Much Is False In "All Is True"

by David P. Gontar (Jume 2014)

1. Remembering *All Is True*

At the beginning of Act 3 of Shakespeare's *All is True* (popularly referenced as *The Life of King Henry VIII*), Queen Katherine has retreated from the humiliating proceedings at Blackfriars to her rooms at Bridewell. Having denounced Cardinal Wolsey and challenged his authority to sit as her judge, and having departed peremptorily from the consistory, Katherine is profoundly shaken. She has had to respond to allegations that her long marriage to the English king is, and has always been, invalid on grounds of incest, implying the illegitimacy of her daughter Mary. It has taken all her strength to stand up to the pressure placed on her to accede to these charges. Exhausted in her chamber, she knows it's only a matter of time before her relentless husband and his attendant lords will seek her out for further harassment. At this point she is wholly isolated. God is her only refuge. We thus expect to find her kneeling devoutly at her prie-dieu, hands clasped before images of Christ and the Blessed Virgin, imploring Heaven for protection.

Instead we are surprised to witness her calling to her maidservants for a ditty.

> QUEEN
>
> Take thy lute, wench; my soul grows sad with troubles;
> Sing and disperse 'em, if thou canst. Leave working.
>
> *Song*
>
> *'Orpheus with his lute made trees,*
> *And the mountain tops that freeze,*
> *Bow themselves, when he did sing:*
> *To his music plants and flowers*
> *Ever sprung, as sun and showers*
> *There had made a lasting spring.*

‘Every thing that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep or, hearing, die.’
(III, I, 1-16)

These charming stanzas are consistent with the pastoral and romantic ballads abounding in Elizabethan literature. Yet in this particular setting they jar. Orpheus is not a Christian saint but a poet, a figure of Greek myth and legend who descends to Hades to rescue Eurydice. From this and other ancient narratives emerged the Hellenistic religion known as “Orphism,” a pious hodge-podge which endured for centuries and which centered on the destruction and rebirth of “Orpheus,” whose tunes transfixed all who heard them. Suffice it to say there is no evidence that Katherine of Aragon ever took a serious interest in Greek or Roman mythology, or that at such a sensitive moment in her life she would have relished or even tolerated secular diversions. It might be suggested that the death and reconstitution of such a fabled hero as Orpheus resembles in some ways the death and resurrection of Christ. But while an intellectual comparison might be pondered by a professor of comparative religion, it would be wholly incommensurate with the mindset of Katherine of Aragon, especially in the predicament in which she now found herself. She was combatting desperately, gallantly, to defend her marriage and queenly throne. In that gut wrenching legal contest she had no time for vain displays or entertainments.

G. Wilson Knight in his classic essay, “Henry VIII and the Poetry of Conversion” notes that the Orpheus song is reminiscent of the plights of Marianna in *Measure for Measure* and Desdemona in *Othello* (Knight, 290-291) He writes, “The synchronization of plaintive song with an especial domesticity has closely resembled Desdemona’s willow song and her talk with Emilia . . . . In mood and purpose the two songs are analogous.” (Knight, 291) Katherine is a “tired, almost broken woman” who reminds us of other Shakespearean females oppressed by overbearing lords.

By showing Queen Katherine entertaining herself with pagan lyrics in her hour of crisis, Shakespeare nudges us away from viewing her in terms of Catholicism. When Cardinals Wolsey and Campeius [Campeggio] arrive and address her in Latin, the language of the Church, Katherine objects: “O, good my lord, no Latin!” (III, I, 46-47) But Latin is the language of the Mass. The fact is that the historical Katherine of Aragon was a staunch Catholic who inherited her faith from militant parents who fought against Moslem incursions in Spain, and

who passed that vigorous Romanism on to her; she, in turn, shared it with her daughter Mary.

One historian comments of Katherine's devotion:

> She often got up at midnight to say matins, and then again at five for mass, dressing hurriedly and telling her maids that any time spent adorning herself was time wasted. On Fridays and Saturdays she fasted all day; she read the Office of the Blessed Virgin daily and, after dinner, read a saint's life to her women. It was said that when she knelt to pray, she denied herself the comfort of a cushion. (Erickson, 66)

Yet Shakespeare gives in *All Is True* not a single instance in which Katherine exhibits that strident Catholic regimen. Indeed, the words "Catholic" and "Catholicism" do not occur in the script. Though Katherine appeals to the Pope, (II, iv, 128-130), that is preceded by a colorless wish to be advised "by my friends in Spain." (IV, i, 56) Entirely missing is any depiction of her voluntarily engaged in recognizably Catholic activity. No "Hail Mary's" for this good lady. Not once is she seen taking Holy Communion, being shriven by a confessor, praying the Rosary (Cp. Part Two, *King Henry VI*, I, iii, 52-61), invoking the Blessed Virgin, fasting, venerating the saints, making a pilgrimage, or performing any action whatsoever identifying her as Roman Catholic. Even at her death, there appears no priest, no administration of Extreme Unction. This is a non-sacramental, non-liturgical dramatic character. Katherine in *All Is True* is shorn of every trace of Roman rites. Yet it is well known historically that she was a conscientious member of the Third Order of St. Francis.

In Act 4, Sc. 2, immediately before her death, she receives a mystical vision in the form of "spirits of peace" who dance and grace her with garlands and palm. This apparition is staged before the audience, which must find in it nothing particularly Catholic. The palm has been employed as a symbol of sanctity or blessing since antiquity, long before Christ. One might go so far as to say the vision she experiences is merely aesthetic in its cavorting of anonymous "spirits." In content it vaguely resembles the mythic ceremony in *The Tempest* involving Iris, Ceres, Juno and their "spirits." (IV, I, 65-156; cp. Bate, Rasmussen, 1384) Let us be clear about this. Had Shakespeare wanted cherubim he would have called for them, as, *e.g.*, he summons "Cupid" and "Amazons" in the masque in Act I of *Timon of Athens*. But the stage instructions in *All Is True* call blankly for "*Personages*," to whom Katherine refers as "Spirits of peace" and a "blessed troop." (IV, ii, 90, 96) One can certainly reinterpret these figures as "angels," but only by importing such an idea into the text from external sources. It should be remembered that Katherine's Vision recapitulates the earlier masque in the Presence-chamber in York-Place, in which disguised "shepherds" promenade before the Cardinal and his guests. (Act I, Sc. 4) It is soon revealed that these "shepherds" are in fact King

Henry and his lords. The second masque of the “Vision” lies in the secular shadow of the first.

Of course, Shakespeare is not averse to depictions of Catholicism. Priests, monks and nuns are positive forces in many plays, including, *inter alia, Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Measure for Measure*. Isabella in *Measure for Measure* is a novice in the Order of St. Clare who bears the name of Katherine of Aragon’s mother. It would have been easy and natural to show Katherine in *All Is True* surrounded or accompanied by members of religious or monastic orders, as we find, for example, in *Richard III*. (III, vii, 95) Her lack of attending clergymen has the inevitable effect of diluting her Catholic identity. It is up to the reader or viewer to furnish what is pretermitted by the playwright. As far as this character’s appearance in *All Is True* is concerned, she is oddly nondenominational. Had she not appealed to the Pope we might take her for a Unitarian.

This emerges with some clarity if we attend carefully to the language of the play. Compare the 1554 George Cavendish text of Katherine’s Blackfriar’s speech with Shakespeare’s redaction thereof in *All Is True*. Cavendish was employed by Thomas Wolsey until Wolsey’s death in 1530. It is believed he took notes of Wolsey’s doings and conversations, and that these notes in manuscript form, including the Blackfriar’s speech of Katherine, fell into the hands of Shakespeare. (George Cavendish, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911, 11th Edition, Vol. 5, pp. 579-80) The Cavendish text is as complete an historical report of the speech as we are likely to get. Though Shakespeare’s rendition tracks Cavendish closely, there are significant changes and omissions. And it is noteworthy that several of these omissions are instances in which Katherine makes reference to the Deity.

> Cavendish
>
> “I beseche you for all the loves that hath byn bytwen vs **And for the love of god** lett me Haue Iustice & right and take of me some some pitie & compassion for I am a poore woman and a Straynger . . . .”
>
> Shakespeare
>
> Sir, I desire you do me right and justice;
> And to bestow your pity on me; for
> I am a most poor woman, and a stranger . . . .
> (II, iv, 14-16)
>
> Cavendish

“**I take god & all the world to wytnes** that I haue byn to you a trewe humble and obedient wyfe / euer Confirmable to yor wyll and pleasure . . . .”

Shakespeare

Heaven witness,
I have been to you a true and humble wife . . . .
(II, iv, 24)

Cavendish

“this xx yeres I haue byn yor true wife (or more) and by me ye haue had dyuers childerne. Allthough **it hathe pleased god** to call theme owt of this world wche byn no default in me. And whan ye had me at the first **(I take god to be my Iuge)** I was a true mayed w‘owt touche of man . . . .”

Shakespeare

Sir, call to mind
That I have been your wife, in this obedience
Upward of twenty years, and have been blest
With many children by you. If, in the course
And process of this time, you can report,
And prove it too, against mine honour aught,
My bond to wedlock, or my love and duty,
Against your sacred person, in God’s name
Turn me away . . . .
(II, iv, 35-43)

Cavendish

“There for I most humbly requyer you in the way of charitie **and for the love of god (who Is the Iust Iuge)** spare th’ extremytye of thys newe Court vntill I may be aduverised what way & order my frendes is Spayn woll advyse me to take.”

Shakespeare

Wherefore I humbly
Beseech you, sir, to spare me, til I may
Be by my friends in Spain advis’d, whose counsel

I will implore.

(II, iv, 54-57)

Five times is God invoked by Katherine in this justly famous speech of female integrity, and all five of these references vanish in the First Folio. The euphemistic substitution of ‘heaven’ for ‘god’ is particularly glaring. It can hardly be doubted that the practical effect of siphoning off the Christian ejaculations of Katherine of Aragon is to diminish her beatific aura. And with her Christianity goes her Catholicism.

In the minds of traditional English people faithful to the Holy Church of Rome the Blessed Virgin was central. During the period of Katherine’s ascendancy and marriage to Henry, she became for those pious souls the living symbol of that veneration. Bate and Rasmussen in their edition of the *Complete Works* note that the architects of the English Reformation who created the myth of Elizabeth as the “Virgin Queen” derived substantial power by “rework[ing] the Roman Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary.” (Bate, Rasmussen, 1382) *All Is True*, concluding with the celebrated birth of Elizabeth, destined for spiritual greatness, tracks the subtle transition from the Virgin Mary via Anne Boleyn to the reign of her daughter, the Virgin Queen. To have openly portrayed Katherine of Aragon in “*All Is True*” as a traduced Catholic saint would have risked inflaming Catholic sensibilities. Katherine of Aragon thus was a problem in public relations, and had to be presented through a glass darkly in a political drama whose *terminus ad quem* was Elizabeth I and the magnificent Protestant Reformation. *All Is True* is nothing less than a paean to that Reformation and the Tudor myth.

Shakespeare’s fondness for monks, nuns and priests is not reflected in ecclesiastics more highly placed. Instead he is resolutely critical. We find in his plays disparaging references to “Popish” and “Papist” doings. (*Titus Andronicus*, V, I, 78; *All’s Well that Ends Well*, I, ii, 47) Cardinal Pandulph in *King John* is a scheming rascal. So is Cardinal Beaufort in *King Henry VI*. His revolting death by self-ingested poison with its incriminating raving is a significant indicator of Shakespeare’s low estimation of Catholic statesmen. We come then to Cardinal Wolsey in *All Is True*, yet another malevolent prince of the Church and, arguably, the play’s tragic soul. We meet this “holy fox” in the opening scene as he busies himself engineering the downfall of the sympathetically drawn Duke of Buckingham. It is Wolsey who seeks to oppose his will to that of King Henry VIII by undermining the approaching marriage to Anne Boleyn. As Henry’s Lord Chancellor, he has amassed a huge private fortune at the expense of the state and its people, and as the action commences has imposed on them a burdensome tax of which Henry appears unaware. (I, ii, 40) When Henry orders the tax abolished, Wolsey secretly instructs his secretary to see that he receives credit for this relief. (I, ii, 115-120) Wolsey serves as the King’s right hand man in the campaign to dissolve Katherine’s

marriage to him. At the inquest at Blackfriars, she lashes out before the entire court at Wolsey, publicly denouncing him as an enemy not only to her but to the common weal.

QUEEN

My lord, my lord,
I am a simple woman, much too weak
To oppose your cunning. Y’ are meek and humble-mouth’d;
You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,
With meekness and humility; but your heart
Is cramm’d with arrogancy, spleen, and pride.
You have, by fortune and his highness’ favours,
Gone slightly o’er low steps, and now are mounted
Where powers are your retainers, and your words
Domestics to you, serve your will as‘t please
Yourself pronounce their office. I must tell you,
You tender more your person’s honour than
Your high profession spiritual; that again
I do refuse you for my judge, and here,
Before you all, appeal unto the pope,
To bring my whole cause ‘fore his holiness,
And to be judg’d by him.
(II, iv, 114-130)

When King Henry’s agents intercept Wolsey’s traitorous correspondence, Wolsey is disgraced and cashiered by the King, losing the totality of his wealth and possessions. He is given a tragic hero’s soliloquy as though he were a pedestrian version of Lear or Macbeth.

CARDINAL

So farewell to the little good you bear me.
Farewell! A long farewell to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,

> And then he falls, as I do. I have ventured,
> Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
> This many summers in a sea of glory,
> But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
> At length broke under me, and now has left me,
> Weary and old with service, to the mercy
> Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
> Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye.
> I feel my heart now open'd. O how wretched
> Is that poor man that hangs on princes favours!
> There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
> That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
> More pangs and fears than wars or women have;
> And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
> Never to hope again.
> (III, ii, 413-435)

The closing comparison of himself with Lucifer is revealing. The Cardinal is the play's Satanic focus. With 14% of the lines, equal to Henry's own share (Bate, Rasmussen, 1386), he is in a sense *All Is True's* promethean anti-hero, and reminds us of Richard II and Richard III, two other tragic figures in Shakespeare's historical landscape. It is only the general *de casibus* theme of the work and its conclusion in the birth of the salvific Elizabeth that prevent literary critics from classifying this play as a tragedy. Indeed, the words of the Prologue prepare us for tragedy, and the mischievous Cardinal's come-uppance arrives as no surprise.

In his exposition of *All Is True* under the later title *King Henry VIII*, Harold Bloom confesses he "cannot solve the puzzle" of this play. He does find that the "Catholic-Protestant confrontation is . . . muted," so much so that "Shakespeare hardly appears to take sides" (Bloom, 685), but he cannot apprehend the reason therefor. It is not far to seek. *All Is True* is political theatre, the purpose of which is to rationalize a transition from a dim Catholic past to a new England, a sovereign and autonomous nation, independent of Rome and its dark hegemony. To rake over the coals and foreground Queen Katherine as a Catholic "martyr" would be self-defeating in a play whose manifest purpose is to celebrate England's Protestant enfranchisement. The ecclesiastical putsch, which placed the King atop the Church of England, and which would later trigger the brutal reprisals under Queen Mary (1553-1558), could hardly be depicted in gruesome detail, and so takes the symbolic form of the "christening" (not

Baptism) of the infant Elizabeth, over whom Archbishop Cranmer (to be burnt alive by Mary) makes his oneiric prognostications.

Everything is done by the author to make that christening the emblematic crucible in which are resolved the social and political contradictions of England. As Anne Boleyn was still controversial and would be brutally destroyed by Henry, she is absent from the christening scene, in which the vicious court infighting and theological squabbles are decorously buried. Instead we behold the proud father beaming as he looks on to see his daughter "made a Christian." (V, iii, 209) The last words are Henry's:

> KING
>
> O, lord Archbishop!
> 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 heaven, I shall desire
> To see what this child does, and praise my Maker.
> (V, v, 70-75)

Unfortunately, the facts are otherwise. Henry moved heaven and earth to dump his wife of two decades to marry a young lady (possibly consanguineous with himself) whose sacred mission was to give him a son. When she failed to do so, he was apoplectic with rage. History records:

> The following Wednesday the Lord Mayor and Aldermen in their robes, chains and and ermine came down the river to see the new baby christened by the Bishop of London in the Church of the Franciscans at Greenwich. It was an impressive little ceremony – but Henry was not there. Nor were there any bonfires in the streets that night. Anne Boleyn's baby girl did not harmonize with King Henry's grand design. Indeed, she came dangerously close to making a mockery of it. And there were other real life complications which detracted from the glory of the great constitutional edifice Cromwell was constructing to elevate the King's power. It was one thing to pass laws as to what men should believe. It was another to get men to alter their beliefs, or, in some cases, to contradict principles they had always held dear. (Lacey, 137, emphasis added)

In political theater liberty must be taken with certain embarrassing realities. In the case of "*All Is True*," the greatest adjustments were made at the beginning and the end. At the outset, the downfall of Katherine is shown as the sad undoing of a noble lady and wife who is discarded to soothe the delicate King's "conscience" about the theological validity of his

marriage. (II, vi, 180-222) Hardly a word is breathed about Henry's campaign to generate a viable male heir and Katherine's inability to so provide. The intensity of his hopes in Anne Boleyn in that regard is concealed. Henry's break with the Church of Rome and establishment of the "Church of England" of which he will be the head receive not so much as a nod. The play is concluded with the "christening" of a future monarch who will make of English life a virtual paradise, which her successor will gild with his wisdom and "honour."

CRANMER

This royal infant, — heaven still move about her! —
Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,
Which time shall bring to ripeness. She shall be —
But few now living can behold that goodness —
A pattern to all princes living with her,
And all that shall succeed: Saba was never
More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
Than this pure soul shall be: all princely graces,
That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
With all the virtues that attend the good,
Shall still be doubled on her; truth shall nurse her;
Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her;
She shall be lov'd and fear'd. Her own shall bless her;
Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn,
And hang their heads with sorrow. Good grows with her.
In her days every man shall eat in safety
Under his own vine what he plants; and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbors.
God shall be truly known: and those about her
From her shall read the perfect ways of honour,
And from those claim their greatness, not by blood.
Nor shall this peace sleep with her; but as when
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new-create another heir
As great in admiration as herself,
So shall she leave her blessedness to one, —
When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness, —

Who, from the sacred ashes of her honour,
Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fix'd. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
That were servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him:
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour and the greatness of his name
Shall be, and make new nations. He shall flourish,
And like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
To all the plains about him. Our children's children
Shall see this, and bless heaven.

****

She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An aged princess; many days shall see her,
And yet no day without a deed to crown it.
Would I had known no more! But she must die,
She must, the saints must have her; yet a virgin,
A most unspotted lily shall she pass
To the ground, and all the world shall mourn for her.
(V, v, 23-69)

The idea that King Henry VIII, still fuming over the failure of Anne Boleyn to present him with a male heir, would stand by grinning as such pseudo-biblical palaver is recited is preposterous. Not only is Elizabeth praised before her deeds, but her reign, according to Cranmer, will permanently deprive Henry of male succession, his worst nightmare. Cranmer seems heedless of consequences as he warbles over Elizabeth, a female, not only succeeding Henry but, as a virgin, being unable by issue of her body to place a Tudor on the throne of England. Elizabeth's reign entails that not only will Henry not be directly succeeded by a male, neither will his daughter produce a male heir, thus effectively extinguishing Henry's fondest wish. Cranmer prophesies the end of the Tudors. The real Henry would more likely have taken Cranmer's head than praised him for such thoughtlessness. Yet in the play, Henry is content. In fact, he is inexplicably delighted.

It cannot be overlooked that the monarch we are given *in the play* is not the redoubtable head of the Church of England but a Catholic King whose minions are princes of the Church of Rome. The hearing at Blackfriar's (June 18, 1529) was commissioned *by the Pope* in response to Henry'

petition. There is thus no textual conflict of doctrine between Henry and his wife Katherine, and her death is not a martyrdom. Of course, in historical actuality, Katherine was resolutely opposed to Henry's command of his new "Church of England," by which he annulled his marriage and filled his depleted coffers, confiscating Church lands. Underneath the political/theological clap-trap is an embarrassingly elementary issue: Katherine had worn herself out in the service (*Measure for Measure*, I, ii, 103) and not produced a viable male heir. Henry's eyes fall on a young lady who promises to simultaneously gratify him romantically and, as a bonus, yield a replica of himself to install on the English throne. Katherine is therefore not an English martyr who embraces death rather than conform to a new religious institution, but a faithful wife who refuses to be scrapped by her philandering husband who blames her for a genetic phenomenon of which he knows nothing. This brute issue is not allowed to surface in a nationalistic fable in which a long-deceased megalomaniac is rehabilitated to rationalize the political status quo. The business of such a tendentious work of art, then, is not to "hold a mirror up to life," but rather to paint a genteel English tableau, in which Albion enjoys a smooth and largely painless transition from Roman subjugation to conjectured Protestant liberty and virtue. If Katherine is the sacrificial lamb in *All Is True*, it is not because she is presented as a Catholic but because she isn't. The faith which gave her the last shred of dignity is taken from her.

II. Katherine As Recusant Martyr

In a recent article, Professor Amy Appleford argues that it is reasonable to view Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon as a "Recusant Martyr." ["Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon: Last Medieval Queen, First Recusant Martyr," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 40:1, Winter, 2010] Though few are unimpressed with the historical Katherine's faith and the suffering she endured at the hands of her esteemed spouse, Henry Tudor, it is unnecessary and inappropriate to seek to elevate Shakespeare's character in this manner. Prof. Appleford's general thesis is that "Shakespeare's presentation of Katherine is part of a conscious Catholization of the history of the English Reformation," (152) a remarkable claim in light of the fact that *All Is True* is a play which goes out of its way to efface the last vestiges of Katherine's Catholicism.

a. Martrydom

In discussing Prof. Appleford's contentions we must bear in mind that she is specifically referring to the *character* Katherine in *All Is True*, *not* the historical personage. Her thesis must be evaluated strictly in terms of this drama, not what may be known of Katherine from other sources. "*THE VISION*" she experiences near the end of the play in Act 4 is taken as

evidence of her “martyrdom.” But we have already seen that the Vision is ambiguous at best, and that the palm branches held by the “spirits” are consistent with sacred traditions long antedating Christianity. When Katherine has this Vision she is dying. But her mortality is not featured in the Vision itself. The fact is that Katherine of Aragon was neither deliberately tormented nor executed, neither in life nor in literature. Shamefully, disgracefully mistreated, yes; but not subjected to torture and death, and not threatened with either. She was the victim of domestic harassment during the time Henry was having an affair with another woman. She was resented for not bearing a surviving son, setting the lecherous Henry on his philoprogenitive warpath. The word “martyr” in this context is a theological term of art and deserves to be properly employed. Unfortunately, Professor Appleford cites no official Catholic authorities to justify her word choice in this regard.

The *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* online defines “martyr” this way:

> [A] martyr, or witness of Christ, is a person who, though he has never seen or heard The Divine Founder of the Church, is yet so firmly convinced of **the truths of the Christian religion** that he gladly suffers death rather than deny [them].

But unless the rumors of her having been poisoned can be substantiated, Queen Katherine was not executed, nor was she given an ultimatum, that is: deny an article of faith or accept death. Indeed, her principal adversary was Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, a Catholic. Therefore, although exemplary in her devotion, Katherine did not die a martyr nor is she so regarded by her Church. Martyrdom is a personal sacrifice of one’s life for the integrity of the faith. It is the deliberate choice of death rather than blasphemy, apostasy or heresy. Katherine did not face such a dilemma, as, for example, Archbishop Cranmer later did during the reign of Mary. In the inquest at Blackfriars, Katherine is not accused of any crime or wrongdoing, including violation of Church doctrine. Henry and Wolsey may have wanted her to voluntarily consent to the abrogation of her marriage by admitting that she had consummated her first marriage with Henry’s elder brother, Prince Arthur. That consummation could presumably have been used by the King to extract a judgment from the Church that the subsequent marriage to Henry was incestuous and thus a legal and religious nullity. But on her arrival in England, she and Arthur had quickly succumbed to a serious illness from which Arthur died. When Henry came of age it was decided that he should marry Katherine to recover the full dowry from Spain. At that time, and for the remainder of her life, she steadfastly denied that there had been any physical intimacy between herself and the ailing Prince. As a result, the Church sanctioned the marital union of Henry and Katherine. Henry now was petitioning the Church to reach a judgment directly contrary to its original approval of his marriage to Katherine, without any change in either the underlying facts or canon law. This it properly declined to do. Hence,

the frantic campaign of intimidation against Katherine was launched. She was not being asked to renounce her religion or any part of it, but to (1) make a recantation of a matter of fact, that is, that her denial of alleged consummation of the marriage with Arthur was false, or (2) voluntarily enter a convent. (Lacey, 84) In effect, she was being asked to unqueen herself. It is reported that when she was asked to become a nun, she replied that she would do so if Henry became a monk. Under extreme duress, and exhausted from innumerable births and miscarriages, she sickened and died. But matters of fact are not articles of faith, nor is one's last illness to be construed as an execution. Katherine was not a "martyr."

None of this appears in Shakespeare's play, and the reader well may wonder the meaning of these strange proceedings. Their very vagueness seems to afford Professor Appleford the opportunity to suggest that Katherine was "martyred." The burden of proof is substantial. But what we are given is equivocation on the term "martyr" This can be seen plainly if we consult the dictionary. The Oxford American College Dictionary (2002) gives several senses of "martyr":

1. A person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs;
2. A constant sufferer from an ailment [pain or distress]

(Oxford, 829)

Queen Katherine is acknowledged to be a martyr in sense two, not in sense one. Here is the argument verbatim.

> Not only must [Henry] submit to a resolution of the play by the birth of a girl, not the boy he wanted; but in her dying vision, Katherine is given a noble send off by powers that lie outside and beyond those of her former husband, receiving tokens not of disgrace and defeat, but of victory through martyrdom: the palm of the martyr, such as the palm associated with her namesake, Katherine of Alexandria, and the garland crown associated both with worldly fame and the crown of righteousness of 2 Timothy 4:28. (Appleford, 151, emphasis added)

Here we find a departure from the text. In Shakespeare's *All Is True*, unlike actual history, King Henry VIII makes no big issue of the sex of his child by Anne Boleyn. He would prefer – and expects – a son, but when he learns it is a girl, he has no complaint whatsoever. In fact he gives a gratuity to the bearer of the news and dashes off without another word to felicitate the mother. (V, ii, 192-204) Then, as we have noted, he is ecstatically happy with his infant daughter and the glorious future forecast by Cranmer. Though Professor Appleford's subjects are the characters in Shakespeare's play, the reference to Henry's acute displeasure

is derived from the external historical record. When Katherine has her Vision, its solemnities transcend the powers not of Katherine's "former husband," but of her current one. Her former husband was Prince Arthur. Finally, the dramatic victory in the text of *All Is True* belongs to King Henry VIII, who is blessed with a daughter destined to be England's female messiah, a prospect which has Henry fairly gasping with joy. That is the moment the curtain descends. There is no "victory" for Katherine whatsoever. The imaginary and highly ambiguous "Vision" she enjoys is a mere consolation prize, a sop thrown to a wife whose only fault was her fidelity to a tyrannical husband. If she was a 'martyr' to anything, it was to childbirth, which utterly depleted her physical resources. Once she is out of the way, the attention of the audience can be directed to the "christening" of the newborn Elizabeth. This is insulting. Let it be remembered that on June 11, 1513 Henry, absent from the realm, appointed Katherine Regent of England. There were many seasoned peers he might have chosen. But he selected his wife, a person of no political or military experience. Though they corresponded frequently, it was Katherine who ruled England during this period. On September 3rd of that year the Scots invaded. Katherine, who was *in advanced pregnancy at the time*, *rode forth in front of her army in full armor to engage them at the Battle of Flodden*. As a result she suffered one of many stillborn deliveries. Katherine of Aragon was more, then, than the "housewife" she is depicted as being in *All Is True*. She was an able administrator and leader, a Spanish woman who, while pregnant, led English troops against the Scots in war. The difficulty of taking *All Is True* seriously is that it scants rather than features a great woman and her achievements. Elizabeth may have rallied the English militia at Tilbury, but she didn't ride pregnant to engage the foe. The play dispenses expeditiously with an accomplished and noble queen to break into dithyrambic ecstasy over the merely hoped-for deeds of a babe in arms. It thus turns reality on its head. The best we can say for its title is that it is a bitter irony.

a. Katherine as Recusant

In addition to the claim of Professor Appleford that the text of *All Is True* shows Queen Katherine as a martyr, it is also maintained that the text supports a conception of her as a forerunner of English recusants associated with the reign of Elizabeth I. By definition, a recusant is one who avoided participation in the services of the Church of England and secretly practiced the rituals of Roman Catholicism. An inspection of the evidence reveals that Katherine of Aragon fails to meet either of these criteria. First, despite the "christening" of Elizabeth there is in *All Is True* no perceptible Church of England or references to same, nor is Katherine shown avoiding attendance at its gatherings. The Archbishop of Canterbury in *King Henry VIII* is thus ecclesiastically indistinguishable from the Archbishop of Canterbury in *King Henry V*. (I, i, 1 ff.) Second, although Katherine's

Catholicism is downplayed in *All Is True*, neither is it denied or concealed. Her appeal to the Pope (II, iv, 128) is sufficient to establish that as a character she is Catholic, though, as far as the play is concerned, not especially so. In what sense, then, can it be claimed she is a "recusant"? The term has connotations of enthusiasm and dedication to the faith not manifest in Shakespeare's Katherine. The historical Katherine did indeed refuse to recognize Henry as the legitimate head of the Church in England, and as such might appear to be proto-recusant. But as can be seen by the title and argument of Professor Appleford's essay, it is Shakespeare's character who is being examined and about whom the claims are made. And in Shakespeare's *All Is True* there is no Church of England to resist nor any reason for Katherine to conceal her ancestral faith. The nominal Catholicism Shakespeare's Katherine actually exhibits in the context of Henry's own Catholic regime in the play never attains the status of "recusancy," nor is there any apparent attempt by Shakespeare's Katherine to introduce reforms into the Church. We would certainly not wish to urge that somehow

a. The Orpheus song
b. The Vision and
c. Her struggle to remain Henry's spouse, the mother of a legitimate child (Mary), and England's Queen

add up to an attempt on her part to demonstrate the "possibility of reform" in English Catholicism. Even in the case of the historical Katherine's resistance to her husband's apostasy, as it was open and notorious, and opposed Henry's absurd willingness to do absolutely anything to be rid of her, the label is inapposite.

Appleford argues that Katherine's attempt to persuade Henry to oppose Wolsey's tax on the commons depicts Katherine as a reformer. It does nothing of the kind. Katherine knows Wolsey is scheming against her and tries to take advantage of his avaricious tax to cast doubt on the Cardinal's probity in Henry's eyes. This is court infighting, not reform. It has naught to do with religion, and everything to do with her marriage and survival as England's Queen.

We then read:

> At key moments in the play, she appears in the character of a critic of the church to which she belongs.
>
> She repeatedly attacks [Wolsey] for his luxurious lifestyle . . .

How is this a critique of the *church*? Is Wolsey the church? The issue was one of court corruption in the person of the Lord Chancellor, the man in charge of the day-to-day running

of England's affairs. (Lacey, 43) When Lord Buckingham refers to Wolsey as one for whom "no man's pie is freed from his ambitious finger," (I, I, 60-61) does that mean he is functioning as a religious reformer? Katherine was simply one of a number of nobles who knew of and often drew attention to Wolsey's abuses. The theme of personal luxury purchased at the commonwealth's expense was a matter of general notoriety, one to which Henry was particularly sensitive as he was himself a chief offender. Even minor characters pointed to the needed correction of "our travell'd gallants, that fill the court with quarrels, talk [i.e., gossip] and tailors [i.e., extravagant dress]. (I, ii, 26) It should be remembered that in 16th century England, it was customary for well-born or unusually talented and aggressive individuals to seek positions in the church, not because they had religious vocations, but because the church was one of the major estates of English society, and prelates often wore two hats, serving as secular administrators. Wolsey was a butcher's son. All he ever wanted was power and wealth and everyone knew it. His overreaching must be set in that context. If we go back to Shakespeare's *King Henry VI*, Part One, we see that good Duke Humphrey, the Lord Protector, is at odds with Cardinal Winchester, whom he accuses of "[lov]ing the flesh." (I, i, 41) Does this make Humphrey a religious reformer? Is his death at Suffolk's hands a martyrdom? No. Winchester is merely one of the court's wolfish lords, striving for advantages along with all the rest. So is it with Wolsey.

> In reflecting anxiously on the arrival of Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius to speak with her, Katherine criticizes not the particular ecclesiastics office they hold but rather their failure to conform to the moral standards their church demanded of them. "They should be good men, their affairs as righteous." (Appleford, 60)

This is revealing and only slightly wide of the mark. Katherine's attack is indeed not directed to the church through the bishops' offices, but to the individuals, their intrigues and defalcations. Would she have been as vocal as she appears had they not conspired against her to placate a petulant and wayward monarch?Certainly not. Katherine acts in self-defense. She is neither a martyr, nor reformer nor recusant, but a good woman wronged and a Queen maligned. Rising to turn back those who would slander her is her womanly and royal prerogative and in no way casts her in any of the extraneous roles which would be assigned to her by Professor Appleford.

What basis, then, is there to advance the rubric of recusancy? The answer lies in Professor Appleford's theory of authorship. Instead of addressing the standard question of whether Fletcher or Shakespeare was the author of *All Is True*, or what was the measure of their respective contributions, Professor Appleford takes a different tack, asserting *ex cathedra*

that “William Shakespeare” is the author, and that he himself was a Catholic recusant, certainly a novel hypothesis. It flies in the face of the received view that the play is the product of collaboration. No persuasive evidence is adduced to prove that the writer was indeed a recusant Catholic, nor is there any effort made to discount the countervailing data, including the disparaging references cited above to villainous Cardinals, popery, etc. Professor Appleford merely adopts the rumor of the author’s recusant Catholicism to lend support to the strained thesis that the character Katherine should be viewed as a proto-reforming recusant, neatly begging both questions at a single stroke. Bear in mind that Appleford’s main thesis is that “Shakespeare’s presentation of Katherine is part of a Catholization of the history of the English Reformation.” (Appleford, 152) But how does a Katherine with scarcely a flicker of Catholic activity about her contribute to “Catholization”? The play proceeds in precisely the contrary direction, away from an etiolated Katherine whose vital Catholicism has been sucked out of her, to a vague future in which a Protestant Elizabeth will be the savior of her people.

But let’s have Professor Appleford speak for herself.

> The claim that Katherine is Shakespeare’s recusant heroine, a Catholic sympathetically portrayed as such in a play that deals, literally, with the cradle of English Protestantism, should seem less surprising than it would have seemed even a few years ago. The rebirth of interest in Shakespeare’s own Catholic ties and the possibility of his personal Catholicism is obliging scholars to reconsider a good deal: the famous “lost years” of the playwright’s youth between leaving Stratford and appearing in London . . . .
>
> For after spending two years in his home town – long a center of English Catholic recusancy –Shakespeare returned to London to write the “medieval” *Two Noble Kinsmen* [sic] and . . .the . . . pro-Catholic historiography of this late play [All Is True]. (163)

The most that can be said for this is that at least “Shakespeare’s Catholicism” is described as a mere “possibility.”

Here are some of the problems:

1. The attempt to base an interpretation of the Shakespearean text on a biography of the supposed writer has been repudiated as an exegetical technique for many years. This is of course especially true where, as here, the biographical narrative is merely conjectural;

2. As shown above, Catholic prelates in Shakespeare are always disgraceful rogues;
3. Imagining that Shakespeare spent the “lost years” in the company of recusant Catholics begs the question and is grossly speculative;
4. Even if it were somehow shown that Shakespeare was a recusant Catholic, such a fact would be inconsistent with the watered down religiosity we witness in Shakespeare’s Katherine;
5. Professor Appleford completely ignores the most significant aspect of contemporary Shakespearean scholarship: the raging debate about whether William of Stratford or someone else was the author of the plays and poems. To write about such matters, seeking to ground a controversial reading of a play on authorial biography with ever mentioning the authorship controversy is, to say the least, disingenuous;
6. No documentation is provided for the preposterous claim that the author of the Shakespearean corpus retired from London theatre life, sojourned in Stratford for two years, and then returned to London to compose *All Is Well* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*