

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-29692-2 - King Henry VIII  
 Edited by John Margeson  
 Excerpt  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Date and occasion

*King Henry VIII* will always be linked with the burning down of the first Globe theatre on 29 June 1613. As Sir Henry Wotton and several others of the time remark, it was during a performance of this play that the fire took place. Wotton's letter to Sir Edmund Bacon, written on 2 July 1613, is the fullest and best known account:

Now, to let matters of state sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what hath happened this week at the Bank's side. The King's players had a new play, called *All is true*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the Knights of the Order, with their Georges and garters, the Guards with their embroidered coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain chambers being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very grounds.

This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric; wherein 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 broiled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with bottle ale.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Lorkin, writing on 30 June, speaks of the play as 'the play of Hen:8' and again notes the cause of the fire as 'shooting of certayne chambers in way of triumph'.<sup>2</sup>

Wotton calls it 'a new play', a phrase commonly used at the time to indicate a first performance, but he may have meant to describe a relatively new play, still attracting a lot of attention. This interpretation is borne out by a letter discovered by M. J. Cole and published in *Shakespeare Quarterly*.<sup>3</sup> It was written on 4 July 1613 by Henry Bluett, whom Cole describes as a young merchant in London, to Mr Richard Weeks:

On Tuesday last [29 June 1613] there was acted at the Globe a new play called *All is Triewe*, which had been acted not passing 2 or 3 times before. There came many people to see it insomuch that the house was very full, and as the play was almost ended the house was fired with shooting off a chamber which was stopped with tow which was blown up into the thatch of the house and so burned down to the ground. But the people escaped all without

<sup>1</sup> L. Pearsall Smith (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 2 vols., 1907, II, 32–3.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lorkin, in BL Harl. MS. 7002 f. 268 (quoted Pooler, p. vii).

<sup>3</sup> *SQ* 32 (1981), p. 352.

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1 Portrait of Henry VIII by an unknown artist, probably painted about 1511. It shows him aged 20, the young king admired by More and Erasmus. He had married Katherine of Aragon two years before

hurt except one man who was scalded with the fire by adventuring in to save a child which otherwise had been burnt.

Again the play is called *All is True*, and it is described as one ‘which had been acted not passing 2 or 3 times before’, an important point which ought to settle the question of its ‘newness’.<sup>1</sup> We learn that the play was popular, the house being crowded, and Wotton’s account of the cause of the fire is confirmed by Bluett. The interesting difference is that Bluett remarks that the ‘shooting off a chamber’ happened ‘as the play was almost ended’, whereas Wotton gives a strong indication that it occurred near the end of the first act: ‘King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolseys house, and certain chambers being shot off at his entry’. There is no way of reconciling these two statements. Bluett adds one small dramatic incident that is in contrast with Wotton’s light-hearted account of the man who ‘had his breeches set on fire’, though of course they may be writing about the same man, Bluett explaining why the man had ventured in. It is worth noting the presence of children in the audience – at least, of one child.

It seems certain from these letters that while the play was indeed new, the occasion of the fire may have been the third or fourth performance. Records indicate that new plays were rarely given a number of performances on successive days but that they were presented at intervals of several days or a week. One other question which may or may not have something to do with its date is its relationship to Samuel Rowley’s *When You See Me You Know Me*, a romantic chronicle play of the old-fashioned kind, which shows Henry as a popular hero, disregards chronology, is often fiercely anti-papist, and spends much time on the antics of two fools, Patch and Will Summers. The Prologue to *Henry VIII* stresses the play’s truth to history and points out that the audience will be disappointed if they have ‘come to hear a merry bawdy play’ or ‘to see a fellow / In a long motley coat guarded with yellow’. Rowley’s play was first acted in 1604 at Easter and printed in 1605 and 1613, but, as Foakes points out, was probably revived on the stage in 1613.<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars from Spedding onward have linked the play with the celebrations for the marriage on 14 February 1613 between Princess Elizabeth and one of the notable champions of Protestantism in Germany, Prince Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Court records show that a number of plays, six by Shakespeare, were called for from the King’s Men during the festivities at court, but *Henry VIII* (or *All is True*) was not among them.<sup>3</sup> This does not vitiate the argument that Shakespeare and his company may have considered it as a play to be put forward with the others as a possible choice, or as a colourful show with topical overtones that would do well in the popular theatre during the same period or immediately after.

As Foakes has demonstrated, the wedding attracted special attention in the country because of the death of Prince Henry, the young and hopeful heir to the throne, in November 1612. After a period of mourning, there were large-scale

<sup>1</sup> See Foakes, p. xxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

<sup>3</sup> E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 1930, II, 343; Maxwell, p. x.

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displays of pageantry and much festivity for the wedding in February, as if to make up for the great sorrow of the court and the nation over the young prince's death. Foakes adds that in the general atmosphere of suspicion of Spain and Catholic conspiracy that existed in 1613, there was a widespread hope, evident in many documents, that the marriage would bring about a strong alliance with the German Protestant princes, to England's advantage.<sup>1</sup> Much was made also by pamphleteers and poets of the identity between the names of the bride and the glorious queen of the recent past. Certainly the christening scene at the end of *Henry VIII* makes a strong dramatic point of the naming of the child Elizabeth by Archbishop Cranmer. As Foakes observes, 'A play on the downfall of Wolsey, the last great Catholic statesman of England, on the rise of Cranmer, and the birth of "that now triumphant Saint our late Queene *Elizabeth*" would have been very appropriate at such a time.'<sup>2</sup>

The play is not anti-papist in the way that Rowley's *When You See Me* is, but ultimately tolerant and reconciling in its portrayal of the falls of Wolsey and Katharine. It concludes with a visionary prophecy from Cranmer not only of the peace and security of Queen Elizabeth's reign, but also of the idealised hopes, still felt by some in 1613, for the reign of James I. These themes of the reconciling of the divisions of the past in the hopes of the future, in the birth of new generations which would undertake this task, and even of 'new nations', make the play appropriate to a marriage which was also an alliance and which revived hopes that had been lost at the time of Prince Henry's death.<sup>3</sup>

Most scholars, whether they agree with the link between *Henry VIII* and the wedding celebrations of February 1613, accept the long-held view that the play was written late in 1612 or early in 1613. The language of the play and its versification (so far as these are Shakespeare's) indicate the last stage of Shakespeare's career, the period of the late romances. Perhaps only *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a collaboration with Fletcher, comes later, but that was not included in the Folio.

### Authorship

Heminges and Condell, the editors of the First Folio and actors in Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, printed *Henry VIII* as the final play in the long series of Shakespeare's history plays. No one doubted Shakespeare's authorship until the middle of the nineteenth century, though there had been questions asked about the Prologue and the Epilogue, and whether the section on King James in Cranmer's prophecy had not been added later to an Elizabethan play.<sup>4</sup> In 1850, however,

<sup>1</sup> Foakes, p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxi. Tyrone Guthrie made effective use of this identity of names when he produced *Henry VIII* at the Old Vic at the time of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Harris, 'What's past is prologue: *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII*', in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (eds.), *Later Shakespeare*, 1966, p. 232; Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, 1975, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> See Maxwell, pp. xii–xiii.

James Spedding announced his dissatisfaction with the idea that Shakespeare had written the whole of *Henry VIII* and suggested that he must have had a collaborator, probably John Fletcher. About the same time, Samuel Hickson revealed that he had independently come to the same conclusion, and that his division of the play between collaborators was almost identical with that of Spedding.<sup>1</sup>

Spedding claimed that the design of the play was not worthy of Shakespeare's craftsmanship; he also said that he had become aware of two distinct styles in the play, in part through a suggestion from Tennyson:

The resemblance of the style, in some parts of the play, to Fletcher's, was pointed out to me several years ago by Alfred Tennyson. . . and long before that, the general distinctions between Shakespeare's manner and Fletcher's had been admirably explained by Charles Lamb in his note on the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and by Mr Spalding in his *Essay*.<sup>2</sup>

One style, he claimed, was syntactically difficult and charged with images, full of vigour and freshness, the other easy, familiar, 'diffuse and languid'. He then devised metrical tests based on the occurrence of feminine and masculine endings, the use of an extra accented syllable at the end of a line, and the number of run-on lines and end-stopped lines, all of which proved conclusively, in his view, that there were two distinct kinds of prosody in the play, one Shakespeare's and the other most probably Fletcher's. He divided the play between the two on this basis, scene by scene, with the following result:

Shakespeare: 1.1 and 1.2	Fletcher: Prologue and Epilogue
2.3 and 2.4	1.3 and 1.4
3.2.1–203	2.1 and 2.2
5.1	3.1 and 3.2.204–459
	4.1 and 4.2
	5.2, 5.3 and 5.4

This division gives Fletcher over two-thirds of the play on the basis of the number of lines; it is also assumed that each author was responsible for complete scenes, with the single exception of 3.2. The table is worth quoting because it has been accepted by many editors and scholars since Spedding's time, although the evidence for dual authorship is now largely of a different kind from Spedding's and various modifications have been made in the traditional division.

The evidence for Fletcher's hand in the play (or the hand of any other playwright of the time) is entirely internal since there is no external evidence of any kind pointing to his contribution. The external evidence that does exist seems to show Shakespeare's authorship clearly. *Henry VIII* was included in the First Folio with Shakespeare's other plays, which are declared to be 'absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them'. The Folio editors, Heminges and Condell, would certainly have known, Peter Alexander observes, if Fletcher had written the major portion of

<sup>1</sup> James Spedding, 'Who wrote Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*?', *Gentleman's Magazine* (Aug. 1850), pp. 115–24; (Oct. 1850), pp. 381–2; Samuel Hickson, *N&Q* (24 Aug. 1850), p. 198, and subsequent issues.

<sup>2</sup> Spedding, *Gentleman's Magazine* (Oct. 1850), p. 382.

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the play: they were managing the King's Men at the time of its composition and would have been responsible for paying him for his share.<sup>1</sup> *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ascribed to Shakespeare and Fletcher on the title page of the 1634 quarto, was apparently close in date to *Henry VIII* but was not included by Heminges and Condell in the Folio.<sup>2</sup>

However, Spedding's hypothesis was widely accepted, as we have noted. His argument was cogently presented, and was supported by carefully worked-out metrical data from particular scenes. Spedding disliked the play, finding that it lacked a clear moral design, and did not believe that Shakespeare could have written the whole of it at the end of his career, even though he recognised that certain scenes showed the master's hand. Following Spedding, Farnham and Thorndike began to study the linguistic data which seemed to strengthen the case he had put forward.<sup>3</sup>

Early scepticism about the theory found supporters in Baldwin Maxwell, Peter Alexander and G. Wilson Knight. Maxwell in his essay 'Fletcher and Shakespeare' (1923) doubted if the scenes assigned to Fletcher were entirely his.<sup>4</sup> He gave examples of his own tests – for instance, the immediate repetition of single words or of words with a modifying phrase, where the Fletcher scenes of *Henry VIII* showed far fewer examples than scenes from Fletcher's known works. He also laid much stress on the use of sources. The scenes assigned to Fletcher make as close a verbal use of Holinshed as the scenes given to Shakespeare, but in *Bonduca*, Fletcher's only historical play, there is no verbal borrowing whatever from Holinshed or Tacitus, its obvious sources. This argument was to be repeated and developed further by Geoffrey Bullough and R. A. Foakes.

Peter Alexander argued strongly in his 'Conjectural history, or Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*' (1930) against the manipulation of evidence by those who wished to make conjectures about the authorship and provenance of literary works, and used *Henry VIII* as an example. He pointed out that the differences of style in the play have an important dramatic function in relation to widely differing speeches and situations, and yet these very differences are made the basis for disintegration.<sup>5</sup> In a careful analysis of Spedding's evidence, he showed how the so-called peculiarities of style in the scenes given to Fletcher can be paralleled in Shakespeare's late plays in varying proportions from play to play. Spedding, he claimed, never considers how metrical variations arise in the development of Shakespeare's verse. Alexander also gave considerable weight to the external evidence pointing to Shake-

<sup>1</sup> Peter Alexander, 'Conjectural history, or Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*', *Essays and Studies* 16 (1930), 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Cardenio*, a lost play, was entered under Shakespeare's and Fletcher's names in the Stationers' Register, 9 September 1653, by Humphrey Moseley (Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 538). Moseley is not highly regarded for the accuracy of his ascriptions (Baldwin Maxwell, p. 57).

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Farnham, 'Colloquial contractions in Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger and Shakespeare as a test of authorship', *PMLA* 31 (1916), 326–58; A. H. Thorndike, *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare*, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin Maxwell, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander, 'Conjectural history', pp. 110–11.

speare, and saw in the play themes and attitudes characteristic of Shakespeare.

Wilson Knight in *Principles of Shakespearean Production* (1936) and particularly in *The Crown of Life* (1948) stressed the unity of the play and its special relationship with Shakespeare's last plays. Like Alexander, Knight saw the different styles in the play as deliberate variations for dramatic purposes which he found paralleled in other of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>1</sup> His analysis of structure is closely related to his analysis of central themes, themes which he found elsewhere in Shakespeare but nowhere in Fletcher.

Although the kind of evidence presented by Spedding was cast seriously in doubt by Alexander and other critics, many scholars continued to believe that the play was not solely by Shakespeare and were assiduous in collecting other evidence, stylistic and linguistic, of a more convincing kind. The most persuasive of these, in terms of the evidence presented, have been A. C. Partridge (1949, 1964) and Cyrus Hoy (1962).<sup>2</sup> Partridge uses the Spedding division of the play as a basis for comparison and points to characteristic linguistic habits of the two authors. In particular, he cites the use of the auxiliary verb 'do' as a mere expletive and the common use of 'hath' in the Shakespearean scenes, whereas Fletcher avoids 'do' and prefers 'has' to 'hath'. Partridge also stresses Shakespeare's use of 'you' where Fletcher uses 'ye', and Shakespeare's preference for 'them' as against Fletcher's use of the clipped form 'em'. Partridge notes differences between the often tortured syntax in the Shakespearean scenes and the more orderly syntax of the passages assigned to Fletcher. However, he is inclined to give more of the play to Shakespeare than Spedding and Hickson had done in Acts 3 to 5; for example, he gives 4.2 to Shakespeare, and also Cranmer's final speech in 5.5 (5.4 in this edition).<sup>3</sup> He speculates that Shakespeare had left an unfinished play with his company on his retirement which Fletcher was asked to complete when it was required for production, a theory which he believes is better than the less probable theory of 'simultaneous collaboration'.<sup>4</sup>

Cyrus Hoy's work on the play is firmly based on a thorough linguistic study of all of Fletcher's non-collaborative plays and of Shakespeare's later plays. Hoy observes that the linguistic practices of authors involve questions about the nature of the manuscript behind the printed text, the possibility of scribal interference where the copy for the printer is not the author's foul papers, and the habits of the compositors of the printed text where these are known.<sup>5</sup> He finds that the linguistic practices of Shakespeare and Fletcher are often similar, but that the most noteworthy differences occur in their use of 'hath' and 'has', 'you' and 'ye', and 'them' and 'em'. Hoy and Partridge agree on these usages, but Hoy's work is based on a larger body of evidence.

<sup>1</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life*, 1948, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Partridge, *The Problem of Henry VIII Re-Opened*, 1949; *Orthography in Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama*, 1964. Cyrus Hoy, 'The shares of Fletcher and his collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon', *SB* 8 (1956), 129–46; *SB* 15 (1962), 71–90.

<sup>3</sup> Partridge, *Orthography*, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> Hoy, 1962, p. 73.

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Hoy also observes, on the basis of Foakes's and Hinman's studies of the composers' work on the text, that Compositor B, who set rather less than half the play, is known to be inclined to alter 'ye' to 'you', so that there may be fewer 'ye's than one might expect in a scene ascribed to Fletcher.

From his study of linguistic preferences by the two authors, Hoy supports some of the traditional ascriptions and alters others. Thus he thinks that 1.3 and 1.4 are probably Fletcher's because of the frequent use of 'em' even though there is no clear evidence from 'ye' and 'you'. However, he gives 2.1 and 2.2 to Shakespeare because the 'ye's occur grouped in clusters of two or three lines, as if a few lines here and there were interpolated or rewritten by Fletcher. Act 3, Scene 1 presents, he thinks, the clearest evidence of Fletcher's hand, but 3.2 is probably entirely Shakespeare's because again the 'ye's occur in a cluster. The same argument applies to both scenes of Act 4, which Hoy assigns to Shakespeare. In Act 5, Hoy agrees that Scene 1 is Shakespeare's, but is inclined to think that Scenes 2 to 4 are Fletcher's because of the general spread of 'ye's throughout each scene, although he does note a majority of 'you's in 5.2 and 5.3. Since Compositor X, who is not known to prefer one form to the other, set this act, no argument can be based on the compositor.

In sum, Hoy would tentatively ascribe to Shakespeare ten of the sixteen scenes (or 1,848 lines) and six to Fletcher (736 lines), thus reducing Fletcher's share of the play from over two-thirds in the traditional division to less than one-third. He also appends some non-linguistic evidence, pointing out that there are clear signs of Fletcher's modes of syntax and rhetorical habits in the six scenes which linguistic evidence shows are probably his. He believes that 'the truth about Fletcher's share in *Henry VIII* is to be found where truth generally is: midway between the extreme views that have traditionally been held regarding it'.<sup>1</sup> Hoy does not develop a theory of how collaboration may have worked, beyond the suggestion that Fletcher touched up certain of Shakespeare's scenes and added a few more of his own.

Non-linguistic tests for authorship based on style, structure, characterisation and the use of imagery have tended to cancel one another out because of their widely differing conclusions and their apparently subjective nature. Probably the most objective of these tests involves a comparison of the handling of sources by Shakespeare and Fletcher, though here too there are differences of opinion. A comparison is difficult since Fletcher wrote only one history play, *Bonduca*. As already mentioned, Baldwin Maxwell has shown that there is no verbal borrowing in *Bonduca* from its sources in Holinshed and Tacitus, but close borrowing from Holinshed and Foxe occurs throughout *Henry VIII* in the Shakespearean manner. Maxwell's conclusion is that 'a comparison of *Henry VIII* with its sources argues strongly against Fletcher's participation'.<sup>2</sup> However, R. A. Law argues

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79. In a 1962 'Postscript' to his edition of the play, R. A. Foakes, who had argued on a variety of grounds for the likelihood of Shakespeare's sole authorship, accepts the importance of Hoy's evidence and quotes Hoy's measured conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin Maxwell, p. 58.





<sup>2</sup> Henry VIII making Pope Clement his footstool: an engraved frontispiece from John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583), which gives the popular Protestant view of Henry's triumph over Pope Clement. The king receives the Word of God from Cranmer, while papal representatives recoil in horror

for Fletcher's share, noting that there are distinct differences in the handling of source material in the scenes ascribed to the two supposed authors. Law maintains that Shakespeare modifies his source material to clarify motivation, strengthen characterisation and increase dramatic power, whereas Fletcher uses the sources in a pedestrian way, without development of character or other signs of dramatic imagination.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. A. Law, 'The double authorship of *Henry VIII*', *SP* 56 (1959), 486–7.

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In the view of R. A. Foakes, there is much evidence in *Henry VIII* of a close reading of Holinshed and Foxe, often of material in widely separated sections of the chronicles which is then used in a single scene. This evidence of close reading, the compression of chronology for dramatic purpose, and the reshaping of material to bring out aspects of character are all in keeping with what we know of Shakespeare's practice and not typical of Fletcher. In any theory of collaboration, Foakes observes, 'it would have to be assumed that each author read independently not merely the sections in the histories relevant to the scenes he wrote, but all the material on the reign of Henry'.<sup>1</sup> Bullough reaches a very similar conclusion in his study of the sources of the play.<sup>2</sup>

The argument of Spedding and some of his followers that metrical analysis could differentiate between two distinct styles in the play has been largely discounted. The argument from style is on stronger ground when it is concerned with syntax and rhetorical practice. Like Spedding, A. C. Partridge compares the 'difficult syntactical progression of Shakespeare' in the early scenes with the 'clarity of Fletcher' in certain later scenes<sup>3</sup> and claims that Shakespeare neglects grammatical relationships for the sake of ideas and images: 'Few dramatists, except Shakespeare, could have drafted such structurally entangled accounts of events.'<sup>4</sup> However, after a number of examples, Partridge admits the possibility that complications of syntax may be the result of heightened feeling in particular scenes. Hoy likewise finds indications of Fletcher's syntactical and rhetorical habits in the scenes where there is clear evidence of his linguistic preferences. He gives a number of examples of Fletcher's favourite line structures, the use of repetition with different modifiers ('O very mad, exceeding mad, in love too', I.4.28), the use of a second subject after the verb, and what he calls 'rhetorical cascades'.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars have claimed that the different styles apparent in the play are functional and dramatically appropriate to the scenes where they are used. Alexander argues that the play would have been 'intolerably monotonous' had it been written throughout in the manner of Buckingham's farewell,<sup>6</sup> and Wilson Knight recognises three major variations in the style of the play, each with a particular dramatic function.<sup>7</sup> Northrop Frye points out that the low-keyed quality of the writing in much of the play is appropriate to its nature as pageant, that 'obtrusively magnificent poetry in the text accompanying such spectacle' would violate decorum.<sup>8</sup>

The division of critical opinion is as marked with respect to structure as it is over the question of style. Most of those critics who find serious faults in the play's

<sup>1</sup> Foakes, p. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, IV (1962), 449.

<sup>3</sup> Partridge, *Orthography*, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> Hoy, 1962, pp. 82–4.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, 'Conjectural history', pp. 110–11.

<sup>7</sup> Knight, *Crown of Life*, p. 261.

<sup>8</sup> Northrop Frye, 'Romance as masque', in C. McG. Kay and H. E. Jacobs (eds.), *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, 1978, p. 31.