

# The Quill

The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival Newsletter • Summer 2013

## SUMMER 2013



### Oklahoma!

June 12 – June 30



### The 39 Steps

June 19 – July 14



### The Importance of Being Earnest

July 10 – August 4



### Measure for Measure

July 18 – August 4



### Henry VIII

July 24 – August 4

#### Children's Shows:

#### Beauty and the Beast

May 31 – August 3

#### Shakespeare for Kids

July 24 – August 3



## A Wilde Woman: Lady Bracknell Revealed

By Peter E. Danelski

**“ I put all my genius into my life,  
and only my talent into my works. ”**

Despite this proclamation, Oscar Wilde created a comic masterpiece with *The Importance of Being Earnest*—along with a character truly deserving to be called genius.

Lady Bracknell, Wilde's symbol of the rigid Victorian ethic, embodies much of the play's humor. She delivers some of Wilde's most dazzling epigrams—"Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years." While the play otherwise features couples—Jack pursues Gwendolyn, Algernon loves Cecily, and the Reverend Chasuble woos Miss Prism—Lady Bracknell stands alone.

Mother to Gwendolyn, Lady Bracknell seems the head of her household, only occasionally referencing her husband Lord Bracknell. She makes no apologies in admitting her

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# A METEOR SHOWER OF COURT SCANDALS V

By Heather Helinsky, dramaturg

Early in his reign, hunting, the arts, and women appealed to King Henry VIII far more than policy and governing. Yet just as the recent discovery of King Richard III's skeleton under a Leicester car park created a media sensation but told us little about Shakespeare's great villain, history and Shakespeare's vision of Henry VIII need not be a perfect match for the play to fascinate.

Even through contrast, understanding history illuminates the play's characters and events.

How great political figures quickly fall into misery is a familiar theme in most Shakespeare history plays. If conflict is drama, then to see great politicians fall through their political actions or private personal scandals is highly dramatic. Contemporary political life is no exception. Though not all fodder of this ilk creates great plays, the Tony-nominated play *Frost/Nixon* by Peter Morgan captured imaginations 13 years after Nixon's death.

## I'm Henry the VIII, I Am

Herman's Hermits 1965 chart-topping song playfully mocked Henry VIII's multiple wives.

I'm Henry the Eighth, I am!  
Henry the Eighth I am, I am!  
I got married to the widow next door,  
She's been married seven times before  
And every one was an Henry (Henry)  
She wouldn't have a Willie or a Sam (no Sam)  
I'm her eighth old man I'm Henry  
Henry The Eighth, I am!

Second verse same as the first!

(first verse repeats twice)

H-E-N-R-Y  
Henry (Henry)  
Henry (Henry)  
Henry the Eighth I am, I am  
Henry the Eighth I am

Yeah!

*Henry VIII* portrays the rise of a virile young king whose scandalous affairs lead to the birth of his daughter Elizabeth. The character of Henry VIII shares some similarities with Shakespeare's Henry V—that young Plantagenet king who, as a prince, preferred to hang out in taverns with the entertaining Sir John Falstaff than to support his father, the embattled King. Henry V sobered during the wars with France and embraced his leadership responsibilities.

While Shakespeare included a suggestive subtitle, *Henry VIII: All is True*, he wrote the play 10 years after the death of Henry VIII's daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, so it is not a contemporaneous account of Henry VIII.

Scholars believe the play was first performed by the King's Men for the court of King James I as part of the ceremonies for the royal wedding of his 16-year-old daughter, Princess Elizabeth, on February 14, 1613.

The first public performances of the play were likely held indoors at the Blackfriars Theatre, a more private playhouse for a higher social class of audiences. Famously, during an early performance at the Globe Theatre on June 29, 1613, a canon shot fired as part of a scene sparked a fire in the thatched roof that burned the theatre to the ground. Reports noted that no lives were lost, just a few cloaks.

While playwrights Shakespeare and John Fletcher may have wanted their first audiences to believe that "all is true," to detail point by point historical fact from fiction would strip away the pleasure of surprise. All plays that make the claim that they are based on a true story take creative liberties. In the Prologue for *Henry VIII*, the audience is asked:

"...Think ye see  
The very persons of our noble story  
As they were living; think you see  
them great  
And followed with the great throng  
and sweat  
Of a thousand friends; then, in a  
moment, see  
How soon this mightiness meets  
misery..."



This is not the Henry VIII that Charles Dickens described as "a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the history of England." Nor does this play depict the saga of Henry's six wives, although we get to witness the beginnings of those affairs with the trial scene for Queen Katherine, his first wife and the daughter of the Spanish royals Isabella and Ferdinand. Instead, Henry is something of a romantic hero, if an enigmatic one, and the culmination of the cycle of English kings come before him.

Young Henry VIII, a dashing sportsman with hopes of glory through war, was not as powerful as the French King Francis I or the Hapsburg emperor Charles V. While Henry never retreated in his role as the leader of England, he delegated most of his administrative work to Thomas Wolsey.

Wolsey, the son of a butcher, caught Henry's attention when he was maintaining Henry's army's supplies in France. One might say Henry VIII's talent was to spot talent. In 1515, he promoted Wolsey to Lord Chancellor. Wolsey then gained control over the English church as the archbishop of York and a cardinal, with hopes of becoming the next pope.

While Henry VIII enjoyed the privileges of his title, Wolsey governed England for almost 15 years. Though Wolsey's judi-



# WHILE A GREAT STAR OF ENGLAND IS BORN



cial policies had a long-lasting impact on English history, he had the misfortune of ruling at a time when all Europe suffered economically due to inflation. Wolsey's taxation policies caused such a crisis that in 1524, Henry VIII had to step in as the good cop to prevent a rebellion.

This convenient relationship between a butcher's son and a king who enjoyed the high life at court may have continued if Wolsey hadn't crossed Henry in the international chaos created by Henry's desire to divorce Queen Katherine and marry Anne Boleyn (called Bullen in this play). Henry needed Wolsey's support to influence the Pope, and when Wolsey plotted his own aims, Henry unleashed his fury on Wolsey.

And it is that fall from power that Shakespeare and Fletcher dramatized so well, leading to Wolsey's lament:

"...I had touched the highest point of all my greatness,  
And from that full meridian of my glory  
I haste now to my setting. I shall fall  
Like a bright exhalation in the evening  
And no man see me more."

Wolsey's astronomical descent is one of many. Another victim is Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, one of the few blue-

bloods that posed any dynastic threat to the Tudor king. Henry VIII's inability to produce an heir through Queen Katherine created a crisis, and a friar prophesied that Henry would die without heirs and Buckingham would become king. Rumors and superstition were enough to seal Buckingham's downfall. The audience sees so much of the action of this play through the gossip of gentleman and newly-installed lords who owe their titles to Henry VIII.

The play feeds on our fascination with the private lives of politicians, and the rise of Anne Boleyn and fall of Queen Katherine are among the more fascinating events in history. Henry VIII woos Anne at a masked ball much like Romeo woos Juliet, Berowne and his friends woo in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the Prince speaks to Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Literary critics sometimes fault this play for having too much action that occurs offstage reported by courtiers. Yet the thrill of hearing national news second-hand is the same as the drama emanating from CNN, FoxNews, or MSNBC. Shakespeare and Fletcher also show the trial scene of Queen Katherine and the pageantry of Anne Bullen's coronation as the new, younger, beautiful queen.

The political theatre plays out when characters make assertions and then later contradict them. The stakes are high. One can be a blue-blooded Duke in one scene and a condemned prisoner in the next; or a cardinal effectively ruling England for 15 years and then, with the delivery of a letter, a man stripped of power; or a loyal and popular queen who strengthens England's international ties tossed aside for a younger woman.

The only real truth-tellers in this play are the lower-classes, who, like Anne's nurse, can say openly that Anne should jump at the opportunity to become queen—as the nurse would if given the chance! Or the porter who stands outside the gates and keeps the eyes of the growing crowds away from the newborn Elizabeth on the day of her christening.

Shakespeare shows us that perhaps the only people who can speak the truth are the

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## Who's Who



**Ian Bedford**  
King Henry VIII



**Susan Riley Stevens**  
Queen Katherine



**Anthony Lawton**  
Surrey/Sands



**Emiley Kiser**  
Anne Bullen



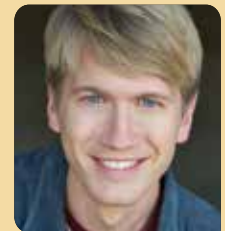
**Christopher Patrick Mullen**, Buckingham



**Peter Schmitz**  
Chamberlain/Cranmer



**Richard B. Watson**  
Cardinal Wolsey



**Brandon Meeks**  
Duke of Norfolk

Editor's Note: We believe Shakespeare's actors performed plays on short notice and might present a dozen plays in the span of a few weeks, leaving little time for the extended rehearsal processes used today. With *Henry VIII*, PSF is employing something akin to the presumed Elizabethan rehearsal method.

PSF typically rehearses each play six days a week for three and a half weeks. For this production, there are no directors or designers in the conventional sense. The actors arrive with lines learned, stage the play, and open after a few days of rehearsal, bringing patrons one step closer to the excitement and spontaneity experienced in an Elizabethan playhouse.

ones who have no political power to lose. Whether we are asked to believe that historically all is true, there is much truth to be gained from the lives of characters in *Henry VIII*.

Buckingham, the first of many to fall in Henry VIII's court, stoically understands his place in history and speaks of forgiveness:

"...I as freely forgive you  
As I would be forgiven. I forgive  
all,  
There cannot be those  
numberless offenses  
'Gainst me that I cannot take  
peace with. No black envy  
Shall make my grave. Commend  
me to his grace,  
And if he speak of Buckingham,  
pray tell him  
You met him half in heaven..."

If we listen well to the characters in *Henry VIII*, we may find gentle reminders of our own experience, and the world we navigate today. ■

Heather Helinsky is a freelance dramaturg with an MFA from A.R.T./Moscow Art Theatre Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard and is a 2001 alumni of DeSales University Theatre.

## HENRY VIII Catches Fire at the Globe

As reported by Sir Henry Wotton, July 2, 1613

"The King's players had a new play called *All Is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth, which set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty...sufficient in truth...to make greatness very familiar..."

"Now King Henry making a Masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch...and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the ground. Yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks; only one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have boyled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit, put it out with a bottle of ale."



## In Tribute: Priscilla Payne Hurd

by Patrick Mulcahy

In 2007, Priscilla Payne Hurd received the Will Shakespeare Award, presented by PSF Producing Artistic Director Patrick Mulcahy.

"I support the Shakespeare Festival."

Indeed she did. When I assumed the responsibilities of artistic director in 2003, the Festival had been through several lean years. Building a world-class theatre takes decades, and there are challenges along the way. In those moments, it's good to have the angels on your side.

Over the past decade, thousands of people made the Festival's success possible. Yet there are only a few whose support shaped the organization.

Priscilla Payne Hurd was one of them. She believed in the Festival. She spoke at our Gala in 2007, the year we honored her with PSF's annual Will Shakespeare Award. She spoke eloquently of the importance of the arts and Shakespeare for society, and for humanity, especially in the schools.

Priscilla Payne Hurd blessed this community with her wise and discerning philanthropy. The Valley is forever greater, as is the Festival. Thanks to her kindness, we stand on a new ground of being. ■



**Long-time PSF actor** Christopher Patrick Mullen landed on the cover of *American Theatre* magazine's May issue. Published by Theatre Communications Group, *American Theatre* is the signature publication covering professional regional theatre.

Mullen, whose leading roles at PSF include *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, *Dracula: the Journal of Jonathan Harker*, *Hamlet* (2002), and many others, will perform multiple roles in *Henry VIII*.

The cover photo reflects his performance in *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Scotland's Guy Hollands at People's Light & Theatre in Malvern, Pa., earlier this year.

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