

A full-page background image of a portrait of Henry VIII. He is depicted from the waist up, wearing a dark red, fur-lined tunic with gold embroidery and a white, intricately patterned surcoat. He has a beard and is wearing a black cap with a white fur trim. He is holding a sword in his right hand and a dagger in his left. The background features a patterned curtain and a window with a green and gold geometric pattern.

Henry VIII:

A Reflection of Time

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Abstract

This study examines how king Henry VIII is represented throughout the centuries. In particular, it seeks to answer the question how writers, dramatists, and scriptwriters reproduced Henry VIII according to their own time and views. This thesis examines the numerous representations of Henry VIII over a wide time span from the sixteenth century until today. Previous studies on Henry VIII have mainly focused on how politics and religion developed in his reign and less on how Henry himself is represented. Through the analyses of selected literary and popular works, this research explores influential representations of Henry VIII. The findings of this thesis show how writers have reproduced and given their own spin to historical facts about Henry's life and reign and how their representation of Henry VIII reflects the biases and influences of that time. This thesis provides an extensive view on how and why Henry VIII is represented throughout time.

Keywords: Henry VIII; representation; literary works; popular works

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Introduction

Henry VIII is one of the most renowned kings of England. From his birth in 1491 until today, many years after his death in 1547, the world has been intrigued with the controversial king. He is not only known for his role in establishing the English Reformation but also for having had six wives and for his obsession with a male heir.

Throughout the centuries, Henry VIII has been represented in several ways, such as a determined young man, the face of reform, an easily influenced person, a tyrant and also of course as a sovereign. He has often been praised as well as denounced but never forgotten: he had a leading role in chronicles, plays, books, films, and TV series throughout the centuries. This thesis examines the numerous representations of Henry VIII over a wide time span from the sixteenth century until today. In order to do so, the first chapter takes a close look at Henry's reign and certain life events, which were key for how he has been represented.

In chapter two and three, this thesis investigates how the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' historians, writers, and dramatists portrayed Henry. For example, historians such as Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed wrote chronicles on Henry VIII's reign in the sixteenth century. This is followed by a close look at popular seventeenth-century plays on Henry VIII. The first is *When You See Me, You Know Me* by Samuel Rowley. In his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough states that this play is famous for its "unusual treatment of history" (438). The second is the more famous of the two and the play that greatly influenced later representations of Henry: *Henry VIII* by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher.

Chapter four will focus on how Henry was represented in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Numerous theatre productions of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, these productions were a mere continuation of

the sixteenth-century play and therefore they will not be taken into consideration. Moreover, the emphasis will lie on the twentieth century with the production of film, such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) by Alexander Korda. This chapter will finish with an in-depth investigation of how Henry VIII was represented in the popular twenty-first century TV series *The Tudors*, created by Michael Hirst.

These representations of Henry VIII are written with different approaches and visions in different times. This raises the question: what were the ideas behind these representations? In other words, how did the writers intend to represent Henry? How are historical facts then merged with fiction to establish a certain representation? How much did these representations influence other representations? Besides, how far do these, perhaps fictional, literary and popular works on Henry VIII have a basis in fact? Answering these questions should establish how Henry VIII has been represented throughout time.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on Henry VIII. However, these studies seem to be rather focused on how politics and religion developed in Henry VIII's reign. Although this research is highly valuable, it fails to take into account how the representation of Henry VIII himself changed throughout time. For example, in *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, Alistair Fox takes into account several literary works written during Henry VIII's reign, which were often concealed criticisms on Henry himself or his reign. How Henry VIII is portrayed in these literary works, however, has only been briefly taken into account. The concept of representation thus lies at the heart of the discussion on Henry VIII. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, representation is "the way that someone or something is shown or described". In other words, a representation is any kind of expression, such as a description or portrayal, of someone or something.

However, a representation of someone in the past becomes much more difficult to define. A representation of someone who was prominent in history is subjected to the fact that

this person is deceased and consequently life events or “facts” can no longer be verified. The remaining representations of historical figures are often historical writings or fictional narratives based on these writings. Every historian, novelist, playwright, or scriptwriter makes his own selection and gives his own “spin” to these “facts”. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* states that historian Hayden White argues that this is how “historians deploy the traditional devices of narrative to make sense of raw data, to organize and give meaning to their accounts of the past” (1533). To this end, historical writing has actually never been neutral since the events, the source of the writers’ story, already are an interpretation of “what really happened”(White 1544). In his essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", White argues that “the facts—and, more important the relationship among those facts—do not inhere in the events themselves, but instead are constituted by historians in the [...] literary structures they use to identify and describe the events they study” (1534). As a result, the recordings of these events feature how the writer chooses to structure, select, and emphasise them. So even though writers may not be aware of it, they will make a story out of historical facts by giving their own spin to it: their own interpretation of these “facts”. The story, or—in the case of historical writings—the chronicle, will be constituted out of a selection of life events, placed in such an order that the reader can understand them. Therefore, as White acknowledges, “the ‘overall coherence’ of any given ‘series’ of historical facts is the coherence of story, but this coherence is achieved only by a tailoring of the ‘facts’ to the requirements of the story form” (1545). In other words, historical representations are a union of historical facts and literary fiction.

In other words, the representation of Henry VIII changes throughout time because every literary or popular work incorporates its own interpretation of Henry. These works are not simple reproductions of Henry’s life events but rather a guide to how writers established their view of Henry and the reason for choosing such a representation.

Chapter 1: Henry VIII's Reign and Significant Life Events¹

In determining how Henry VIII has been represented, several major life events are worth investigating. Henry has often been portrayed as easily affected by a desire for power, women, a male heir and a wish to leave the world with a legacy like his father did. Henry VIII was the second son of Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarch, and Elizabeth of York. Henry's older brother Arthur, the Prince of Wales, died young after a short marriage in 1502. With papal dispensation, Henry was granted permission to marry his brother's wife Katherine of Aragon since it was believed that her marriage with Prince Arthur was never consummated. In 1509, Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon were married and crowned. Katherine of Aragon gave birth to a few children but only one daughter, Mary, survived and no sons. Numerous literary works, such as William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, have implicitly suggested that Katherine's failure to produce a male heir made Henry doubt their marriage. Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry*, for example, illustrates that he felt punished by God for marrying his brother's wife (2.1.157–146, 2.2.10–15). In 1527, when Henry VIII proposed to divorce Katherine of Aragon, he had already started an affair with Anne Boleyn. His love affair with Anne has led to representations of Henry as a young passionate man, determined to achieve what he wants at any cost, no matter personally or politically.

Henry VIII's request for an annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon and the following conflict with Rome has been known as the "King's great matter". The "King's great matter" was a prominent topic in many literary works on Henry VIII since it was the beginning of a turbulent period in English history: the English Reformation. In 1534, after Pope Clement VII eventually rejected the annulment of his marriage to Katherine, Henry

¹ Historical facts in this chapter have been taken from several historical sources. See Fothergill-Payne and Fothergill-Payne 13; McMullan 277-444; Bullough 81-518; Holinshed 1516-1556.

created the Act of Supremacy. This act declared Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England and hereby his break with the Roman Catholic Church had begun. Henry's religious reforms during the start of the Reformation enabled him to divorce Katherine and marry Anne Boleyn. Whereas Pope Leo X had once declared Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith" for opposing Protestantism, Henry now enforced the Protestant Reformation in England. These events lead to a portrayal of Henry VIII as the face of Reformation in sixteenth-century England.

The start of the English Reformation also initiated the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, at that moment Lord Chancellor, highest advisor to the king. Wolsey has often been depicted in literary works as a successful manipulator, which consequently led to a portrayal of Henry as someone who was easy to influence. Since Henry VIII's coronation in 1509, Wolsey had not only attained a great deal of political power but even more power within the Roman Catholic Church. A number of studies have argued that Wolsey had an immense influence on Henry VIII. For example, Alistair Fox argues that Wolsey's power grew fast and he "in turn became the prime object of authors' concerns" during Henry's reign (7). These studies also suggest that Wolsey was in Henry's favour until he failed to achieve the annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. In 1530, Wolsey was accused of treason but died a natural death a month later before he could be executed. As many would learn, it was dangerous to fail King Henry VIII.

Henry has also often been represented as a tyrant for carrying out the numerous executions of former political friends, advisors, and of his wives. His second wife, Anne Boleyn, for example, gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, but also failed to give Henry a male heir. In 1536, Henry accused Anne of adultery, even with her own brother, and had her arrested for incest and treason. Anne and her accused lovers were found guilty, based on insubstantial evidence, and she was beheaded in 1536. Henry was now free again to choose a

new wife. Anne was not the only person who failed Henry and had to pay the highest price. Edward Stafford, third Duke of Buckingham, was also executed in 1521 for treason, alleged to have laid claim to the English throne. Thomas More, a trusted friend of the king who succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, was next. More and his friend Bishop Fisher were opponents of the Reformation that Henry had established and they refused to sign the obligatory Oath of Succession that would make Mary, Katherine of Aragon's daughter, a bastard and Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, official heir to the throne. More and Fisher were accused of treason for opposing the king and beheaded in 1535. Furthermore, Thomas Cromwell, who became Lord Chancellor after More, helped Henry to achieve the annulment and he enforced the Protestant Reformation. He also arranged Henry VIII's marriage to the Protestant Anne of Cleves, which turned out to be a failure since Anne did not meet the king's expectations of beauty. It is suggested that Henry's unsuccessful marriage to Anne of Cleves was the reason why Cromwell fell out of Henry's favour. In 1540, Cromwell was suddenly accused of treason and executed without a proper trial. In "Reflecting on the King's Reformation", G.W. Bernard emphasises the lack of valid proof for these accusations: "increasingly, those who opposed the king's policies might find themselves condemned, not in a court of law, but by an act of attainder passed by parliament without the need for any proof" (26). Therefore, rumour has it that the actual reasons for Cromwell's arrest were rather ambiguous. In that same year, Henry divorced Anne of Cleves and married the young Katherine Howard but he executed her in 1542 on the same charges as he had executed Anne Boleyn, namely adultery. In other words, Henry VIII established an image of himself as a tyrant through the many executions he commanded. As Bernard concludes: "Most remarkable about Henry's reign [...] is how many of those who at some point were close to him and served him well suddenly found themselves not just out of favour but on trial for their lives and condemned to death" (11).

Of course, there are also several of Henry VIII's life events that aid in a representation of him as a sovereign. Historians depict Henry as someone who often wished to go to war and establish a military status like his father. In 1513, Henry joined Pope Julius II in a military campaign against France. However, Henry eventually withdrew his army because the battles became pointless and too expensive. In 1514, he eventually decided to make peace with France; however, Henry declared war to them again in 1522. Henry VIII often changed alliances and therefore it can be assumed that the king often radically changed his mind. The most radical political change of Henry's reign was the break with Rome and thereby Catholicism, leading England to the Reformation. Furthermore, literary works also often illustrate how Henry spent most of his wealth on flamboyant banquets and masquerades at his court and of course on warfare. As a result, Henry could be seen as someone who was more occupied with his own welfare than actually ruling his country, the task he mostly left to Cardinal Wolsey. These depictions establish an image of Henry as a sovereign who preferred to spend his wealth on luxuries and let others do the actual administrative, hard work of ruling.

Finally, the representations of the king as a lover are also very interesting. Henry VIII has been most renowned for the fact that he had six wives, of whom he divorced the first, beheaded the second, outlived the third, divorced the fourth, beheaded the fifth, and the sixth outlived him. In addition, Henry is also known for his numerous extramarital affairs. During his marriage to Katherine of Aragon, Henry had countless mistresses, such as Katherine's lady-in-waiting, Elizabeth Blount. Blount, also nicknamed "Bessie Blount", bore him a son: Henry. At that time, Katherine had not yet bore him a son and thus he had no male heir. Historical records state that Henry acknowledged his illegitimate son with Blount and entitled him as Henry FitzRoy, first Duke of Richmond and Somerset. Before Henry VIII started to court Anne Boleyn around 1527, her sister Mary Boleyn had been his mistress. In 1533, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, annulled the marriage of Henry VIII and

Katherine of Aragon so Henry could marry Anne Boleyn. However, Henry had already been publicly courting Anne while he was still married. It is unknown whether Anne and Henry were actually sexually involved before their marriage. In 1536, while Henry was still married to Anne Boleyn, he also publically started to court Jane Seymour, one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting. After Anne Boleyn was executed, Henry married Jane Seymour, who died soon after giving birth to a son: Edward VI. In 1540, Cromwell arranged Henry's political marriage to Anne of Cleves, which was annulled again in the same year. However, it is said that before this annulment, Henry VIII was already courting Katherine Howard whom he also eventually married. All in all, Henry's extramarital affairs portray him as a lustful king who never seemed to be satisfied with just one woman, a representation that would later be elaborated on television.

In conclusion, there are countless representations of Henry VIII established throughout the years. Some major life events aided in how Henry was portrayed. The young Henry wished to win wars and leave a legacy like his father, Henry VII, did. Nonetheless, his desire for a male heir and his infatuations with women led to a bigger legacy than he could ever wished for: he became the image of the English Reformation. However, as Cardinal Wolsey would prove, others easily influenced Henry in courtly politics. Besides, it seemed that Henry preferred to deal with courtly indulgences instead of politics. Later, Henry proved to be a more active sovereign at his court. When Henry's courtly power grew, so did his ruthlessness. He commanded many arrests and executions during his reign, remarkably mostly of people close to him. That is, if he was not all too busy with his extramarital affairs.

Chapter 2: The Portrayal of Henry VIII in the Sixteenth Century

In the sixteenth century, it was mostly playwrights and historians who wrote representations of Henry VIII. However, the way these representations have been documented in history differs. The objective of this chapter is to focus on several sixteenth-century plays and chronicles and to unravel why these playwrights and historians opted for a certain representation of Henry VIII.

Plays were written for the theatre and therefore historical events and “facts” were part of their plots, which made up a story to entertain the public. The historians, however, sought for a more objective way to document the historical events of that time in the form of a chronicle: a historical record of “facts” and events in a chronological order (Abrams 47). However, Hayden White has argued that these historical events and “facts” were also structured in chronicles as parts of a plot, the so-called “emplotment” (1538). According to White, facts and historical

“events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play” (1539).

In general, therefore, both playwrights and historians have incorporated their own interpretations in their literary works. Representations of Henry VIII are therefore a reflection of the time they were written in.

In *The Holinshed Texts, Volume 4*, chronicler Raphael Holinshed has asserted that Henry’s father, Henry VII, ended the English civil war, the War of the Roses, on the battlefield in 1485. He then claimed the English throne, which he secured by marrying

Elizabeth of York, daughter of King Edward IV (Holinshed 1425). After so many turbulent years, Holinshed argues that a peaceful period had begun under Tudor reign. However, Henry VII's claim to the throne was still questionable and several noblemen tried to oppose the Tudor dynasty. In *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, Allistair Fox notes that literary work during the Tudor reign therefore shows many political influences (3). When Henry VIII had succeeded his father to the throne in 1509, political influences in literary works remained (Holinshed 1464). Henry's constant switching of alliances and religious views forced many historians and playwrights to be indirect in their literary representations of the king. According to Fox, "Social codes and political discretion determined that many of the things most writers desired to say could not be said openly"(3). Opposing the king was dangerous, as many had already proven before. As a result, writers often had to create fictive representations of Henry VIII, such as John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, written around 1515-1516, and Jupiter in John Heywood's *The Play of the Weather*, written in 1529 (Fox 236-252).

2.1: John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*

In *Magnyfycence*, Skelton represents Henry VIII as someone tempted by the extravagance of his court but also as someone who in the end resists these temptations and chooses to listen to wise counsellors. The main character "Magnyfycence" is the very image of how Henry and his young friends at court might have thought the ultimate ruler would be: a brave and young practical thinker. As Fox notes, "Magnyfycence, in fact, is none other than Henry VIII" (237). In the play, Magnyfycence is tempted to throw good money after bad, tempted by the "Vices" and "Virtues":

Fancy [sic] hath cached [sic] in a fly [sic] net

This noble man Magnyfycence,
Of Largesse under the pretence (Skelton 21).

Fox argues that Henry VIII “is shown as casting off the restraint of wise counsellors in favour of riotous and irresponsible companions who tempt him into a life of intemperate pleasure and profligacy, until their influence is replaced by that of four sad and sober advisors who instruct Magnyfycence on the means of attaining a moral recovery” (237). However, Raphael Holinshed’s detailed accounts of the many “greate banquettings” indicate that Henry VIII had been doing the exact opposite and was mostly busy with pursuing pleasure at his court (Holinshed 1468). If the real Henry had a similar behaviour as Skelton’s “Vices” and “Virtues”, then why would Skelton represent Henry as a wise and sober King resisting all these pleasures? Although it could be argued that Skelton was implicitly trying to make a joke out of the king, it is more likely that he was warning Henry: “in showing Magnyfycence’s willingness to undergo reformation under the guidance of wise counsellors, Skelton was sending Henry the citizens’ message” (Fox 239). The common citizens had been paying for the king’s luxuries in court and the battles in France. Therefore, it could be argued that the citizens urged Skelton to send out their message. In “Dramatic Genre and the Court of Henry VIII”, Peter Happé argues that the “play was not printed until after [Skelton’s] death in 1530” (28). So, it is less likely that the play was a production for which the citizens had paid. Moreover, Skelton was once Henry’s tutor, so maybe he sought to regain his influence on the king again (Happé 281). Besides, *Magnyfycence* is known to be a morality play, so Skelton might have intended it as an instruction to Henry VIII to acquit his indulgences at the royal court. On the other hand, Skelton also briefly takes into account the image of Henry VIII as a lover. At one point in the play, the character “Courtly Abusion” suggests to Magnyfycence: “to fasten [his] fancy [sic] upon [sic] a fair [sic] mistress [sic]” (73). Magnyfycence in turn answers

Ah [sic], that were a baby to brace and to [kiss]!

These words [sic] in my [sic] eye [sic] they be so lustily [sic] spoken,

That on such [sic] a female my flesh [sic] would [sic] be wroken (74).

Here Skelton seems to imply an image of Henry who craved for Anne Boleyn, the mistress “Courtly Abusion” is referring to. By suggesting that Henry had a lust for Anne, Skelton was on dangerous grounds. Henry VIII had tried to convince his citizens and court that he wished a divorce because he felt punished by God for marrying his brother’s wife. Implying Henry’s wish to divorce was in fact for lust was opposing the reason for the divorce and would undermine the entire trial and thereby Henry’s cause. Soon after, however, “Courtly Abusion” states: “Let your lust and liking [sic] stand [sic] for a law [sic]” (76). Here again, although a brief representation of Henry’s extramarital affairs with Anne Boleyn is taking into account, Skelton returns to his moral instruction and ends with advising the king.

2.2 John Heywood’s *The Play of the Weather*

In *The Play of the Weather*, Heywood shows the same tendency as Skelton in how to represent Henry VIII. At the end of the play, he is again depicted as a wise counsellor. However, it is more likely Henry was the opposite and similar to the main character’s suitors: arrogant and pursuing his own pleasures, such as marrying Anne Boleyn. The play is probably written during the beginning of the Reformation in 1529, when there were several religious and political conflicts. According to Happé, “Weather indirectly offers advice to the king, who is represented on the stage as Jupiter, about the exercise of personal authority” (281). Jupiter, as the embodiment of Henry VIII, is the main character whose gods are pleading for themselves: they “represent the disaffected nobles and commons who are pursuing their own self-interest at the expense of the commonweal” (Fox 254). Jupiter subsequently advises and

instructs his gods and “everyone applauds Jupiter’s wise judgement”(253). In the play, the character “Merry Report” seems to illustrate Henry’s wish to divorce Katherine and marry Anne. This is indicated by how “Merry Report” talks to the “Gentlewoman” about the transition of an old moon to a new moon:

Even now is he making [sic] of a new moon
 he said [sic] your old moons [sic] be so far [sic] tasted
 That all the goodness of them is wasted (795-798).

The fact that the last moon is “old” most likely refers to Katherine of Aragon and that she is “so far tasted” and “wasted” could indicate her miscarriages. Therefore, Jupiter, as the embodiment of Henry VIII, is making a “new moon”. This new moon could signify a new queen, Anne Boleyn. To this end, Heywood’s suggestion of a new moon could also hint to the Reformation, which took place as a result of Henry’s imminent wish to divorce Katherine. The rise of a new moon, namely the rise of a new religion, would establish Henry, or here Jupiter, as its “maker”. In other words, Heywood does not solely advise the king but also incorporates representations of Henry VIII as a lover, who creates a new moon. This image of change might also refer to the Reformation. Therefore, Heywood not solely advises the king but also represents him in context with political events of that time.

Skelton and Heywood’s plays show that playwrights did not dare to directly remark on the political issues of that time, since opposing a regime like Henry VIII’s reign could result in their death. Therefore, writers were inclined to represent Henry VIII as a generalised fictional character, who was often praised and wise, with whom they could safely address political matters. As Fox concludes: “The politically orientated play thus became a prime means of activating and expressing such shared awareness [sic] concerning important contemporary issues” (236). To this end, Skelton created the character of “Magnyfycence” and Heywood that of “Jupiter”.

2.3 Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*

Historians, in turn, had been practising the tradition of chronicles:

“if the series were simply recorded in the order in which the events originally occurred, under the assumption that the ordering of the events in their temporal sequence itself provided a kind of explanation of why they occurred when and where they did, we would have the pure form of the chronicle.” (White 1547).

The common goal of most historians had therefore been to cite events and facts as logically, systematically, and objectively as possible. However, historian Edward Hall explored a different path. In *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*, published in 1548, Hall's lavish descriptions of Henry VIII's courtly wealth are in contrast with Skelton and Heywood's depictions of Henry as a sober and wise ruler. Hall's different representation of Henry probably derives from his personal vision of Henry VIII as “the saviour of England and the embodiment of its national pride and achievement” (Fox 229). Hall describes Henry as “being [sic] lusty [sic], young, courageous [sic], greatly delighted [sic] in feats [sic] of chivalry [sic]” (520). Besides, he dedicates an entire chapter to Henry: “The Triumphant [sic] Reign [sic] of King [sic] Henry the VIII” (505). As the use of “Triumphant” in the title indicates, Hall concentrates on the grandeur of Henry VIII's reign. He describes how during the marital festivities of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, Henry washed away his injuries from the tournament and how the royal couple and their court wore garments on which the golden letters H and K were sewed:

“So the king [sic] with the queen [sic] and her ladies [sic] returned to his chamber, where they had a great banquet [sic], and all these hurts [sic] were turned to laughing [sic] and game, and thought that, all that was taken away was but for honour [sic], and

larges: and so this triumph [sic] ended with mirth and gladness [sic]. At this banquet [sic], a shipman [sic] of London caught certain [sic] letters which he sold [sic] to a goldsmith [sic] for. II.L.XIII.S.VIII.D. [sic] by reason whereof [sic], it appeared that the garments [sic] were of a great value” (Hall 519).

Throughout this chapter, Hall describes the many banquettes, weddings, competitions, and royal events in detail:

“in came the king [sic] with fine other, apparelled in coats [sic], the one half of russet satin [sic], Spangled with spangles [sic] of fine gold, the other half [sic] riche clothe of gold, on their heads capes [sic] of russet satin, embroidered [sic] with works [sic] of fine gold bullion” (526).

Hall also represents Henry as a ruler with many virtues and as “unquestionable justified, for example, in his attitude to his marriage with Katherine of Aragon, and his suppression of dissent to the royal supremacy” (Fox 230). Overall, Hall shows a sympathetic representation, which favours Henry VIII. Annabel Patterson argues that Hall has written such a positive image of Henry VIII because his chronicle “was written at the specific request of a monarch in order to sustain the legitimacy of a dynasty” (15). Besides, by 1548, Henry VIII had died, so Hall had not to fear as much as Skelton and Heywood had.

2.4 Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*

The chronicler Raphael Holinshed is probably the most famous historian of the sixteenth century. Similar to Hall, Holinshed describes the royal events of Henry’s reign in great detail. In contrast to Hall, Holinshed tried to refrain himself from giving an opinion. He wished to follow the tradition of the chroniclers in chronologically documenting facts and events as objectively and ‘true’ as possible. First published in 1577, Holinshed’s *Chronicles of*

England, Scotland and Ireland, is a large work on the history of Britain and contains several volumes. It is argued to be a collaborative work since the first volume of the 1577 edition contains the chapter “The names of the Authors [sic] from whom [sic] this History [sic] of England is collected” (Holinshed 6). Therefore, the chronicle is not a unified piece but rather a compilation of many historical narratives. In his article “King, Commons, and Commonweal in Holinshed’s Chronicles”, Robert Zaller discusses that the chronicle “derives from the received texts it incorporates, and in part from the varied perspectives of its author/redactors” (372). The multivocal nature of the text echoes more than just Holinshed’s interpretation. Nonetheless, the chronicle as a whole has still been assigned to Holinshed and therefore this thesis will presume his view on Henry VIII as the most dominant one. Although Holinshed mostly silences his opinion, a closer look at the text shows that he nonetheless stresses his dislike for Cardinal Wolsey. To illustrate, Holinshed writes “the Cardinal verily [sic] was put most [sic] in blame for this scruple now cast into the [sic] kings conscience” (1550). Besides, Holinshed’s ambiguity is also reflected in how he indirectly reveals his sympathy for Henry through his chronicle: “the kings gentle nature & great courtesy [sic]” (1506). Another implicit account occurs when Holinshed recalls “the kings great [sic] liberality & bountiful goodness [sic]” (1503). However, Holinshed also illustrates Cardinal Wolsey’s power over Henry: “the Cardinal [...] continued [sic] surmises [sic] as he daily [sic] put into the kings head” (1508). Hereby, Holinshed illustrates that Wolsey easily manipulated Henry. Holinshed’s dislike for Wolsey is emphasised by his sympathy for Katherine of Aragon. Besides, he does not bestow the divorce case on Henry but on Wolsey’s deceit. Holinshed thereby acquits Henry VIII of the consequences of his political decisions. Indirectly, he blames the king’s counsellor, Wolsey, for misguiding Henry blames him for all of Henry’s crimes. So, although Holinshed tried to follow the chronicle tradition closely, he

implicitly represents Henry as a gentle and noble king who tried to do good but whose head was filled with what Wolsey had put there.

In other respects, Holinshed wrote his Chronicle during the reign of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was a powerful queen who wanted the Tudor myth upheld so it would enforce her grandfather's, her father's, and her own claim to the throne. Holinshed could therefore not criticise his Queen's father, so he blamed her father's advisor. As a result, it could be argued that Holinshed's attitude towards Wolsey is negative because he needed a scapegoat. With someone else to blame, Holinshed leaves Henry in the middle: not being either too positive or negative about him. Besides, Elizabeth was a Protestant queen and blaming a Catholic advisor, such as Wolsey, was therefore even more reasonable.

Chapter 3: The Portrayal of Henry VIII in the Seventeenth Century

In the seventeenth century, two major plays dominated the way Henry VIII was represented. The first is Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me*, published in 1605. The second is the most famous one of the two: William Shakespeare's, and presumably John Fletcher's, *Henry VIII*, a.k.a. *All is True*. *Henry VIII* was probably performed for the first time in 1613. In his preface to *King Henry VIII*, Gordon McMullan argues that the play "depends heavily (sometimes word for word) on its sources, particularly Holinshed's *Chronicles*" (xvii). In addition, the play also echoes some of Rowley's passages in *When You See Me, You Know Me*. The two plays, however, differ in their representation of Henry VIII. Rowley presented Henry VIII as the evangelical prince but Shakespeare and Fletcher present him more in the context of courtly politics and as a representation of the process of Reformation.

3.1 Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me*

Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me* also includes the subtitle: "Or the famous Chronicle History of king Henry the eight, with the birth and virtuous life of Edward Prince of Wales" (33). Apart from the focus on Cardinal Wolsey in his play, Rowley also emphasizes Henry Frederick, James I's son. In his article "Henry VIII, Shakespeare, and the Jacobean Royal Court", Mark Rankin argues that Rowley wrote his play for "Prince Henry's Men", which were "under patronage of Henry Frederick, James's eldest son and heir" (350). By 1603, James I, also James VI of Scotland, had succeeded Elizabeth I to the throne (Bullough 518). With the death of Elizabeth, the last Tudor Monarch of England died and James I was the last remaining suitable distant relative of the Tudor dynasty. When James' son Henry Frederick became the Prince's Men's patron, Rowley probably wrote the play with

the royal heir, the ninth Henry, in mind. In the play, for example, Henry VIII calls out to Jane Seymour: “Now, Jane God! Bring [sic] me but a chopping boy, / Be but a Mother to a Prince of Wales / Add a ninth Henry to the English Crown” (Rowley 41).

According to Rankin, Rowley depicted Henry VIII as “an evangelical Protestant prince” (350). Rowley’s depiction of Henry VIII as a Protestant hero had to serve as an example for Henry Frederick, who was a young boy at that time: “Rowley represents Henry VIII as sympathetic to evangelical Protestantism in order to counsel his patron to cultivate a reputation for forward-thinking Protestant religiosity” (Rankin 351-352). In the play, for example, rumours have it that Henry VIII wishes to wed Katherine Parr but Wolsey strongly disagrees with this proposal:

Holy Saint Peter shield his majesty,
 She is the top of Luther’s heresy:
 If she be queen, the protestants will swell.
 And Cranmer, tutor to the prince of Wales,
 Will boldly speak ’against [sic] Rome’s religion.
 But, bishops, we’ll to court immediately,
 And plot the downfall of these Lutherans.
 You two are tutors to the princess Mary
 Still ply her to the pope’s obedience,
 And make her hate the name of protestant (Rowley 71).

In other words, Wolsey is not pleased with Henry’s plausible union to Katherine Parr. Rowley embodies Wolsey as the ultimate Roman Catholic who opposes Protestantism and in turn, he makes Henry the ultimate patron of Protestantism. Rowley only briefly depicts Wolsey’s fall and focuses on the portrayal of Wolsey as the villain by whom Henry VIII is victimized (76). Besides, Rowley has not treated historical events in a logical order and lets Wolsey live

beyond his actual death in 1530 (Bullough 518). Geoffrey Bullough argues that “to include Prince Edward the play is set later in the reign, but Wolsey still lives” (438). In other words, historical events are altered to aid in the Protestant representation of Henry VIII. With Wolsey’s fall, which also symbolizes the fall of Catholicism, Henry is even more established as a Protestant defender. Catherine Parr also reinforces this image when she challenges the obedience of the Catholic Gardiner and Bonner to Henry VIII:

[...] God himself commands
 The king to rule, and people to obey,
 And both to love and honour him:
 But you, that are sworn servants unto Rome,
 How are ye faithful subjects to the king,
 When first ye serve the pope then after him? (Rowley 89).

Bullough emphasises this by stating that Rowley’s play is “a play of Protestant propaganda, with its discussions of religion and its presentation of Bonner and Gardiner as evil plotters” (440-441).

At the same time, Bullough argues that Rowley also tried to write a serious and truthful picture of Henry VIII. However, this seems less likely because the chronological order of events has been changed in order to dramatize the story and establish a positive representation of Henry VIII as an “evangelical Protestant prince”. In addition, Rowley added comical relief to the play in the form of two fools: Will Summer, the king’s fool and Patch. Since the two fools are imaginary characters, they do not add to the truthfulness of the story, just to its dramatic effect. In addition, McMullan argues that *When You See Me, You Know Me* is “a comical history [...]”; it is a loosely structured entertainment with a strong Protestant bias and emphasis on the role of Henry’s fool, Will Summers” (210).

Moreover, Rowley's portrayal of Henry does not just include Protestant arguments but also a fighting scene, which would most likely appeal to Prince Henry, who loved tournaments and the like. Prince Henry wished to fight wars for the Protestant cause whereas his father wished for peace. Therefore, Rowley not only alludes to James but also to his patron Prince Henry. In the fighting scene, Henry VIII goes into London disguised and provokes a burglar, with whom he ends up jousting (Rowley 29-33). Henry defends the personal property of his citizens by fighting the burglar and thereby embodies a king who fights for his people. Besides, the idea of the undercover monarch may well have been intended to appeal to James, who was fond of such representations. He liked the idea of a disguised ruler because it showed how the monarch was involved with their people. On the other hand, the portrayal of Henry VIII as a man of action would have also pleased the young Prince Henry, who wished to take action for the Protestant cause.

Rowley had to present King Henry VIII as a good ruler who would be concerned with his people, so James I could relate. Although the play was written during James' reign, it shows a focus on his son Henry Frederick since Rowley preferred to agree with the militant Protestants who found James I weak in not fighting for Protestantism. Prince Henry now symbolized the strong Protestant nation, whereas James I was the 'rex pacifexus': king of peace. In "A Difficult Legacy. Elizabeth I's Bequest to the Early Stuarts", Ronald G. Asch argues that "the image of the *Rex pacificus* [was] so alien to all Elizabethan traditions" (37). In James I's reign, the aggressive kind of ruling was more appreciated, which would keep up with the Protestant cause that Henry VIII began. As Rankin argues, "James preferred to tolerate religious differences so long as they did not preclude obedience. Rowley's comparison between Henry Frederick and Henry VIII praises the prince as a militant Protestant alternative to James at an early stage" (353). In other words, Prince Henry was the hope for the Protestants as the embodiment of a more aggressive ruler who would adopt the

Protestant cause. In conclusion, Rowley's representation of Henry as a Protestant with military traits was intended to present a heroic Tudor king to whom his patron, Henry Frederick, could relate.

3.2 William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *Henry VIII*

In *Henry VIII*, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher do not represent Henry as “the violent, frenzied man of moods depicted (and rather well too) in *When You See Me, You Know Me*” (Bullough 448). In contrast to Rowley, Shakespeare and Fletcher tried to achieve a more serious portrayal of Henry VIII. Hence the play's other title *All is True*. The play depicts no violence, nor does it add comic relief in the form of fools to dramatize its content. On the contrary, the play is mainly concerned with courtly politics: “*Henry VIII* specifically displays Henry's success in overcoming faction and controlling policy” (Rankin 358). The play is structured so that it celebrates the birth of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth I is frequently praised, for example, when she is born Archbishop Cranmer states that “she shall be to the happiness of England / An aged princess” (Shakespeare and Fletcher 5.4.56). Such a praising portrayal of the late queen, whose successor, James I and IV, now held the throne must have been made for a noble and maybe even a royal audience. However, it has also been argued that praising Elizabeth I in James I's reign was an indirect way of criticizing him since it recalled ‘the better days’. Ronald G. Asch argues that “James I found it difficult to compete with his predecessor or rather the memory of her reign that became seemingly ever more glorious as the years went by” (37). During the reign of James I, it was therefore not at all positive to praise Elizabeth I. According to Michal Dobson and Nicola J. Watson in *England's Elizabeth*, Elizabeth was not praised much in her own time and only after her death, when the James I ascended the throne, the people and nobles appreciated her more active policy for

Protestantism (46-47). James, on the other hand, was considered a coward because he focused too much on mediating peace. As Dobson and Watson emphasize: “the more anxious English commentators became about [...] the arrival of a Scottish king [e.g. James] and [...] his attempts to act as a peacemaker between European Catholics and Protestants instead of as a champion of the latter [...], the more Elizabeth was retrospectively flattered as his antithesis” (47). In “Giving Up The Ghost: The Jacobean Elizabeth In *The Revenger’s Tragedy* And *Henry VIII, Or All Is True*”, Sophia Y. Gu argues that “[Elizabeth I] is resurrected in order to comment on her successor” (27). For example, in the play the “Old Lady” tells Anne Boleyn that she might become queen but Anne protests that she never wishes to be so. The Old Lady’s response is “In faith, for little England” (2.3.46). McMullan argues that the notion of “little England was a way gently to mock James’ grandeur” since he unified the two kingdoms of England and Scotland (293). Besides, James I’s mother was Mary Queen of Scots, who was executed by Elizabeth I for her claim to the English throne. Asch argues that “[James] was the successor of a widely admired Protestant heroine but also the son of the Queen this heroine had executed in 1587” (29). By glorifying James I’s predecessor, Shakespeare and Fletcher not only reminded the audience of the magnificence of Elizabeth’s reign but also of the questionable legitimacy of James I as her heir. Since Elizabeth was the Virgin Queen, there were no direct descendants. The order of succession thus reached a dead end and a successor had to be found further back in the royal bloodline. James I was a distant relative, a descendant from Henry VII. Nonetheless, James I was Shakespeare and Fletcher’s, and thereby the King’s Men’s, patron so they also had to keep him satisfied. Therefore, the praise of Elizabeth also includes a prophecy for James I, who is said to become “As great in admiration as herself” (Shakespeare and Fletcher 5.4.42).

Moreover, Elizabeth’s legacy establishes Henry VIII as the father of such greatness and the chronology of the historical events in the play is altered to emphasize this (Bullough

443). In the play, Anne Boleyn is present during Wolsey's banquet in 1527 (Shakespeare and Fletcher 1.4). However, there is no record of this in Holinshed's version of it. Gordon McMullan argues that "the occasion is principally engineered to create a first meeting between Henry and Anne, though in fact their relationship was already well established by 1527" (256). The late establishing of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's relationship was necessary to portray Anne as chaste queen instead of an improper one who had an affair with Henry long before they were married. According to Hayden White, "How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation" (1540). It can be argued that Shakespeare and Fletcher accomplished this by constructing the plot so that Henry's motives in the play, whether good or bad, and several of his life events were ordered in such a manner that they would lead to Henry VIII fathering Elizabeth I. Besides, the plot had to be structured so that Anne Boleyn would be viewed as the innocent mother of the praised Virgin Queen. Gu argues, that by doing so and "by concluding the play with the future queen's christening, Shakespeare and Fletcher focus on the glory of the virgin queen's rule rather than the accomplishments of Henry VIII" (29).

However, the play also focuses on Henry VIII himself and his accomplishments. According to Bullough, for example, Henry is portrayed as "vigorous in pleasure and in anger, mingles courtliness with bluntness, is generous and trusting until he realizes he has been deceived or that villainy is intended" (448). Moreover, Henry is portrayed as a "sincere husband to the regal Katherine, [but] he divorces her to marry the sweet and winsome Anne" (Bullough 448). A literary vehicle to make sure that "from this lady may proceed a gem" (2.3.78): Elizabeth I. These points exemplify how Shakespeare and Fletcher establish Henry VIII as a determined king "who nevertheless does good in the main, is master of his house,

defies the Pope and puts down a Cardinal's pride as neither Henry VI nor King John could do, growing (unhistorically) in wisdom and benevolence as the drama proceeds" (Bullough 450). Rankin supports this by stating that "Shakespeare's portrayal of [the] divorce (which does not appear in Rowley), and of Wolsey's involvement in it, points specifically to the monarch's supreme authority in religious affairs" (360). Nevertheless, Shakespeare and Fletcher also represent Henry VIII as someone who can be easily deceived: "the play's King is perceived as being subject to Wolsey's machinations from the outset" (Bullough 16-17). Shakespeare and Fletcher hereby show the seventh-century common trope of not criticizing the king by blaming his councilors, portraying the king as naïve and good. In "Reflecting on the King's Reformation", G.W. Bernard contradicts this. He argues that the real Henry VIII by his "deliberate use of his ministers as lightning conductors [...] made them take public responsibility for actions and policies that were, in fact, his own" (16). In other words, Henry was not just manipulable but likewise a manipulator himself.

Furthermore, Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* shows how Henry gradually develops into a protestant hero. In the play, this begins with how the king's Privy Council and mostly its Catholic member Gardiner accuse the Protestant Cranmer of heresy. King Henry however counters the Privy Council by openly supporting Cranmer through giving him a royal ring beforehand, which Cranmer then shows during his accusation. Henry then enters the council, acknowledges Cranmer's innocence whereby he stands against Catholicism, and ends the council meeting with "So I grow stronger, you more honour gain" (5.2.215). Not only does this example suggest that Henry VIII was more the manipulator himself, it also confirms the process of the Reformation that he started. The process of Reformation begun when Henry used his councillors in order to get what he wanted: a divorce from an old queen who had born him no male children. At first, the play indeed suggests that Cardinal Wolsey is pulling the strings in terms of political power while Henry is portrayed as rather passive.

However, Wolsey is also the symbol of corruption of the Roman Catholic Church: “[...] the Cardinal / Does buy and sell his honour as he pleases, / And for his own advantage” (1.1.191). The Catholic Katherine, then still queen, is actually the first who questions Wolsey’s intentions in front of Henry (1.2). Wolsey’s integrity as the image of the Roman Catholic Church is thus questioned and thereby the seed for reform is planted.

The following scenes indicate that Henry VII embodies the next stage of the process of Reformation. The first actual hint about the Reformation can be found in the following scene when it is assumed to be a French influence that has reached the English court: “The reformation of our travelled gallants / That fill the court “ (1.3.19-20). When Henry falls in love with Anne Boleyn, his need for a divorce is first mentioned (2.1.76-157). However, it seems not just a personal cause but also a more political one since he has not yet a male heir and he blames this on his marriage to his brother’s wife, Katherine (2.210-15). Henry then takes a more active role in courtly politics and begins to push through religious and political changes in order to gain his annulment. He shows his first political defiance towards Catholicism during the court hearing for the divorce. Campeius, who was known for his “staunch anti-Protestantism”, postpones the trial (McMullan 205). Henry, aside, makes a comment to this, stating that he “may perceive / These cardinals trifle with me. I abhor / This dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome” (2.4.232-234). This gives an example of Henry’s dislike of Campeius’ decision and he channels his anger towards Rome. Hereby, Henry begins to distance himself from Rome. In addition, Katherine of Aragon challenges the supremacy of Henry’s authority. During the court hearing for the divorce, Katherine pleads that she will only “appeal unto the Pope / To bring [her] whole cause ‘fore His Holiness, / And to be judged by him” and leaves the court (2.4.117-19). The Catholic Katherine hereby emphasizes that the Pope in her eyes has more authority than Henry VIII. The need for Reformation then

turns from a personal need to marry Anne Boleyn towards a political need for a male heir and then to a more ideological issue of who is ultimately in charge

Henry shows he is indifferent to the Pope's opinion and rejects papal power when he decides to marry Anne Boleyn in secret, despite the fact that there is not yet an outcome of the trial. Hereby, Henry establishes his own supremacy. Wolsey finds out and reacts furious to this, calling Anne a Lutheran. He adds that Protestantism, embodied by Cranmer, "hath crawled into the favour of the King" (3.2.103). This emphasises the image of Henry VIII as a king who is in favour of Protestantism. Furthermore, when the king finds dubious letters from Wolsey to the Pope, arguing against the divorce, he arrests Wolsey. In *Henry VIII And The English Reformation*, Richard Rex argues that Henry's rejection of Rome's authority was also "the beginning of the end for Wolsey" (11). Next, the King emphasizes this by appointing the Protestant Thomas Cromwell as Wolsey's successor. This also illustrates Henry as the leader of the process of Reformation. To this end, Henry casts off Catholicism, mostly embodied by Wolsey, Campeius and Gardiner, and chooses to support the Protestant Cromwell and Cranmer. These examples show how Shakespeare and Fletcher presented Henry as the beginning of Reformation. Overall, Henry's reasons for the Reformation developed for a personal wish to marry Anne Boleyn, towards a political need for a male heir, but eventually seem to end in a fundamentally ideological debate about supremacy.

Representations of Henry were thus highly influenced by the time they were written in. To this end, it can be argued that the rather positive representation of Henry in this play was necessary to mirror the greatness of James I's son, Henry Frederick, heir to the throne and the image of Reformed England. Therefore, Shakespeare and Fletcher dramatized not only the greatness of Henry VIII but also his legacy through the birth of Elizabeth I. In 1612, however, Prince Henry suddenly died (Bullough 63). According to McMullan, Henry Frederick had been "the possibility of a new era for an England fully engaged with Continental

Protestantism, a situation which was highly unlikely as long as James was on the throne” (64). After Prince Henry’s death, his sister Elizabeth was supposed to marry “Frederick, The Elector Palatine (the most prominent Continental Protestant ruler)” (Bullough 64). The praising of the English Reformation led by Henry VIII in the play and the birth of Elizabeth I would have been fit for such a Protestant marriage. The play, however, also had to be performed in a time of great sadness, namely Prince Henry’s death. Therefore, Shakespeare and Fletcher allude to his death in the prologue of the play: “How soon this mightiness meets misery” (Prologue 30). Nonetheless, Henry VIII is mostly presented as a powerful king who led the English Reformation and his name can be connected to that of the young Prince Henry before he died.

In conclusion, Shakespeare and Fletcher’s representation of Henry VIII was thus determined by the political context and dominant view of that time. Rowley presented Henry VIII as an already established Protestant champion but Shakespeare and Fletcher presented Henry more as someone who is finding his way towards Protestantism, thereby abandoning Wolsey.

Chapter 4: The Portrayal of Henry VIII in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stage productions of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* remained popular. Gordon McMullan even argues that "*Henry VIII* was performed five or six times a year throughout the mid-eighteenth century" (24-25). For example, an impressive kind of theatre became the standard in the continuation of stage productions of *Henry VIII*. Several scenes, such as the coronation of Anne Boleyn and the baptism of Elizabeth I, showed "the play's obvious availability for the kind of spectacular, tableau-dominated production that Victorian audiences in particular adored" in the nineteenth century (McMullan 32). This. Apart from this continuation of spectacular representations of *Henry VIII*, no other kind of dominant representation of Henry VIII can be found. It can be argued that other Shakespearian plays were more popular or, as McMullan argues, "critics remained largely lukewarm about *Henry VIII*, treating it at best as 'minor Shakespeare', and often ignoring it altogether" (3-4). According to Grace Iopollo, *Henry VIII*'s ambiguous genre makes it difficult to comprehend: "Henry VIII is uneven - we don't know what genre it is. People walk into the theatre and ask if they are seeing a history play, a romance or a tragedy?" (qtd. in Masters). Besides, the play is argued to be a collaborative work of Shakespeare and Fletcher and therefore differs from Shakespeare's popular solo work. Despite the continuation of stage productions of *Henry VIII*, the unexplainable absence of other material on Henry VIII remains. The popularity of *Henry VIII* on stage might have been the reason why nothing new on Henry VIII was written. Besides, Shakespeare's authority and status might have been difficult to challenge, so writers did not dare to question it by rewriting his play.

Subsequently, this research will move forward towards the twentieth century when a decline in stage productions appeared and Shakespeare's authority was debunked by movies such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). Shakespeare had been the cultural hero of the Victorian and Edwardian era. In the twentieth century, however, writers started doubting his authority. Modernism arose and with it came the phenomenon of glorifying modern writers and consequently debunking historical writers. Writers were no longer afraid of Shakespeare's status and sought for sarcastic ways to bring it down. Moreover, the beginning of World War I in 1914 was a breaking point in stage productions of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. The continuation of *Henry VIII* stage productions in the Victorian and Edwardian Era went hand in hand with a lot of spectacle. Famous English actor and theatre manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, for example, still promoted such Shakespearean plays. However, as McMullan argues: "the First World War brought with it irreversible social and aesthetic changes, and as theatrical tastes altered and resources shrank, the [spectacular theatre] mode was no longer sustainable" (37). Consequently, it was necessary to find a new way to appeal to the public with *Henry VIII*.

4.1 Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII*

Tree found a new way to appeal to the public with the newly invented medium of film in the late nineteenth century and made a film adaptation of *Henry VIII*, which was "indeed one of the very first Shakespeare plays to be filmed" (McMullan 42). After Tree's adaptation in 1911, other film adaptations of *Henry VIII* followed soon. Most notable was *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, directed by Alexander Korda. This historical comedy debunks King Henry VIII by giving a satirical account of his many marriages. According to William B. Robison, this historical comedy is famous for its representation of Henry VIII "while devouring a roast

capon” (qt. in Parril 4). The film begins with an ironic caption: “Henry VIII had six wives. Catherine of Aragon was the first, but her story is of no particular interest – she was a respectable woman. So Henry divorced her”. If this is not ironical enough, the film continues with the following caption: “He then married Anne Boleyn. This marriage also was a failure – but not for the same reason”. A comical tone is hereby continued. Additionally, the film omits the whole “King’s Great Matter” and consequently its break with Rome. Likewise, Cardinal Wolsey as a dominant influence on Henry is completely left out. In conclusion, the film only discusses Henry’s marriages with ironical representations.

Korda’s film represents Henry VIII as a highly unsympathetic man who is impetuous in his politics. He is a womanizer and ruthless to his discarded wives. The first scene of the film already establishes a representation of Henry VIII as a womanizer. Several ladies-in-waiting are making up his’s bed and announce that the “king is in his many moods”, referring to his sexual activity at court. One of the ladies recalls that “Anne dies this morning” while a second one ironically answers that “Jane Seymour takes her place tonight”. When Henry VIII himself enters the scene, he is portrayed as a pompous and fat king. Furthermore, another scene, shows Henry and his councillors in a discussion on the affairs of state, which illustrates Henry as eager to go to war at any cost, even though his councillors warn him it will be too costly. He even comments ironically: “diplomacy? Diplomacy? My foot!”. Henry’s image as reckless in his politics is established when, despite the advice of his council, he commands the building of more warships.

The following scene establishes a representation of Henry as cruel in discarding his wives. He states that his “first wife was a killer; [the] second was ambitious, and [the] third [...] a stupid woman”. His cruelty is also evident in how quickly he marries Jane Seymour after his second wife, Anne Boleyn, is beheaded. Another example appears when Queen Jane delivers a boy but dies soon after. When Henry learns about his newborn son, he cries out “it

is a boy!”. However, he is also told that Jane died during the delivery. Henry reacts with “poor, pretty, little Jane” but quickly changes to “where is the prince?”. His desire for a male heir is portrayed here as most important and his dead wife is already discarded. Subsequently, Henry visits his son, Edward VI, and tells him “my son, one day you will rule England. A greater England than mine, that is, if you’re strong enough to hold the sceptre firmly”. This is again ironic since Edward died young, so he was not strong enough. Moreover, these examples establish Henry VIII as a pompous and unsympathetic man.

Furthermore, Henry VIII is further debunked by Korda’s portrayal of the king as someone who has no sense of politics whatsoever. For example, in the film’s most famous scene, Henry is chewing on a piece of chicken while commenting that it tastes like “all sauce and no substance. Like one of Cromwell’s speeches, just as difficult to swallow”. This shows his ignorance of Thomas Cromwell’s administrative work in ruling the country while the king is indulging in other things. Cromwell also tries to persuade the king of the political necessity to marry again because they “need more heirs”. Henry, apparently unaware of any political interest, answers that he has already given England “two daughters and one son”. He also states his daughters that “Mary may go to wisdom but Elizabeth will never learn to rule as much as a kitchen but the boy is [his] second self”. Here again, Korda shows Henry VIII as someone who has things absolutely wrong since Elizabeth I’s reign over England is usually considered a golden age. Cromwell suggests that the king remarries the German Anne of Cleves so that a “third self or even a fourth will make all safe”. However, Anne of Cleves does not turn out as beautiful as her commissioned portrait suggested. In the film, she makes herself ugly on purpose, a fictional addition for comical effect. Consequently, before his wedding night with Anne of Cleves, the king angrily comments to Cromwell: “the things I’ve done for England”. This also indicates how Henry VIII himself jokes his sovereignty. Henry soon divorces Anne of Cleves and marries the young Katherine Howard, who

according to the film had been pursuing the crown for a while: “the fifth marriage looked like a success. Katherine was happy with her crown. Henry was happy with his Katherine”. As the caption suggests, however, the marriage only *seemed* a success. The king’s counsellors find out that Katherine is guilty of adultery with Thomas Culpepper, gentleman of the Privy Chamber. When the king learns about Katherine and Thomas' affair, he orders the couple to be executed. Henry’s ruthlessness is thus portrayed again.

By the end of the film, the king is suddenly portrayed as an old fat man, who marries Catherine Parr, his sixth wife. Catherine is portrayed as dominant and commands Henry to stop overeating and drinking. When she exits the scene, Henry concludes the film with a monologue: “six wives ... and the best of them is the worst”. Overall, as Mark Duguid argues in “Life and loves of the larger-than-life English king”, the film mainly deals with the love life and marriages of the king. Moreover, the film “portrays a much warmer, more human Henry than we might recognise from the history books” (Duguid). However, the film still also portrays Henry as ruthless. He beheads Anne Boleyn and waits only a second with marrying Jane Seymour. He also shows little remorse when Jane dies giving birth to his son. In other words, the representation of Henry VIII as a tyrant is also clearly established in this film.

Overall, Henry VIII is represented as a fool whose wives are merely comical vehicles for the story. Although the film presents Henry as a tyrant who executes two of his wives without sorrow, he does not seem as someone to fear. Korda portrays Henry VIII rather as someone to laugh at. All Henry’s military campaigns and his role in the religious rebellion are left out. Moreover, all political sense is omitted throughout the film and thus Henry is only presented as an ill-mannered king who deals ruthlessly with his marriages. This satirical way of mocking Henry VIII as a historical figure is in agreement with the Modernist tradition that dominated the twentieth century.

4.2 Michael Hirst's *The Tudors*

In 1970, the BBC started a series called *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*. As the title suggests, the series focused on Henry's notorious marital life again. However, it also followed the tradition of writing a 'truthful' representation of Henry VIII as Shakespeare and Fletcher tried with their *Henry VIII*. According to William B. Robison in the introduction to *The Tudors on Film and Television*, the film "sticks relatively close to facts" (qtd. in Parril 5). Besides, in "Henry VIII and Popular Culture", Tom Betteridge argues that "*The Six Wives of Henry VIII* presents a traditional view of Henry as a domineering man (211). As a continuation of such traditions, the film is therefore less interesting to discuss.

On the other hand, the untraditional TV show *The Tudors* (2009) is very interesting to take into account. In *The Tudors*, creator Michael Hirst shows Henry as a young, handsome, and muscular king who is mainly busy with his love life. This interpretation contrasts with other twentieth-century representations of Henry as a voluptuous ill-mannered king. As Hirst argues in his foreword to *The Tudors: It's Good to be King*, the TV series was supposed to have a "human and personal core" (Foreword xii). Hirst establishes a picture of a king every man wishes to be: "handsome, [...] best at all the physical activities –[...] speak five languages. [...] And he had absolute power" (xiii). What is curious, though, is that Hirst's Henry barely seems to age throughout the series. Henry VIII is known to have been rather obese at the last stage of his life, whereas this Henry does not look unattractive and fat by far at the end of the series. The TV series lasted for four seasons in which all of Henry VIII's marriages are depicted. According to Sue Parril in *The Tudors on Film and Television*, the series is known to be "by far the longest filmic event ever to deal with the Tudor dynasty" (248). Although the focus essentially lies on Henry's love life, other representations of Henry appear as well.

The first season depicts Henry as a young man who prefers to spend his days at court jousting with his friends, playing tennis, and mostly pursuing women. The representation of Henry as a lustful man is here elaborated through his many extramarital affairs. For example, the TV series features Henry's affair with Elizabeth Blount and the birth of their son Henry Fitzroy. Furthermore, the affair with Mary Boleyn is also briefly taken into account. The extramarital affairs are extensively shown and the series has a tendency to show a lot of nude. The majority of the first season shows Henry's affair with Anne Boleyn, on which it heavily elaborates. After divorcing Katherine and marrying Anne Boleyn, Henry's extramarital affairs continue when he falls in love with Jane Seymour by the end of season two. The focus in the last two seasons seems to shift from his pursuit of women towards an obsession with his own well-being.

In *The Tudors*, Henry is also portrayed as one in desperate need of an heir. The TV series shows not his lust for Anne as the main reason for a divorce, but his need for a male heir, which Katherine had failed to give him. The fact that Henry already worries about marrying his brother's wife before he meets Anne Boleyn indicates this. Instead of suggesting Anne Boleyn as the reasons for Henry's wish to divorce Katherine, Henry has a fictional near-death-experience that makes him realise that "he has no heir, and that he has lived too long for pleasure, with no thought of the future. He states that God is punishing him for marrying Catherine, but 'now everything has changed,' he wants a divorce and he tells Wolsey to arrange it" (Parrill 253). In the series, Wolsey arranges the papal court in England sooner than in real history but he fails to persuade the Roman Catholic Church of the necessity of the divorce.

Consequently, season two of the TV series focuses on the break with Rome when Henry makes sure that his marriage with Katherine of Aragon is annulled despite Wolsey's failures. He then marries the pregnant Anne Boleyn. Although the TV series takes into

account Henry's break with Rome, it does not portray him as the face of Reformation. The show represents the religious tensions in England of that time as a result of the continental Reformation. In this respect, Hirst's portrayal of Henry differs from most previous representations. Whereas Henry is often portrayed as an active player in obtaining his divorce and thereby establishing the reformation, this Henry seems to be more passive. In the series, the focus lies on that Henry's mind troubles him so much that that he accidentally starts the religious revolution. He suddenly turns against his most trusted advisors such as Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More. Although an episode deals with the court hearing on the divorce, the process of the annulment is omitted. When Anne consequently gives birth to Elizabeth, Henry declares himself head of the English Church and by the Oath of Succession secures Elizabeth as his heir. In other words, although some events of the Reformation are shown, they seem to be mere occurrences and not the focus of Hirst's representation of Henry VIII.

In addition, Henry is also presented as someone easily influenced. The first season actually establishes Cardinal Wolsey as again as a major influence on Henry. Wolsey is depicted as "intelligent, subtle, wordly, ambitious, yet sincerely dedicated to peace, justice, and the welfare of his young royal protégé" (Parrill 248). As Parrill notes, Henry "entrusts all business to the cardinal" (252). When Wolsey commits suicide, which is a fictional event, Henry is more presented as seriously affected by Anne Boleyn. She manages to hold off a sexual relationship with the king until they are nearly married. Throughout the series it becomes more evident that Hirst's Henry VIII is mainly influenced by his own mind. He seems often to be troubled by feelings for a particular person, which are shown as all-consuming and a big influence on personal and political decisions. For example, Anne seems to seriously bother him at the end of their relationship but he is easily infatuated again with Jane Seymour as he once was with Anne. Besides, his need for leaving a legacy like his father, Henry VII, seems to obsess him throughout the series. However, this wish develops

into a fixation to not become ill and die. Consequently, Henry starts to show psychopathic traits. For example, when the mysterious “sweating sickness” occurs, he starts doing excessive training exercises next to his bed in the middle of the night. In other words, in *The Tudors*, the private man outweighs the political leader.

Henry VIII's development of psychopathic traits also emphasize the image of a ruthless king. In his review “The Tudors”, Tim Dowling notes that “Henry VIII is an unblinking psychopath; he doesn't spend a lot of time playing tennis or writing Greensleeves. He glares, rants, broods and says unnecessarily hurtful things”. The execution of the Duke of Buckingham, Bishop Fisher, and Thomas More, among others, are also featured in the series. All of them are of course by the king's orders. The numerous executions also stress the representation of Henry as a ruthless king. Another example occurs in episode six of season two, when after the birth of Elizabeth I, Anne becomes stressed about her miscarriages and questions Henry on his extramarital affairs. Henry answers that she should not complain and threatens her: “I can drag you down as quickly as I have raised you”. In episode eight, Anne miscarries another son and Henry blames her for murdering him and he states that “God will not grant me any male children”. At one point, Brandon informs the king of rumours of Anne's adultery. Consequently, Anne is found guilty and arrested. Her execution is even spun out over the length of an entire episode, the last episode of season two. On the morning of her execution, Henry VIII has a great banquet and while chewing on a piece of meat, a small reference to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, and he shows no mourning for Anne. Henry is rather focused on his soon to be wife, Jane Seymour. This scene is evident in establishing Henry VIII as a tyrant who executes his own wife in order to marry the next. Henry shows the same ruthlessness in his marriage to Katherine Howard, whom he marries in season four. This season depicts their damned marriage: the young Katherine falls in love with Thomas Culpepper and commits adultery, for which both of them are also executed.

What is also most notable about the series is its historical inaccuracy. Throughout the centuries, writers and playwrights have altered the chronological order of Henry's life events for the dramatic effect, and so does Hirst. According to Parrill, Hirst argues that "his goal was entertainment rather than historical accuracy" (249). This is evident in the opening sentence of every episode: "you think you know a story, but you only know how it ends. To get to the heart of the story, you have to go back to the beginning". In other words, Hirst tells his viewers that there is the well-known historical story but this story may give a different insight. Hirst does not claim to tell a 'truthful' story at all. However, the amount of historical inaccuracies might reduce the story's credibility. For example, history tells that Charles Brandon married Henry VIII's youngest sister Mary Tudor, who becomes his third wife. In *The Tudors*, however, he marries Henry's other sister Margret Tudor, who thereby becomes his first wife. Margret marries Brandon after she murders the king of Portugal whom she was forced to marry. However, historical facts state that Margret married James IV and not the king of Portugal and neither did she smother him as the series depict. Next is the portrayal of Anne Boleyn as a pawn in her father's political aspirations, whereas there is no basis in fact for the idea that her father, Thomas Boleyn, was a political mastermind. Furthermore, Mary I, daughter of Katherine of Aragon and Henry VIII, was born in 1516 but is portrayed as a child at Elizabeth's birth in the series, whereas historically she must have been seventeen in 1533. Furthermore, Hirst lets Cardinal Wolsey's fall cumulate into suicide: he cuts his own throat, whereas historical accounts say that Cardinal Wolsey died of sickness and did not commit suicide at all. Last, the series indicates that Henry sends away Catherine Parr's husband, Thomas Seymour, so he can court and marry her. The historical Catherine, however, came to court after her first husband died and married Thomas Seymour after Henry's death. On the other hand, it can also be argued that these historical inaccuracies should not be considered important since Hirst opted to write a historical fiction. Kathryn Robinson also questions the

criticism on *The Tudors*'s historical inaccuracy in “‘A Game of Historical Hopscotch’: Examining The Tudors Series as Historical Fiction”. Robinson states that “deviation from fact can be justified by the practical constraints of making a series; clearly the producers did not have the luxury of making the programme last thirty years”. Historical deviations and fictional extras were most likely created so the series would remain entertaining. As Hayden White argues, a “historical narrative does not *reproduce* the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events” (1545). In other words, White argues that even though Hirst uses historical facts, he would always give those a spin as well. Hirst’s fictional narrative does not aim to uphold historical accuracy and his main goal was to tell a story so he even made up “facts” for the parts of history that are unknown. His historical narrative is thus a story partly based on facts: he had to rewrite an out-dated story to make it suitable for modern times.

Therefore, Hirst wrote a TV series that had to be entertaining for the twenty-first century public and in order to do so he had to fictionalise historical events. In the twenty-first century, the receiver of the story is no longer Henry VIII or any other king. The higher moral does not matter as much as it used to. In contrast to previous representation, the focus lies on what the general public thinks about the representation of Henry VIII. Hirst's representation of Henry VIII therefore differs in that it does not have a high esteem towards a monarchy. The twenty-first century public has a more liberal attitude towards historical narratives. They are no longer entertained by a reconstruction of just historical facts but require dramatic tension. The focus on Henry's psychological process, for example, occurs so the spectator can empathise with the series' main character. Therefore, it could be argued that *The Tudors* public demands sensations, such as detailed sex scenes and the duration of cruelty, are elaborated in order to grasp the spectator's attention.

Overall, *The Tudors* is untraditional in its portrayal of Henry VIII. Not only is Henry's physical appearance completely different but also his love life with the many nude scenes differs from traditional conservative representations. In "A Slightly Neutered Tudors", Jim Bawden notes that "Sex sells history and this version of the overly sexed king attributes virtually everything to his robust lusty nature and desire to have a strong male heir". The series portrays Henry's lusts and his many extramarital affairs as a means to an end: his obsession for a male heir and the fear to be unable to continue the Tudor dynasty. As Hirst emphasizes: "this obsession drove him from wife to wife" (27). Nonetheless, the representation of Henry as someone who was easily influenced by others such as Wolsey also occurs in the series. However, is not only influenced but also increasingly by his own mind and an abnormal focus on his well-being, which in turn evolves into a fear of death. This and his ruthlessness towards his wives, such as blaming Anne Boleyn for murdering their son after her miscarriage, add to a representation of Henry as someone rather psychotic. This modern psychological view of Henry VIII seems to dominate the series and Hirst adds historical fiction to dramatize Henry's psychological process even more.

Conclusion

This thesis has given an account of several representations of Henry VIII throughout the centuries and how these are established in literature, film, and television. Representations of such a historical figure as Henry VIII often find a basis in previous historical writings or fictional narratives and therefore they are always an interpretation of what actually happened. Historical representations cannot be considered as neutral since they are always a merger of historical facts and literary fiction. Henry VIII has been represented throughout the centuries as one who wished to rule by warfare and leave the same military legacy as his father, Henry VII, did. However, he established a more famous legacy as the face of the English Reformation – a religious reformation that was established through his obsession with a male heir and with women. The historical view on Henry represents him as someone who preferred to indulge himself with courtly luxuries rather instead of politics, which made him a rather passive sovereign who left ruling to others, such as Cardinal Wolsey and later Thomas Cromwell. These men easily influenced him. Nonetheless, when he eventually takes an active reign through his wish for a divorce, his power grows but also his ruthlessness. As several close to him would find out, it was dangerous to oppose or fail the king.

This study has also found that both historical and fictional representations of Henry VIII are biased and influenced by their own time. In the sixteenth century, writers and historians had to deal with Henry's switching of political and religious views. As it was dangerous to oppose the king, they had to find a way to safely address political issues and did so through the creation of fictional representations of Henry. Skelton and Heywood, for example, create their "Magnyfycence" and "Jupiter" who indirectly refer to Henry. By the end of the play, they both eventually depicted Henry as one who opposes his suitors and becomes a wise counsellor. History tells, however, that Henry was in fact the opposite:

arrogant and pursuing pleasures at court. Skelton and Heywood indirectly advise Henry on how to reign and thereby sought to regain influence on him. Heywood even dared to represent his character in contrast with the political events of that time: Henry's infatuation with Anne Boleyn and the start of the Reformation are portrayed by the transition from an old moon to a new moon. During the sixteenth century, historians did not portray fictionalised characters of Henry VIII but tried to achieve a more truthful and objective representation. Hall, however, deviates from this tradition and writes a chronicle that seems to sympathise with Henry. In contrast to Skelton and Heywood, he had nothing to fear since Henry VIII had died. His positive description of Henry seems to originate in the fact that he was commissioned to write a chronicle that supported the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty. In his chronicle, historian Holinshed, on the other hand, refrains himself mostly from any opinion but in doing so he seems to clear Henry VIII of any blame for political decisions. He appoints a scapegoat, embodied by Cardinal Wolsey, whom he can blame for misleading Henry. Holinshed probably was forced to do so since he could not openly criticise the father of his queen, Elizabeth I, who wished to sustain the Tudor myth that her father symbolised.

In the seventeenth century, Rowley presents Henry VIII as the already established protestant hero whereas Shakespeare and Fletcher focus on Henry as the face of the process of Reformation. Rowley's representation of Henry as a Protestant champion had to serve as an example for James I's son Henry Frederick, who was also Rowley's patron. Henry VIII as a Protestant prince with military traits was what James was in fact not and what the people hoped Prince Henry would be. In contrast to Rowley, Shakespeare and Fletcher tried to achieve a more "truthful" representation of Henry VIII. Their representation of Henry includes a glorification of Elizabeth, which would indirectly be a critical comment on James I's reign since they would remind the audience of a "better" reign. However, James I was Shakespeare and Fletcher's patron, so they had to keep him satisfied. To this end, he is

mentioned as England's bright future in the final scene. They also show Henry VIII as a good king whose counsellors are to blame for all that goes wrong, thereby upholding the seventeenth-century tradition of not criticising a king directly. Moreover, Shakespeare and Fletcher's Henry VIII gradually takes an active role in his reign and establishes religious and political changes for not only his personal need to marry Anne Boleyn, or his political quest for a male heir, but also for a more fundamentally ideological cause of supremacy.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show merely a continuation of stage productions of Henry VIII since Shakespeare's popularity discouraged rewritings. In the twentieth century, however, writers started to debunk the authority of historical writers and dramatists, such as Shakespeare and Fletcher. This can be seen in Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, which deals with Henry VIII's many wives in an ironic way. Although he is presented as a tyrant who discards and executes his wives, he is also presented as a fool. In the twenty-first century, on the other hand, the TV series *The Tudors* seems to take a completely different path in representing Henry VIII. Although the series also focuses on Henry's wives and extramarital affairs, it does this by ways of elaborate nude scenes and a main focus on Henry's love life. This seems to be excused by his obsession for a male heir who needs to sustain the Tudor dynasty. Henry's own mind seems to influence him most, leading to a rather psychotic view of Henry VIII, which is dramatized by Hirst's liberal use of historical events and additional fictional ones. The focus on Henry's psychological process was necessary to entertain the twenty-first century spectator who needs more than just the reconstruction of historical facts and requires dramatic tension and elaborated sensations.

In conclusion, it is difficult to ignore the mythical status that Henry VIII achieved throughout the centuries. Every writer, dramatist, or scriptwriter reproduced Henry VIII according to their own time and views. To conclude, they "would simply be doing what writers always do, consciously or unconsciously, that is, drawing upon available texts to

provide them with material to which they respond and which they reshape and extend in relation to the specific and general contexts within which they are operating” (McMullan 162).

Although this thesis takes into account major literary works to exemplify representations of Henry VIII, it omits many others. The findings of this study suggest that there are many more representations of Henry VIII to be found. For example, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries literary and popular works are only briefly taken into consideration since elaborating on the many other films and biographies on Henry VIII would exceed the limit of this thesis. Future work could include other important works, such as John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, A.F. Pollard’s biography *Henry VIII*, and the documentary *Henry VIII: The Mind of a Tyrant* to provide additional evidence. The current research, however, was limited to a small selection of literary and popular works. Therefore, it does establish a representation of Henry VIII throughout the centuries but it has limitations in its research on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A further study on the absence of material in those centuries would establish a more valid representation of Henry throughout time.

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