Shakespeare’s history plays, as fresh today as when they were written, are based upon the assumption that time is not simply a destroyer but a preserver, and that ‘examples past’ might enable us to understand the present and anticipate the future. This lively study examines the continuing tradition of Shakespeare’s history plays in stage and film productions as well as giving an account of the critical debate on these plays. Following two introductory chapters giving essential background on the genre, the English history plays are discussed in turn, bringing out the distinctive characteristics of each play: the three early Henry VI plays; the perennial stage favourite Richard III; King John; Richard II; Henry IV I and 2, famous for the character of Falstaff; Henry V, which is treated very differently in the film versions by Olivier and Branagh; and Henry VIII. An invaluable introduction to these fascinating and complex plays.

Warren Chernaik is Visiting Professor at King’s College London, and Emeritus Professor, University of London.
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Acknowledgements

Much of this book was written in the Humanities Reading Room of the British Library, and I am grateful for the helpfulness of the library staff there and in the Rare Books room, the Senate House Library, and the Maughan library of King’s College London. For help with illustrations and with research into the stage and cinematic history of the plays, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the library staff at the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, the Theatre Museum, and the British Film Institute. Among copyright holders of film versions of Richard III and Henry V, I am grateful for the assistance of Lisa Katselas, Photofest Inc., and the BFI.

Sarah Stanton not only commissioned the book, but has been an unfailing source of encouragement and gave me excellent advice on revision. Judith Chernaik, as well as attending endless productions, good and bad, with me, has carried on a running conversation about Shakespeare with me for many years, from which I have profited greatly. Friends and colleagues who have read chapters in draft form or have helped me to clarify my views in conversation include Janet Clare, Robyn Bolam, Gabriel Egan, F. J. Levy, Michael Hattaway, A. R. Braunmuller, Gordon McMullan, René Weis, Kate McCluskie, Sandra Clark, Sonia Massai, Ann Thompson, Richard Proudfoot, and Andrew Gurr. I am especially grateful to Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerin for inviting me to give a paper comparing the Olivier and Branagh films of Henry V at the International Shakespeare Conference organized by the Shakespeare Institute in August 2006; that essay, a version of which appears in chapter 8, will be included in a forthcoming collection edited by them, Shakespeare on Screen. Sonia Massai invited me to give a paper on Henry VI (mostly about the relationship of different versions of 2 and 3 Henry VI) at the London Shakespeare Seminar in 2005. And among the Shakespeare scholars from whom I have learned most, I must particularly thank Emrys Jones, Annabel Patterson, and Phyllis Rackin.

I have gained immeasurably from discussing Shakespeare’s histories with my students at King’s College London, the University of Southampton, and Queen Mary, University of London. But my main debt, other than to Shakespeare himself, is to the actors and directors who have made the history plays of Shakespeare come alive in productions.