



Henry VIII

Cardinal Wolsey, a close advisor to King Henry VII, has arranged that the Duke of Buckingham is arrested on charges of treason. Henry's wife, Queen Katherine, pleads on Buckingham's behalf with no success; Buckingham is tried and executed. Katherine condemns Wolsey, who is despised for the taxes he levels on the populace in the King Henry's name. Later, at a party hosted by Wolsey, Henry meets and is smitten with Anne Bullen, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Katherine.

Henry seeks counsel from Wolsey. Henry's argument is that Katherine is the widow of his brother, which makes the marriage one step removed from incest—never mind that Henry and Katherine have been wed for almost twenty years. Wolsey, already hated by Henry's courtiers for his role in Buckingham's death, is now further despised because Henry wishes a divorce. Wolsey agrees to have the Pope send a representative to render a decision on the matter. Katherine, on the other hand, wants nothing to do with such proceedings, viewing her marriage as sacred, valid, and incapable of being dissolved. Nevertheless, hearings will be held.

Wolsey, however, endures a series of mishaps that expose him unflatteringly to King Henry. Most damning in Henry's eyes is Wolsey's meddling in his divorce proceedings: Wolsey, recognizing that Henry intends to marry Anne once Katherine is out of the way, has instructed the Pope to stay any decision on the matter. Wolsey is disgraced, and Henry proceeds to divorce Katherine and marry Anne in secret regardless of the Pope's opinion. Wolsey dies soon after, and Katherine (who is in poor health at this point) soon follows him to the grave.

Meanwhile, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer, is the subject of a plot by Gardiner, Wolsey's secretary. Though Gardiner is brought to trial in much the same manner as Buckingham previously, he is under the King's protection. Henry exonerates the Archbishop, and has him christen his new daughter by Anne Bullen, Elizabeth. At the christening, Cranmer foretells a noble reign for Elizabeth and glory for England in her time.

Dramatis Personae

King Henry the Eighth
Cardinal Wolsey
Cardinal Campeius
Capucius
Cranmer
Duke of Norfolk
Duke of Suffolk
Duke of Buckingham
Earl of Surrey
Lord Chamberlain
Lord Chancellor
Gardiner
Bishop of Lincoln
Lord Abergavenny
Lord Sandys
Sir Henry Guilford
Sir Thomas Lovell
Sir Anthony Denny
Sir Nicholas Vaux
Cromwell
Secretaries to Wolsey
Griffith
Three Gentlemen
Garter King-at-Arms
Doctor Butts
Surveyor to the Duke of Buckingham
Brandon
Door-keeper of the Council-chamber
Porter and his man
Page to Gardiner
A Crier
Queen Katherine
Anne Bullen
An Old Lady
Patience
Lords and Ladies in the Dumb-shows
Women attending the Queen
Scribes, Officers, Guards, other Attendants
Spirits