Henry as altruistic throughout its episodes build to a resolution which shows Henry as the true master of his realm. The play relies on dramatic irony to produce tension, as the audience is concerned with whether or not Henry will discover Wolsey's plots and believe Edward's advice. *WYSM* constructs its narrative and attempts to tie up the 'loose threads' of audience memories to lead to its providential ending in which Henry is reconciled with Catherine Parry, at Edward's urging. This ending glorifies Henry's providential rule, affirming Tudor and Stuart dynasties, but warns Stuart monarchs to beware of false advisors – particularly Catholics. Future-oriented statements in *WYSM*, such as Henry's calls for his marriage to Catherine Parry, may be meaningful to audiences as a point of recollection, but the moment serves to establish a later episode. The providential fulfilment of Henry's reign occurs within the play, as Henry and Edward are shown banishing Catholic influence and asserting English sovereignty. Future-oriented references therefore remain contained within the play's narrative. By contrast, *All Is True* structures events within its narrative to produce ambiguities. *All Is True*'s Henry consistently attempts to assert his authority and 'truth' publicly; however, there is a notable division between what Henry publicly asserts on the one hand, and what he privately thinks on the other, as shown in Henry's aside in Act Two, Scene Four. The play's events and references to the "future-past" orient the audience in relation to its events, but future falls from Henry's favour are left unaddressed. Its tension is constructed through the differences between what characters hope for and what audiences anticipate, often beyond the events of the play's narrative.

The providential ending of *All Is True* is Elizabeth's christening, with Cranmer's prophecy over the infant Elizabeth foretelling a peaceful and prosperous reign for her and her Stuart heirs. This ending seems to signal providence and resolution, but as the final scene of a play that has been ambivalent about future-oriented hopes, there is more to Cranmer's speech than simple propaganda. In isolation, Cranmer's rhetoric aligns with Elizabeth's and James's self-fashioning as monarchs. This includes images of Elizabeth as the "maiden phoenix" and how "her ashes new create another heir / As great in admiration as herself" (*Henry VIII* 5.4.40–42). James is "a mountain cedar" that "make[s] new nations" (*Henry VIII* 5.4.52–53). Cranmer heaps effusive praise on Elizabeth as "the happiness of England" and "[a] most unspotted lily" (*Henry VIII* 5.4.56, 61). These images seem to affirm Tudor and Stuart rule, completing the providential picture Cranmer forms in his prophecy. Henry, in front of the gathered nobles, declares to Cranmer:

HENRY.                   Thou hast made me now a man. Never before  
                                   This happy child did I get anything.  
                                   This oracle of comfort has so pleased me  
                                   That when I am in heave I shall desire  
                                   To see what this child does... (*Henry VIII* 5.4.63–67)

Lee Bliss comments that Cranmer's prophecy "provid[es] a suggestion of resolution and finality to counterpoint the sense of fruitless repetition" that "pointedly corrects every moral fault... in Henry and the court he dominates" (20). For some audience members, it is possible that the ending did sweep away the uncertainty of previous episodes. The play's own scepticism towards future-oriented assertions suggests a variety of audience responses from this context alone. This is not the only prophecy in the play, after all. In Act One, Henry executes the Duke of Buckingham for the accusations brought against the duke that he heard and encouraged a prophecy that if Henry died without a male heir, Buckingham would succeed the throne. Gordon McMullan notes this "awkward context" for Cranmer's later prophecy over Elizabeth at her baptism (242). Henry's awe at Cranmer's prophecy contrasts with the disbelief and fear with which he viewed the prophecy that proclaimed Buckingham's ascendance to his throne, spurring Henry's concern for a male heir. Henry's speech at Blackfriars detailed his worries about God's displeasure at marrying his brother's wife, citing the deaths of all of his and Katherine's male children. The recollection of past events within the play complicate Henry's moment of contented royal fatherhood.

The play text encourages a more sceptical reading of this final prophecy as the audience would have also been encouraged to recall events outside the play's narrative. Scholars have, in large part, considered this prophecy to be unironically affirming due to where in time they locate the fulfilment of Cranmer's assertions regarding the Stuarts as Elizabeth's heirs. Bliss' 1975 article posits such an argument, which continues to be echoed in current work, such as Lauren Robertson's 2023 monograph, *Entertaining Uncertainty in the Early Modern Theatre: Stage Spectacle and Audience Response*. Audiences in 1613 could be reasonably sure that James' rule and succession would continue – thus extending the range of the prophecy – but the majority of the prophecy concerns Elizabeth's reign and the years preceding her rule. As at the end of Act Two, Scene Four, the play returns to the "future-past" to complicate Henry's attempt to legitimise his divorce. In Cranmer's providential framing of Elizabeth as Henry's heir, it excludes the tumultuous years of religious and political upheaval at every level of society as the English Reformation began as well as the trial and execution of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother. It leaves out Henry's further marriages and the birth of the longed-for male heir, Edward, and the following succession crisis. It further excludes disillusionment with Elizabeth's government, including economic instability, as well as an unclear line of succession.

Its framing of James is also potentially ironic. Jacobean audiences may have been particularly attuned to the portrayal of James as a "make[r of] new nations" in 1613 (*Henry VIII* 5.4.53). James' policy of "conjugal diplomacy" was a part of his plans for peace between Catholics and Protestants, as he sought a Catholic match for his heir, first Henry Frederick, but also in his efforts to fully unite England and Scotland (Britland 73). James' English subjects were not wholly supportive of their king's efforts (Finkelppearl *passim*). At the start of this article, I mentioned Henry Frederick's death in 1612; James' less popular son Charles, the 'spare', was now heir to the throne (Sutton; Kishlansky and Morrill). *WYSM* excludes details in its framing of Henry, but *All Is True* has used the "future-past" to evoke more questions than answers with its providential ending. *All Is True*'s shifting between the past, the future-past, and the political 'now' at

its conclusion enabled the play to comment on Henry's 'truth' and recent events with ambivalent irony. This ironic position to 'truth' pilloried monarchical attempts to use historical events to assert a coherent narrative that affirmed Stuart power.

### Conclusion

The recollection of not-so-distant Tudor monarchs was, for early modern audiences, part of the appeal of these history plays. *WYSM*'s first performance to Prince Henry Frederick suggests a particular context for the play, as does its regular early modern reprinting by the stationer Nathaniel Butters over a forty-year period. The play's association with Henry Frederick may have influenced its print popularity, even in the years after the prince's death. *Henry VIII* is connected to the King's Men, their playing company, the burning of the Globe theatre, and Shakespeare's First Folio. As a result, the play is often treated as 'the one which burned down the Globe' and the last history play which completes the First Folio. The King's Men's ownership of the Blackfriars, which is the site for the legatine court in *Henry VIII*'s Act Two, Scene Four, frequently becomes the focus of speculation on the play as a site-specific performance. Gordon McMullan and Sarah Dustagheer offer interesting views of scenes from the play in this context, which exemplifies the ways *All Is True* is discussed in pieces, generally considered unworthy of deeper exploration. In this article, I have established that these plays are rich with generic exploration and engagement with contemporary memory.

The 1613 audiences' relative temporal closeness to the Tudor history portrayed within these plays influenced their reception, an aspect that has gone largely unexplored. In this regard, both plays are worth further consideration as part of the popular culture of their time. I have shown some ways in which both plays explore history-making and recollection, to different conclusions. *WYSM* reframes possible recollections to create an affirming narrative for Henry, while *All Is True* anticipates and uses a variety of audience responses as a part of its narrative to produce a sense of instability. The context of *WYSM*'s ending, while not wholly simplistic in its providential affirmation of Tudor and Stuart succession, is certainly more straightforward than *All Is True*. *WYSM*'s generic experimentations include fewer challenges to the ways in which those in power construct the past, but its use of some romance conventions in the play's familial and political resolution is perhaps an early example of the Jacobean trend for mixed-mode drama. I would like to suggest that in these short examples, there are wider ramifications for how early modern audiences may have understood these plays and why the history play form remained popular for audiences. These reasons have little to do with the grand sweep of English history with which modern scholars and theatre practitioners alike often view history plays. Instead, Tudor monarch plays reveal how early modern playwrights engaged audience memory in their genre experiments, often to speak to new political concerns during James's early reign.

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## Zusammenfassung

Shakespeares Historiendramen galten zu ihrer Zeit als sehr populär. In der Forschung wird gemeinhin die Annahme getroffen, dass die Zeit der Historiendramen hauptsächlich auf die Regierungszeit Elisabeth I. begrenzt war und die Form mit der Thronbesteigung von Jakob I. aus der Mode kam. Dieser Artikel überprüft diese Annahme und untersucht dazu zwei Beispiele für „Tudor monarch plays“ (Grant and Ravelhofer) aus der frühen jakobinischen Zeit. Anhand einer Analyse von William Shakespeares und John Fletchers *König Heinrich VIII (or All Is True)*, 1613) und Samuel Rowleys früherem Werk *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1605) wird diskutiert, inwiefern diese Stücke als Reaktionen auf einen veränderten politischen Kontext verstanden werden können und neue episodische Erzählstrukturen und Konventionen anderer Genres aufweisen und dabei die Erinnerungen des Publikums an Ereignisse der jüngeren Geschichte einbinden. Die lebendige Erinnerung eines jakobinischen Publikums an die Vergangenheit unter der Tudorzeit als ein Teil erlebter oder nacherzählter Erfahrungen innerhalb weniger Generationen ist ein bis heute unterschätzter Aspekt der Popularität dieser Stücke.