



Henry VIII

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Places Discussed

*Westminster Palace. Royal palace in London in which most of the play is set. The vast palace affords the play's producers rich opportunities for sumptuous spectacle. Life at the royal court often consisted of revels, masques, and displays of splendor. There is plenty of pageantry in *Henry VIII*, but there is also harsh and cold realism. As Shakespeare shows, King Henry's court was a place of intrigue and counter-intrigue, of fulsome emotion and eloquence. His play exploits the size and layout of Henry's palace for the various conflicts that are played out.

The play uses various rooms for different dramatic purposes. An antechamber, for example, is the setting for the duke of Buckingham's outrage at Cardinal Wolsey and his aim—which is forestalled—to report to the king about the cardinal's treachery. The palace itself is the place in which news of the birth of the daughter of Anne Bullen (Anne Boleyn) is first heard, and it serves as the locale for the play's climax, in which the infant Elizabeth is baptized and eulogized by Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, in the final scene. The council chamber is the place where Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon, makes suit to the king on behalf of the people who are upset by the court's extravagance. An anteroom and yard are used for brief scenes in act 5 dealing with the bishop of Winchester's unsuccessful attempt to destroy Cranmer.

Bibliography:

Donoghue, Denis. *The Sovereign Ghost: Studies in Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. Emphasizes how Shakespeare portrays artistic as well as political order in *Henry VIII*.

Frye, Northrop. *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1965. Discusses the providential nature of Elizabeth's birth at the end of the play and the manner in which the prophecy at her birth causes the play to function as a romance as much as a history.

Hamilton, Donna B. *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992. Argues that Shakespeare's presentation of Henry VIII is a reflection on the religious controversies of Shakespeare's day. Valuable in glimpsing the political issues behind Shakespeare's negative portrayal of Wolsey.

Kermode, Frank. "What There Is to Know About Henry VIII." In *Shakespeare: The Histories*, edited by Eugene M. Waith. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965. Seizes on essential elements of *Henry VIII* for an understanding of the play's place in Shakespeare's canon. A good starting place.

Richmond, Hugh M. *King Henry VIII*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994. An informative treatment of the relationship between the historical King Henry VIII and Shakespeare's character. Discusses the role of Protestantism and English nationalism in Shakespeare's portrait of the king.

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