A Critical Analysis of
William Shakespeare's
King Henry VIII

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Summary

A s a brief summary of this assignment on literary criticism regarding the history play *King Henry VIII*, written by William Shakespeare, we could say that the principal purpose is to offer our own critical perspectives of different areas of study. Namely, the authorship, sources, tone of the play and analysis of historical and literary references. These perspectives or points of view are based on the ideas previously developed by experts in the field of literature and particularly, in the literary production written by Shakespeare. To conclude, the elaboration of this kind of projects is useful to acquire more experience in the field of research, given that many books, articles, magazines or web resources have to be used if we want to obtain as much reliable and valuable information as possible.

Resumen

Como breve resumen de este trabajo sobre la crítica literaria relacionada con la obra de teatro de género histórico *King Henry VIII*, escrita por William Shakespeare, podemos decir que la finalidad principal es ofrecer nuestras propias conclusiones críticas sobre diferentes áreas de estudio. Por ejemplo, los autores que contribuyen en la elaboración de la obra, las fuentes, el tono y el análisis de referencias históricas y literarias. Estas conclusiones o puntos de vista están basadas en ideas previamente desarrolladas por expertos en el campo de la literatura, y en concreto en la producción literaria escrita por Shakespeare. Para concluir, la elaboración de este tipo de proyectos es útil para adquirir más experiencia en el área de la investigación, dado que muchos libros, artículos, revistas o páginas web son visitadas si queremos obtener tanta información fiable y de calidad como sea posible.

Key words

*King Henry VIII*, history play, William Shakespeare, John Fletcher, critical analysis, Tudor England.
Palabras clave

Enrique VIII, obra de género histórico, William Shakespeare, John Fletcher, análisis crítico, reinado de los Tudor en Inglaterra.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this project is to provide a critical analysis of one of the many masterpieces written by William Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the literary work of the author mentioned before and that will be analysed in detail in the following sections is not one of the most popular and well-known works of the English writer. This is the main reason why we propose a critical analysis on this play, in order to get more information and perhaps new views on this author concerning his style, language, influences and his life as a writer. Then, the main objective of this project is to offer a wider and more detailed vision in the form of a critical analysis of one of the literary works written by Shakespeare, which is not so well known by the readers. In that way, readers of this project can learn more about the production of this English writer. In other words, the intention of this analysis is to achieve that readers get familiar with other literary pieces written by Shakespeare that are different from those which we are accustomed to and that can be categorised as equally extraordinary, such as the most renowned works. Namely, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, etc. What is more, in order to collect all the information that can be read in the next sections, two valuable editions have been used, together with other articles and sources of information that are available on the Internet. On the one hand, the two editions mostly employed in the project will be that of Jay L. Halio, William Shakespeare King Henry VIII, or All is True, published in the year 1999 and that of John Margeson, King Henry VIII, published in 1990.

Furthermore, other references, which are not mentioned in the corresponding section, have been used. Specifically, The Short Oxford History of English Literature by Andrew Sanders; an essay titled “Performing memorial: site-specific performances of Shakespeare's All Is True: King Henry VIII”, by Johanna Schmitz; an article called “Henry VIII on trial: confronting malice and conscience in Shakespeare's All Is True”, by Gerard Wegener; and finally, Drama and Theatre Analysis: An Introduction, by Jesús Manuel Nieto García. Additionally, a wide variety of web resources have been used, as can be seen in the references section.
2. Contextualization of the play

The history play *Henry VIII* is based on Tudor England from 1485 to 1603. A history play is very different from other kind of genres. It derives from epic poetry in which the characters are human beings or real personalities of the history of England who carry out heroic feats or events that made these individuals significant for a concrete period of the history of England. It focuses its attention on several important characters during this period in England, beginning with Henry VIII and ending with Queen Elizabeth I. To be more specific, we will discuss the historical events that involve King Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth and the rest of characters who are implicated in the Tudor Kingdom of this literary work by William Shakespeare. To begin with, we will briefly pay attention to the main protagonist of this play from the historical point of view.

Henry VIII was the successor of his brother Arthur, who died before accessing the throne. Consequently, in 1503, Henry VIII was engaged to Catherine of Aragon, who was his first wife out of six and they became king and queen of England. As a result of their marriage, they had a daughter called Mary, who would become Mary I. Henry VIII was not satisfied with this marriage and he desired to get rid of the daughter of the King and Queen of Spain, as can be read in the critical edition of this play edited by Halio (1999):

King: “The most convenient place that I can think of/ For such a receipt of learning is Black-Friars:/ … O, ‘tis a tender place, and I must leave her” (2.2: 137-143). His justification or excuse in order to carry out this divorce not supported by the Catholic Church is the fact that their marriage was poisoned, in the sense that he had married the wife of his dead brother, a fact that was prohibited according to an interpretation made of the writings of the Holy Bible. Therefore, the English king knew that the Roman Church did not allow breaking the marriage and he wanted to establish a new Church, the Church of England, in which he could impose his own values and doctrinal ideas. This fact was confirmed by the Act of Parliament, which proclaimed the English Reformation.

Whereas the Catholic Church did not allow the breakup of this marriage, two characters desired to dissolve the matrimony. These two characters were Charles V, Catherine of Aragon’s nephew, and Cardinal Wolsey, the man on whom King Henry VIII placed his confidence, who was later accused of high treason and sentenced to death. In fact, both Charles V and Cardinal Wolsey wanted to separate Queen Catherine from King Henry VIII. This issue deserves further explanation. On the one hand, Charles V and
Catherine of Aragon were Catholics and King Henry VIII was now a Protestant. Then, this is the main reason why Charles V wanted to separate his aunt from this monarch, due to his religious beliefs. In other words, Charles V considered the marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant person a kind of offense. On the other hand, Cardinal Wolsey desired to distance Queen Catherine from Henry VIII because without her presence and her interference in the issues concerning the kingdom, he could freely manipulate Henry VIII to get his ambitious hope of governing the kingdom to the same extent as Henry VIII. Afterwards, Henry VIII decided not to take into account the Roman Church and Pope Clement VII and divorced himself from Catherine of Aragon.

Years later, in 1533, Henry VIII determined to give his love to a new woman called Anne Boleyn, “The fairest hand I ever touched. O beauty, / Till now I never knew thee” (1.4: 75-76). She was his second wife and gave the king a new daughter called Elizabeth, who became Queen of England in 1558. This queen is also known as the Virgin Queen, given that she died without an heir. Thus, the successor of this protestant queen was James I, who suffered from many murder attempts such as the Gunpowder Plot, an event that took place in the year 1605.

The end of this play by Shakespeare concludes with the christening of Elizabeth I: Garter: “Heaven, from thy endless goodness send prosperous life, long, and ever happy, to the high and mighty Princess of England, Elizabeth” (5.4: 1-3).

2.1. Authorship: William Shakespeare or John Fletcher?

According to Allardyce Nicoll (foreword to A. C. Partridge 1949: 5), the play by Shakespeare is an enigma, considering that Henry VIII is famous among other writers and critics because he suggests that perhaps Shakespeare wrote the play with the help of another contemporary of his, possibly John Fletcher.

In the 19th century, critics like James Spedding (1850: 115-24) and Samuel Hickson (1850: 198) concluded that King Henry VIII was not an exclusive work of just one author. Lord Tennyson also thought that this was the case. In fact, they thought that it was a dramatic literary masterpiece shared by two different authors: William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. Stanley Wells (1994: 381) has commented about this double authorship: “the authors worked closely enough together to achieve at least a superficial unity of tone for most of the play” (in Halio 1999: 38). The two critics
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mentioned above reached this conclusion because they noticed some differences in terms of style, for instance the use of distinct expressions, contractions or auxiliaries employed in the same play by each of the writers. To put it simply, Shakespeare tended to use *hath, them,* and *you,* while Fletcher used *has, ‘em* and *ye* (Halio 1999: 20). According to Spedding (1850), Hickson (1950) and Hope (1994: 70-83), Fletcher wrote half of the play and Shakespeare contributed just with a small part of it. This is not the hypothesis that Cyrus Hoy supports in “Shares of Fletcher” (1962: 79-85), he believes that Shakespeare wrote almost the whole play on his own. Another critic, Marina Tarlinskaja (1987: 127-8, 198-200), considers that the use of monosyllables is part of the work of Shakespeare, whereas the use of non-masculine endings in rhyming is related to the production of Fletcher (Halio 1999: 22-23).

This multiple interpretation leaves the readers wondering that we cannot know for certain which sections were written by each author, although there are many studies about the authorship of *King Henry VIII* which establish that there is a double authorship in this play. Can we contemplate the idea that Shakespeare wanted to leave some parts of the play unfinished so that Fletcher could continue and finish the play, or perhaps that it was the other way round? Was Shakespeare the only writer, or did Fletcher write the play by himself? Considering that, two authors wrote the play, why does the name of both dramatists not appear?

In this project we have seen that, according to the critics, Shakespeare did not work alone and that his collaborators are unknown to us as readers, because they were behind him, as secondary writers, John Fletcher being the most consistent hypothesis. In other words, Shakespeare always received more importance than other writers did, and the reason to justify this fact cannot be addressed with a final answer, like the questions previously proposed. However, we can offer a distinct hypothesis: that Shakespeare composed most of the play and he did not consider appropriate to include in his play the name of somebody who did not contribute to the same extent as he did on the development of the play.

These questions and hypotheses need further studying on the part of critics and historians of literature because nowadays, there is not an exact answer to this mystery. The only fact that all the critics and scholars mentioned above have in common is the idea that the play is related individually to Shakespeare or Fletcher or to both of them taking into account the double authorship.
We have already discussed about the writers of the play, but nothing has been said about the person who wrote the fair copy of the play or the previous copy of the complete and corrected version of King Henry VIII, the one that is at our disposal nowadays. Unfortunately, the author of this fair copy is unknown. Moreover, critics like Hinman (1963) hold the idea that there is a third composer called Compositor C of the play and that he could probably be a scribe. Now, this is the only information that we have about this supposed third writer of the play.

2.2. The title: why or All is True?

The title of the play is connected to The King’s players, a company of dramatic actors like Shakespeare himself and Richard Burbage, and their performances were represented in Blackfriars and the Globe theatres. As an interesting fact in relation to the Globe and this play, during the representation of King Henry VIII the Globe went on fire in 1613. In connection to this date and the place where the performance took place, Ralph Alan Cohen, a professor specialised in the literature of Shakespeare at Mary Baldwin University, Virginia, poses two interesting questions and their corresponding answers:

- When was the play first performed? The first recorded performance of Henry VIII, Or All Is True was in 1613, when the play literally brought down the house when a spark ignited the thatch roof of the Globe and burned it to the ground.
- Where was the play first performed? It makes economic sense to assume the play opened at the Blackfriars Playhouse because 84 years earlier Henry VIII divorced Katherine of Aragon in a trial at the Blackfriars, and Shakespeare’s company would have wanted to stage the most important break-up in English history in the very building where it had taken place.

In accordance with some scholars, All is True was the real title of the play and not the one with which we all are familiar. The main reason that justifies the change of the title with the passing of time into King Henry VIII has to do with the idea that the editors took for granted that the title should follow the same pattern as the rest of the history plays such as Henry V, Henry VI, etc. It was basically a way of avoiding establishing a distinction with the rest of the history plays.
Moreover, there is another interpretation of the title according to what Ken Jackson (2012) cites in his article. *All is True* is connected with a specific tension between religion and phenomenology. Religion has to do with the Catholic doctrine and Christ, and the purpose of phenomenology is to be distinguished from religion. To put it simply, phenomenology is a movement created by Edmund Husserl that took shape between the 19th and the 20th centuries. The central principle of phenomenology is to present a different view of the Christian doctrine. The central difference between religion and phenomenology is the fact that the followers of the former believe in an omnipresent force called God that is linked to the religious culture that is celebrated just on specific occasions, which are characteristic of each country. Christians that believe in this omnipresent force celebrate the protection in moments of need that they receive from God in particular situations and they are attributed characteristics such as forgiveness, goodness, the expression of love towards people, etc. By contrast, the supporters of the latter consider that all the actions involved in religious life can be labelled as universal or applicable to any circumstance of life. Then, phenomenology is a way of living that tries to separate itself from the beliefs of the religious and Christian doctrine. Then, why can religion and phenomenology be related to the history play *King Henry VIII*? The answer is associated to three main characters in the play: Buckingham, Cardinal Wolsey and Queen Catherine of Aragon.

The first character, Buckingham, was sentenced to death due to the tricks of Wolsey. However, the former symbolises a Catholic behaviour, given that he said to the lords before his execution that he would be able to forgive everyone, no matter the pain that he had to suffer because of the wicked actions of individuals like Wolsey.

Cardinal Wolsey is a character that represents both, religion and phenomenology. On the one hand, he symbolises this idea of forgiveness that is characteristic of Christianity, but in a different way. When the Cardinal understood that he was ruined, that he had lost all his power and ambition, he in a certain way regretted his actions. That is to say, he regretted what he had done and asked for pardon to remediate in some way his corrupted behaviour. Finally, Wolsey was forgiven, at least by his victim, because Wolsey had a direct role in the death of Buckingham, but the latter had mercy and forgave him. On the other hand, he also represents phenomenology in the sense that he believes in the universal force called God, but he tries to apply his belief in this omnipresent force to his daily life, as a way of living without taking into account religious beliefs such as goodness
or expressing love for those that surround him. This is what phenomenology tries to explain, the faith in God from a profane point of view, because it tries to avoid principles linked to Christianism. Expressing this idea in a more informal way, we could say that phenomenology allows us to believe in God and at the same time sin against God. Probably, this is the reason why Wolsey represents phenomenology, because we should remember that he is one of the cruelest characters involved in the Tudor dynasty, and cruelty is not a religious belief.

Finally, Queen Catherine is another victim of Cardinal Wolsey and her character in the play implies forgiveness too. She is a clear image of compassion and this can be seen when she realised that Cardinal Wolsey had died. Although he was the one who accused her in Blackfriars of an unacceptable marriage, she was capable of forgiving him and wanted him to rest in peace.

As a conclusion, if we are to associate these three characters with the terms religion and phenomenology, we can establish that Buckingham and Queen Catherine represent the idea expressed by religion and Cardinal Wolsey with both, religion and phenomenology.

In addition, apart from *King Henry VIII* and *All is True*, there is another title. The writers in charge of the *First Folio* used the title *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eight*, which was shortened later on into *The Life of King Henry the Eight*.

2.3. *First Folio* 1623: the origin of the play

This *First Folio* is an extensive collection of plays by Shakespeare published in 1623. It is considered to be one of the most significant compilations of works written by this author because the most popular plays can be found in the *First Folio*. It is composed by 37 plays. Nonetheless, only 36 have been registered. There is another reason why this *First Folio* is of major importance, and it has to do with the idea that Shakespeare himself imprinted 17 plays. Then, another theatrical piece was imprinted once he was dead and the remaining 18 plays had not yet been impressed. Thus, if those 18 works had not been collected in the *First Folio*, nowadays we would not have had the pleasure of knowing the existence of these plays and read them.
As we have previously mentioned, Shakespeare wrote the plays that can be found in this selection of plays and printed some of them. In fact, the ones who were responsible for the correction of the printing and edition of the plays were John Heminge and Henry Codell, who were at the same time actors in the Globe together with Shakespeare. What is more, these two actors separated the theatrical pieces into three main groups taking into account the plot of each of them, which were comedies, tragedies and history plays. In addition, Liber D of the Stationers’ Company documented all the performances on November 8, 1623. Furthermore, nowadays this collection of performances is in possession of the Stationers’ Company.

The play which we are analysing in this project is registered particularly on page 559, after Richard III and before Troilus and Cressida. The complete title of the First Folio is the following one: Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, histories & tragedies, published according to the true originall copies. London, printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623, and King Henry VIII is written in the original early modern English.

2.4. Sources of King Henry VIII

The main sources of King Henry VIII are the Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland (1587 second edition) by Holinshed, who at the same time obtained them from Hall’s The Union of the Two Noble...Families of Lancaster and York (1550). The second main source is Acts and Monuments (1563) by John Foxe. Particularly, the information extracted from the work of Holinshed was useful for the first four acts and the final scene of the last act, which is the christening of Elizabeth I. Similarly, the work written by Foxe was the main source for the rest of the fifth act. Another chronicle called The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York (1550) influenced Shakespeare. Edward Hall, a Tudor historian, wrote it. Although the main content of this chronicle has to do with the War of the Roses, it was useful for Shakespeare to add some data about the Tudor dynasty in King Henry VIII.

Another document would be categorised as sources utilized by Shakespeare, for instance, The History of King Richard III (1513-1518) by Thomas More. At first glance, it seems strange that Shakespeare could have used this document because it is focused on the sovereignty of a monarch different from Henry VIII. However, as we will check in a future section of this critical analysis, Richard III is mentioned in the play and the author
of that manuscript is associated to the kingdom of Henry VIII too. Thus, it is comprehensible that Shakespeare could have used it as a source for his play just to connect and involve these two characters with other characters and circumstances that take place in the play.

Geoffrey Bullough in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957) proposes another source of this history play, and it is the chronicle called *When You See Me You Know Me* (1605) written by Samuel Rowley. It has to do with the life and government of King Henry VIII and all the circumstances in which he and his companions were involved.

Moreover, there is a play included in the *Fourth Folio*, which is called *The true chronicle historie of the whole life and death of Thomas Lord Cromwell* written by William Shakespeare (1602), which seems to be a referent for *King Henry VIII*. This chronicle is about the moments of fortune and misfortune that some characters who were related to the kingdom of Henry VIII experienced in their lives. Shakespeare performed this play. Then, he could probably be influenced by the behaviour of the characters of this play on stage and decided to make them the reflex of some characters that appear in *King Henry VIII*. For instance, those characters could be Gardiner, Cromwell, Wolsey or even Buckingham.

Many scenes of *King Henry VIII* contain allusions to the Bible. Hence, Shakespeare had to collect the religious data from the Holy Scripture, and that was the Geneva Bible, written between the 16th and 17th centuries.

One special source is the one written by George Cavendish, *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* (1553). What distinguishes this source from the previous ones is the fact that it is proved that William Shakespeare and John Fletcher made use of all these texts, except the literary work written by Cavendish. So far, no critic has confirmed the use of this source. In fact, this document was written in the 16th century but it was not published until the 17th century, and the play *King Henry VIII* was performed in the year 1613. Then, taking into account these dates, could Shakespeare or Fletcher have taken the copy in order to collect the required data while it was published or unpublished? Did Shakespeare take the copy and write all the necessary information about the description of Cardinal Wolsey? Alternatively, was Fletcher the one who took the copy? Finally, did they ever use this source? These are all questions that do not have an answer yet.
To conclude with this section, we can add one more source. It is a letter that Queen Catherine wanted to send to Henry VIII when she was expelled from the kingdom and sent to Kimbolton Castle. The content of that letter was the last words of the Queen and it was a kind of testament where she exposed her acknowledgements to the monarch and where she asked for a good life and future for her daughter. In fact, this letter was in possession of Polydore Vergil and he registered it in his Anglica Historia (1534). It is a manuscript from the 16th century and probably Shakespeare used it to refer to that famous letter of Queen Catherine in the play.

3. Structure of the play

A critic called Norman Rabkin identifies the play in his work Shakespeare and the Common Understanding (1967: 230-1) as “fine” and believes that the English author did not take into account “seriously” his play. What Shakespeare did according to this critic is “a half-hearted and unconvincing piece” (quoted in Halio 1999: 25). Nevertheless, Jay L. Halio does not agree with him, he comments textually and supports the fact that “the play’s structure is far from merely arbitrary and its themes are important”, such as “the use and abuse of power” (Halio 1999: 25).

The general structure of the play is the following:

- Prologue
- Act 1, 4 scenes.
- Act 2, 4 scenes.
- Act 3, 2 scenes.
- Act 4, 2 scenes.
- Act 5, 4 scenes.
- Epilogue.

Jay L. Halio confirms that the only way to understand the main plot of the play is to be able to relate the different scenes, how the plot of one scene is related to the following ones. Therefore, we will develop in this section a study of the structure of the play so that we can check the relationship among the scenes or episodes of each act.
This history play starts with a conversation between Buckingham and other characters about the Cloth of Gold in France (1.1: 14-38). This conversation guides us to a dangerous conflict between Buckingham and Cardinal Wolsey. The conflict has serious consequences because, due to the abuse of power on the hands of Cardinal Wolsey, the latter sent the former to the Tower as a prisoner. Afterwards, King Henry VIII appears “leaning on Cardinal Wolsey’s shoulder”, this could mean two different things. On the one hand, Cardinal Wolsey may be seen as the right hand of the king; on the other hand, the king might be trying to get the confidence of the Cardinal in order to help him through the use of his power as Cardinal to achieve what the king desires, that as we all know is divorcing Catherine of Aragon. The latter blames the Cardinal and the King about the taxes, which she considers are unfair (1.2: 19-30). The King agrees with her and she wins the battle against Wolsey. However, Wolsey uses his intelligence to defeat Catherine of Aragon and tells his servants that it was him who first said that the taxes were unfair, not the Queen, so that everybody in the kingdom recognised him as a powerful and generous man (1.2: 106-108). The King paid attention to all the conflicts that were taking place and at the end of the play he learned how to behave in a more powerful way when accusing somebody. The last two scenes have as main goal augmenting the power and importance of the Cardinal among the lords of the kingdom (1.3: 50-58 and 1.4: 36-40).

In the second act, we can find the aversion towards the Cardinal by the commons, who are in favour of Buckingham (2.1: 50-55). In the second scene, Henry VIII doubts about his marriage with Catherine of Aragon because he thinks that it is not a legal union and this situation takes place before the trial of the Queen in which the divorce was finally confirmed (2.2: 15-18). From a critical point of view, Henry VIII really believes that his marriage is cursed, considering that it is forbidden by The Bible to marry the wife of your dead brother. Therefore, this would be the perfect excuse for Henry VIII to get divorced from Queen Catherine. Before the Blackfriars trial, where Catherine of Aragon exposed her arguments about her marriage to the King and blamed Wolsey for her disgrace (2.4), the King made Anne Boleyn Marchioness of Pembroke (2.3: 60-64). Probably, the justification that explains why Catherine of Aragon blames Wolsey is because she knows that Wolsey is manipulating the King to get what the Cardinal wants (to defeat Catherine). He is powerful enough and so able to convince the King that the one who should lose the trial is Catherine.
Alluding to the third act, at the beginning, we can perceive the attempt on the part of Cardinals Campeius and Wolsey to persuade Catherine so that she accepts the proposition on the part of the King to renounce her title as Queen of England. In that way, another woman, Anne Boleyn, can occupy her position, such is the desire of Henry VIII. Nonetheless, Catherine insists on her innocence and reinforces the idea that Wolsey is the culprit (3.1: 95-100). In this third act, we can discover many events that take place in Tudor England. Firstly, the King shows symptoms that he is starting to doubt the actions of his right hand man, Cardinal Wolsey (3.2: 19-23). Secondly, the King has a new wife and new Queen, Anne Boleyn (3.2: 40-46). Thirdly, Cranmer has won the favour of the King supporting his divorce from Catherine. Hence, Cranmer became Archbishop of Canterbury (3.2: 62-77). From now on, Henry VIII has decided to continue ruling his kingdom without the help of Wolsey, since he opposed the idea of the king marrying Anne Boleyn. Cardinal Wolsey wanted the king to marry the sister of the French King instead. This situation simply made the King laugh at Wolsey and this provoked panic in him because he understood that his relationship of trusted man with the King was getting colder. Another proof of this rift between both has to do with two papers or letters that the King sent him in order that Wolsey could check the rejection of the King (3.2: 205-228). The greatness of Wolsey was over, the generous and admired Cardinal was discovered as an evil and ambitious man when all the infractions committed by the Cardinal throughout his life were in possession of the King (3.2: 284-303). Cardinal Wolsey admitted his wickedness and found his internal peace because as he says “The King has cured me” (3.2: 374-381).

The following act is an important one. Initially, England has a new Queen and two gentlemen remember their last encounter when Buckingham returned from his trial. These two different events provoke two distinct feelings in these men: happiness and grief (4.1: 1-7). Next, Griffith the “gentleman usher” of Catherine and she herself talk about the fact that one of the most significant characters of the play has died: Cardinal Wolsey (4.2: 4-8). Then, Catherine is too weak; she even has a vision in which she finds herself at Heaven with “six personages clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays and golden visors on their faces” (4.2: 82.5-82.15). If we pay attention to the meaning of this dream, we can provide two different hypotheses. On the one hand, her soul ascended to Heaven just for a moment and came back, as if she was in a coma from which she was able to recover herself. On the other hand, and perhaps this is the most logical hypothesis,
she was dreaming and it was a kind of premonition or reflection of her own worries produced by her weakness, which indicates her that she will die soon. This last theory explains why she wants Lord Caputius to give Henry VIII a letter considered as a sort of testament in which she desires a good future to her daughter, Mary I. Moreover, she wishes Henry VIII to understand how much she loved him and finally she thanks her men for their services and their nobility towards her (4.2: 132-159). Additionally, we cannot find the presence of King Henry VIII. This is the reason why Halio proposes that “as elsewhere in Shakespeare’s plays Richard II, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, for example when a protagonist remains off stage for a considerable time, his absence prefigures a change” (Halio 1999: 35).

Now, the King seems to be a new person, more authoritative, he does not need to depend on anyone to govern his kingdom, he is in charge of everything that takes place in England, as can be verified at the beginning of the last act (5.1: 56-57). Henry VIII places his trust on another man, Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, giving him his ring, which provides the Archbishop with full protection. Afterwards, the Council chamber decides to denounce Cranmer of heresy (5.2: 66-82). That ring was of vital importance to Cranmer because he avoided being sent to the Tower by the Councillors. The King solved this situation thanks to his ring and to his power that was recently discovered once Wolsey is not there to manipulate him. The power is granted to a real king to rule a country and to resolve all the conflicts that are detected in his kingdom. We could say that this is the last conflict that appears in the play. The last scene deals with the banquet (5.3: 64-71) that will be celebrated after the christening of Elizabeth I, which is mentioned in the last scene of the play: “Heaven, from thy endless goodness send prosperous life, long, and ever happy, to the high and mighty Princess of England, Elizabeth” (5.4: 1-3).

To cap it all, from the beginning of the play there is a succession of events, which develops in a conflictive way involving several characters. Finally, they are resolved later on successfully. Although the start and main plot of the play is obscure and entangled, the end of the theatrical piece allows the reader to experience a gratifying ending, together with a reflection about a flourishing England with Queen Elizabeth I.

This could be the general structure of the play taking into account the plot. Furthermore, according to other critics, we would organise the structure of the play in a different way, paying attention to some of the events that take place in the history play.
In other words, we can categorise the structure focusing on the individual trials that some of the characters were obliged to confront.

The first trial is that of the Duke of Buckingham. He was accused by the King of treason and was executed. The second trial, about the divorce of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII, is the most famous one in Tudor England. The critics suggest that the trial is full of wickedness because, as we have mentioned in previous sections, there were certain people who were against the Queen, such as Cardinal Wolsey, and that is why she blames him for her misfortune.

The third trial implicates the latter character mentioned. Nobody in the kingdom was aware of the evilness of the Cardinal; nobody knew his ambitions, his need of power and controlling every circumstance from which he could obtain any advantage. Nevertheless, the King was able to recognise the real Cardinal. He could unmask this religious figure. This event meant two things. On the one hand, it meant the ruin of the Cardinal and on the other hand, with the fall of Wolsey, the King learnt how to be a king, he learnt not to be manipulated or controlled by anybody and was able to be in charge of his kingdom on his own. Wolsey, despite losing the safety that the King provided him with and the confidence of Henry VIII, felt relieved when he knew that his position was occupied by Thomas More, a man who transmitted Wolsey enough faith to develop in an appropriate way the charge of Lord Chancellor.

The last trial is that of Christ, which reflects irony because Christ died in order not to obey those who were against his doctrine and to save humanity, whereas the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer, decided to live to obey the commands of Henry VIII. Thus, this trial has to do with the relationship that the King wants to establish with the Archbishop. Now, he has placed trust again in another person rather than Wolsey. A proof of this close relationship between the monarch and Cranmer is the fact that the former gave the latter the ring that offers the person who wears it the protection of the King.

4. Analysis of the play

The function of this section is to introduce a set of sub-sections which are going to be fully commented and analysed. These will constitute the core of this project considering that we will focus on a deep analysis of the play paying attention to pieces of information such as the language used in the play, the
characteristic tone, symbolism, and finally the different literary and historical references that become visible in this theatrical piece.

4.1. The language of the history play King Henry VIII

Two different styles can be appreciated in the play. Firstly, a formal style associated to the high society of the story such as the courtiers, lords, monarchy, etc., and secondly, a more informal style characteristic of everyday life dialogues among the modest social class. The purpose of this division of styles of the play is to divide the different characters in terms of social classes.

Indeed, we should not forget that verse and prose, which are the two linguistic forms employed throughout the play, are used. The characters belonging to the high society use verse. The meter used by Shakespeare is iambic pentameter. This meter could be briefly defined as a succession of unstressed and stressed syllables that contain 5 feet per line. Except on special occasions, like the end of some scenes or acts, no rhyme is used, so Shakespeare mainly used blank verse.

However, as we suppose that two distinct authors wrote the play, the way of composing the scenes and acts of this history play will be different. That is to say, the scenes or acts attributed to one author will be different to the ones related with the other author, given that each playwright has his personal way of writing. This is exactly what happens with the use of verse in this play. Margeson (1990: 47) takes up the opinions of James Spedding in an essay titled “Who Wrote Shakespeare’s Henry VIII?”, which is registered in Gentleman’s Magazine (1850): “the structure of the verse was ‘full of mannerism’ and the expression was ‘diffuse and languid’ in the scenes Spedding believed Fletcher had written, compared with the ‘close-packed expression’ and seemingly careless but controlled metre of the Shakespearean passages”.

Additionally, not always should the way both dramatists write their plays be different. In other words, they can coincide in many aspects when writing a play in collaboration or in plays belonging to each author individually because “some of the qualities of verse usually associated with Fletcher are also characteristics of Shakespeare’s late plays. Maurice Hunt explains in Shakespeare’s Labored Art: Stir, Work, and the Late Plays (1995: 203) that the “juxtaposition of limpid, sweet verse with rough, elliptical, often metaphorically opaque poetry, found in Fletcher’s work and in
Buckingham’s valedictory scene (2.1), may also be found in *Cymbeline* and in *The Tempest*” (Halio 1999: 39).

Previously, we have specified that there are two type of styles in the play. These are a formal and a more colloquial register. The former is characteristic of the monarchy or high society, whereas the latter symbolises the modest social class. The language that Shakespeare uses to represent the monarchy is associated to body imagery, “which is clearly concerned with the health and welfare of the state and the ability of its ruler to govern it well. Similarly, tempest, or storm, imagery, which appears frequently in the late plays, occurs in *King Henry VIII*, though more subtle. No actual tempest rages, such as we find in *Pericles* or *The Tempest*, but storms of doubt afflict Henry, as he ponders the validity of his marriage to Katherine” (Halio 1999: 42). Nonetheless, those characters who do not belong to the monarchy or nobility, like the Porter, use prose as an imitation of everyday life.

There are many more stylistic features, for instance the usage of metaphors and personifications that can be seen in 1.1: 15-16: “Till this time pomp was single, but now married/ To one above itself”. In these lines, “pomp” is associated with luxury in a ceremony. Particularly, in this scene it refers to a political encounter between two monarchs of different countries, France and England, and the luxury that could be appreciated in the ceremony and festivals that were celebrated after that political meeting, which was called Field of the Cloth of Gold. After this brief clarification, we can explain why pomp symbolises a personification. We all know that a personification is a figure of speech which consists of attributing exclusive features of human beings to inanimate objects or abstract feelings. This is exactly what happens to pomp in these lines, given that it is an abstract concept which acquires a human characteristic, that of being single. The reason why pomp is linked to solitude is that France did not have the support of England to avoid the advance of the Spanish troops. France was not able to convince Britain with its arguments, because both kingdoms were enemies. Thus, the French population was alone. Nonetheless, with perseverance, the French persuaded and married the British metaphorically or joined themselves to the British kingdom for achieving a common purpose, which consisted in the interruption of the conquest of the Spanish troops. This would be the interpretation of the personification found in the lines previously mentioned.
In addition, we can notice in abundance references made to the Scriptures. This takes place because in the context of the story, many characters are associated to the Church. Not only have these religious characters alluded to the Scriptures, but also the monarchy, for instance when Queen Catherine mentions some verses from the Psalms and the Gospels. Naseeb Shaheen, in his *Biblical References in Shakespeare’s History Plays* (1989: 206-207) states that the references of the Scripture that are materialised in the play are assigned to both playwrights and that this is “another indication of the play’s unity of tone” (Halio 1999: 44). The characters make use of the Scriptures to compare their experiences, feelings and even themselves with those events and characters that appear in the Scriptures. In general, the purpose would be to establish a parallelism between *King Henry VIII* and the Sacred Writings. For instance, Cardinal Wolsey draws a comparison between his fall and that of Lucifer: ‘Mark but my fall, and that that ruined me./ Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition./ By that sin fell the angels’ (3.2: 440-2)” (Halio 1999: 44).

4.2. The Tone

*King Henry VIII* can be categorised into three very distinct tones: obscure, aristocratic and humorous.

To begin with, we will comment on some details about the obscure tone. As we have said in previous sections, this history play contains complicated scenes related to the episodes that took place in Tudor England, which are linked to heresy, treason, prison and even death. This guides us to reflect on the fact that our actions can imply hard consequences like the ones mentioned above. One clear example that represents both prison and death appears in 1.1: 198-202. In these lines, carrying out the order of Henry VIII, a sergeant informs Buckingham that he is going to be sent to prison and finally sentenced to death due to high treason.

The second tone, the aristocratic one, is perhaps the most frequent in the play because it is centred on trials and other formal occasions involving the field of the monarchy and the law. Therefore, the vocabulary and language used in most of the play is a formal one. As an illustration of this tone, we can mention the Order of the Coronation of Anne Boleyn (4.1: 36.5-36.34), which is an act linked to the field of the monarchy, where we can clearly perceive the protocol that must be followed by members of the aristocracy, nobility, monarchy, etc., in this kind of formal events.
Finally, the third tone is the less frequent. It is reasonable that not so many comic scenes appear in a history play where one of the darkest periods of England is represented. All the same, we can find a funny scene. For example, when the old lady says to Anne Boleyn in an ironic tone (a resource that makes the audience laugh), that long time ago there was a queen (alluding to Anne Boleyn) who did not want to become a queen. What the old lady suggests is that Anne pretends that she does not want to become a queen, when in fact this is something that she would love to happen (2.3: 90-93).

In general, these are the three main tones of the play. Nevertheless, we can concentrate on the feelings of some characters during the performance of the play to find more tones. For instance, we can think of the figure of Cardinal Wolsey when King Henry VIII decided to remove him from his company, once the monarch discovered that he was not a reliable man. This situation, the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, evokes a dissatisfactory and isolating tone and even hate and anger because Wolsey knows that he cannot do anything to remedy his disgrace, nothing can be done against the words of the King of England.

We can also comment on the tone that is characteristic of the events that involve Queen Catherine. She is the clearest case of innocence because her disgrace comes from Henry VIII’s hypotheses about an illegal marriage. However, her duty in the kingdom was to accompany in a sentimental way the monarch and obey his commands. Then, we would say that there are two kind of tones associated to this character: innocence and unfairness. Afterwards, when her trial took place, she could expose her theory, although nobody believed her. Consequently, another tone connected to this situation would be anger. Finally, in the scene where she has a vision that announces her death, Cardinal Wolsey dies and she feels compassion in spite of all the pain this man caused her. Therefore, this is an example of humanity and an empathic tone.

There is no doubt that an obscure tone should be linked to Henry VIII as well as to Cardinal Wolsey, because their lives are full of deceit, ignorance, betrayal, ambition, power abuse and death. Nevertheless, from a critical point of view, we can also find positive feelings that are characteristic of both characters. In the case of Cardinal Wolsey, he was able to feel regret and asked for pardon when he realised that he could not do anything to save his life. Furthermore, King Henry VIII is not only famous for being a capricious and cruel person at the same time. For instance, when he decided to kill his wives because they did not give him a male heir. Indeed, he was also a man who tried to
make those who surrounded him feel comfortable and cheerful, as can be read in 2.1: 107-112. These lines refer to the dance that was taking place at Wolsey’s house. What is more, Henry VIII was also a good person in the sense that he was able to profess his love for other people, for example Cardinal Wolsey. In 3.2: 185-187, Henry VIII affirms, when Wolsey is ordered to be separated from the company of his King, that the latter has loved the Cardinal, even more than he has loved his own wife, the Queen. These are clear evidences that wickedness can coexist with goodness or virtue.

To conclude, we can also refer to the Duke of Buckingham. The case of this character is very similar to that of Queen Catherine because the same individual ruined both, and both suffered the same punishments. Firstly, both had a trial. Secondly, Henry VIII betrayed both, and finally the monarch decided their destinies. That is to say, Henry VIII was partially responsible for the death of Queen Catherine and Buckingham. On the one hand, Henry VIII wanted Catherine of Aragon to be expelled from the kingdom once he married Anne Boleyn, and since that moment, she became Dowager Princess of Wales. Finally, she was sent to Kimbolton Castle, where she died. On the other hand, the Duke was executed because the monarch decided so, as we will see in a future section. After all this information, we can say that the tones linked to these two characters are obscurity, isolation, injustice and death.

4.3. Symbolism

Some symbols have already been explained in earlier sections, like the significance of the ring that King Henry decided to give to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Many other symbols can be found in the play.

In the first place, the sun. We all know that the sun is a powerful star that illuminates the whole world. This is what Shakespeare wants to transmit to the audience when he compares the sun with the King. He is a symbol of power; every action that takes places in his kingdom depends on the King. We can see clearly this comparison through the words of Cardinal Wolsey: “Seek the King/ That sun I pray may never set…” (3.2: 415-416).

Secondly, the seal of Wolsey. The Cardinal used this seal, which was a property of the King, to sign authorised papers without the consent of the King. Once he was sentenced at the court, he was obliged to return the object to its real owner. Wolsey thinks that he has the same right and power as the King to involve himself in the issues that
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concern the monarch and his government. Once more, his ambition and power abuse ruined the Cardinal.

Thirdly, Queen Catherine. She is a clear representation of injustice. She was accused of something that she had not been responsible for. She was innocent, but the arguments offered by Wolsey had more sense for Henry VIII. Finally, she suffered the cruelest fate: death. Although she tried to defend herself, she realised that she could not do anything to remediate the situation because nobody could change the decisions of the King of England. Therefore, the only solution was to accept her destiny.

Fourthly, the so-called “wheel of fortune”. This concept explains that people sometimes can have good luck and sometimes they can have bad fortune. This idea takes place throughout the whole play through characters like Buckingham, Catherine, Wolsey and Cranmer. The first character had the chance to enjoy the possibility of becoming Duke and have a life of luxury, until the moment in which his good luck disappeared and found in his way that wicked cardinal called Wolsey. The second character had the possibility of becoming Princess and Queen. However, she also bumped into Wolsey and he ruined her life. The third character, Wolsey, had a respectful post in the British kingdom, but he ruined himself with his ambitious and corrupted objectives. Finally, the last character is Cranmer. He became Archbishop of Canterbury and he even was awarded one of the most valuable gifts that the King could offer to the members of his kingdom, a ring that provided him with the protection of the King of England. Then, the only character who escaped from a cruel destiny was Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Unfortunately, the fate of the other three characters was to die at a relatively young age.

A final use of symbolism would be the birth of Elizabeth I. She was the last ruler of the Tudor dynasty and when she died she did not have children. Hence, as she died childless, there was a necessity to find an adequate successor to the throne of England. In fact, the chosen one was James I. With him, the Elizabethan period finished and gave way to the Jacobean period. Moreover, this age was significant for Shakespeare, given that both Elizabeth I and James I lived in the same centuries and Shakespeare wrote his literary works under their ruling.

Attention should also be paid to the prologue and the epilogue.
The prologue explains that the author will try to summarise the plot in two hours and that those spectators who expect a funny play will be very disappointed because this is mainly a depressing and unhappy story (Prologue: 1-7). The writer also wants the audience to feel empathy with the male and female characters, to experiment their own emotional states, so that we can feel connected with them and understand the plot more clearly.

The epilogue indicates that during the performance there were people who got bored whereas other people were excited and intrigued. This depends on what has been explained in the prologue given that those who expected a comedy did not enjoy the play as much as those who appreciate a drama play, or in this case a history play which includes tragic elements.

4.4. Literary and historical references

In King Henry VIII, there are many allusions to other great authors, works or renowned characters of all times. In this section, we will discuss these indirect references in the play.

In relation to the first kind of allusion, to literature, we will focus on poetry. There is a poem based on ancient mythology, which at the same time refers to a myth from the Metamorphoses (8 AD) written by Ovid (3.1: 1-14). The myth is that of Orpheus, a young man whose most relevant ability is music and he uses it to recover his wife Eurydice from the underworld. The connection between this poem and King Henry VIII lies in an intervention of Queen Catherine, who asks one of her women at her service to sing and play an instrument. In fact, the instrument that she asks for is a lute, the one that Orpheus used to play. The explanation of the poem indicates that Orpheus’ music can calm the anxiety of every human being or living being as a cure to any kind of problem. Here, we can apply the popular saying: music can tame wild animals. This is what Catherine needed; she was under pressure and depressed. Thus, she desired a moment of relief.

Concerning characters now, the first one that we find in this play is a biblical one. We are referring to Samson, that powerful man with an immense fortitude who was in charge of saving the Israeliite population. The relationship with the play is the fact that in the last act, the porter and his man are trying to keep the quiet and expel those people who were making too much noise from the room where the banquet of the christening of Elizabeth I was going to take place. These two individuals were debating a solution to
this situation, but the man of the porter told his lord that he is not Samson; he has not strength enough to keep the door closed and to remove those disturbing people from the door. In the same intervention of the porter, he also mentions Sir Guy of Warwick, a famous and legendary knight in English history. He was popular for his feats as a hero, for example, the murdering of a dragon or the killing of an enormous human creature known as a gigantic called Colbrand. All these characters allude to the needed courage or power that the man of the porter requires to solve that circumstance (5.3: 21-22).

Another biblical character is the Queen of Sheba. She heard that King Solomon was more intelligent than she was and the Queen, with a competitive and ambitious behaviour, wanted to ask him difficult questions to check if he could be considered as clever as she was. In King Henry VIII, we can connect this biblical reference with the birth of Elizabeth I because Cranmer predicted that the future English Queen would be even more intelligent than the Queen of Sheba (5.4: 23-25).

Moreover, there are interesting expressions coming from the Latin language, such as *Limbo Patrum*. Its meaning has to do with the place in between Hell and Heaven where are located the souls that do not belong to either of the places mentioned before. This is the original meaning of the expression, but in King Henry VIII, it adopts a different one: to be sent to jail (5.3: 60-61). A different Latin expression that appears in act 3 is the following one: *Ego et Rex Meus*. Cardinal Wolsey used this expression and he made a mistake, considering that he wanted to indicate that he himself was superior to the King. He believed that he was the representative, the absolute power of England, whereas the real King, according to Wolsey, was a mere retainer. Cardinal Wolsey could persuade the King any time he desired so and the King, without taking into account what the Cardinal was doing with him, always accepted the recommendations of the Cardinal and obeyed him (3.2: 315-317).

Once we have dealt with some of the literary and cultural references, we will discuss the historical ones. Firstly and surprisingly, an important allusion found in the play in terms of history is the long presence of the British population in India from the 17th up to the 20th century. In the first act, Norfolk cites this event indirectly and it is a premonition of the subjugation of India to Britain under the government of Elizabeth I (1.1: 20-21), and afterwards Queen Victoria, we might add. This last point may be considered to be a premonition because the play is written in the 17th century, while this event took place up to the middle of the 20th century. Thus, somehow, Norfolk deduced
that his patriots someday would expand the English territory and would reach the glory. Norfolk was right, given that this is exactly what happened mostly in the 19th century. On the one hand, Elizabeth I was responsible for the establishment of the British East India Company. On the other hand, Queen Victoria continued the work that Elizabeth I had started and after the Indian Mutiny, which took place in the year 1857, converted India into a colony of Britain in 1859.

Additionally, we also find a reference to Bevis of Hampton, the main character of an English romance from the 14th century. In King Henry VIII Norfolk compared the feats and the magnanimity of this hero with the extravagance of the Field of Cloth of Gold (1.1: 35-38). A clear proof of the connection between England and Spain is the marriage of Henry VIII to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of the Catholic King and Queen of Spain (2.4: 45-48).

Another historical reference mentioned in the play is the political encounter (which has been previously mentioned briefly) in France between King François I of France and King Henry VIII that took place in 1520 and that was called the Field of the Cloth of Gold. One of the details that have not been cited concerning this historical event is the explanation of the name of this meeting and other celebrations that took place during this short confrontation (it lasted for some weeks). Firstly, the name reflects the luxury and the supremacy of the place. Every monument and residence, even the way in which the characters involved in this pageantry were dressed, exuded extravagance. Secondly, not only the purpose of the encounter was to come to a political agreement, but also the enjoyment of entertaining activities as a way of closing the relationship between both countries.

The name of other Kings of England appear in the play too. Richard III is one of them. Besides, he is also the protagonist of another history play written by Shakespeare. What is interesting for us concerning this King is the fact that he was an undeserving monarch due to his behaviour towards the Duke of Buckingham, father of the Duke of Buckingham that appears in King Henry VIII. Curiously enough, both father and son had the same fortune. One day they were powerful but another day somebody even more powerful than they were destroyed their achievements and their lives. The father of Buckingham offered his services to the King and helped him to get the throne of England.
However, although the former asked for his reward, the King denied his petition because he considered that he was behaving as an impertinent servant. At that moment, the Duke of Buckingham lost his trust in the King. Finally, the latter decided to execute him. In fact, he was only claiming for his rights, but he died unfairly. The Duke of Buckingham, a man of King Henry VIII, understood that when he was going to be executed, he was suffering the same consequences as his father had. He had faith in Henry VIII but he lost it when his King betrayed him because the monarch had ordered his execution after his trial. Then, both father and son died by rule of their respective Kings (2.1: 108-132).

A third British monarch mentioned is Henry VII, father of Henry VIII. The former appears in the second act, when Buckingham is bidding his comrades farewell. Henry VII, according to what Buckingham says, pitied the death of his father, the Duke of Buckingham, and that made his son feel proud of his name. Whereas Henry VII honoured Buckingham, his son Henry VIII betrayed him (2.1: 108-132).

There is another allusion to a member of the French monarchy in this play by Shakespeare. He is the Duke of Orleans, son of Henry II of France. The Duke of Orleans is relevant to this play because Henry VIII did not want his daughter to marry the French Duke, considering that France and England did not have a good relationship. Thus, Henry VIII desired the Bishop to reconsider his proposal (2.4: 171-172).

Before the birth of Elizabeth I and after the ruling of Queen Catherine of Aragon, there was another Queen, Anne Boleyn. In act 4, the order of her coronation, which took place in 1533, is described (4.1: 36.5-36.35). There are just two Queens mentioned in this play, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, with whom Henry VIII fell in love in a celebration, carried out by Wolsey, and immediately hoped her to become the next Queen of England. At the very end of the play, another important member of the Tudor dynasty takes part, Elizabeth I. Nonetheless, at least in the play, she was only baptised as Princess, although both we and the audience at the time would know that she, years later, became Queen of England too.

Dealing again with Elizabeth I, there is an interesting allusion in the last act. She is compared with a legendary and magnificent bird called the maiden phoenix. It is said that this mythological bird surged again (without any male bird) from its own ashes once it had died. Hence, the relationship between the phoenix and Elizabeth I has to do with the fact that, during the Christening of Elizabeth I, Cranmer predicted that she would die
childless and that her successor would be able to keep the peace and glory that the Queen established in England (5.4: 40-54). Obviously, he is referring to James I.

As we can check, many historical references allude to very different Kings of England and in a shorter scale also to members of the French and Spanish monarchy. At least one more monarch can be cited. He is Edward the Confessor. He does not appear as a character. In fact, he is invoked through his crown, the one that was given to Anne Boleyn in her coronation (4.1: 90). This crown was inherited from generation to generation and that same characteristic symbol of monarchy is the one that nowadays is in possession of Queen Elizabeth II.

Finally, we can add one last historical reference to conclude this section. In connection with the divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, there was an Italian man called Gregory de Cassado, who helped the King and Cardinal Wolsey through different negotiations to dissolve the poisonous marriage (3.2: 321-324).

5. Hypothetical formulations about the play

King Henry VIII, since the 19th century, has been a victim of an accumulation of criticism. For example, the play has been criticised in terms of authorship, as has been explained in a different section of this critical analysis. However, in this particular section, we will discuss certain hypotheses related to specific issues. For instance, could King Henry VIII be classified as a historical drama or as a different genre? Have the authors devoted themselves to any specific kind of literary genre before? Why did the writer decide to retake the genre? Alternatively, if both authors were related to other genres apart from drama and years later decided to retake again the genre, this will also be commented on here.

Giving an answer to the first question, the play has been considered as a history play because it includes elements of a tragedy, for instance the soliloquy of Cardinal Wolsey when he is taken away from the company of the King, together with the soliloquy of Catherine of Aragon during her trial in Blackfriars. The play is also a history play because there are many occurrences that are developed in the plot of the story, which happened in real life during the ruling of the Tudor dynasty in England. Besides, the different personalities who took part in these events are part of the history of England from the 15th up to the 17th centuries. These sort of history plays are also associated to epic poetry, given that they reflect the facts for which these existent members of the high
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society or the royalty became meaningful for the English society of that particular period of history, as an imitation of the feats of the heroes of ancient ages.

By contrast, Howard Felperin, in his *Shakespearean Romance* (1972: 201-209), does not consider *King Henry VIII* as a history play, but a Morality play, where Cardinal Wolsey would be compared with Lucifer, Queen Catherine as the angel or protector of King Henry VIII and the latter would develop the role of a mistaken king. These Mystery or Morality plays were performed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in specific areas of the Churches, for instance, the altar or porches, and the main theme was normally issues associated with religion. Howard Felperin can also perceive a clear connection with romances, “especially in the ending of the play which is the golden world of dream and wish fulfilment” (quoted in Margeson 1990: 28).

The second question reminds us that two authors were in charge of the composition of *King Henry VIII*: William Shakespeare and John Fletcher. We associate these writers to one specific genre that is drama, but they also composed other works that belong to different genres, such as poetry. In the personal case of Shakespeare, it is appropriate to mention that before becoming popular for being a playwright, he used to write poetry. During the Renaissance period, Shakespeare was considered as a national poet, given that his writings were included in the list of works which were produced inside the group called national literature. Poetry was the most representative genre in the literature of the Renaissance period, and this is why Shakespeare decided to write poetry before devoting several years to writing drama plays.

As an answer to the third question, we can add that once there were no adequate aspirants for the composition of epic poetry, these national poets, including Shakespeare, took the decision of devoting their lives to other kind of genres, such as drama. This explains why Shakespeare retook the drama genre. Like Shakespeare, John Fletcher has always been renowned for his plays, but he also wrote poetry. In fact, he only wrote 22 poems. From a critical point of view, this is not a large number of poems for an author with such a respectful reputation as John Fletcher. Then, we can conclude that at one point he decided to devote the rest of his professional career to playwriting.

As a conclusion, we can see that both authors were related to different genres throughout their lives, but at a certain moment, they realised that they needed to do what they were born for: dedicate their professional lives to become important playwrights.
We can continue adding other critical commentaries about the play in this section. Nonetheless, criticism does not always have to be negative. An example of a positive criticism of the play is the idea developed by Nicholas Rowe in his biography of Shakespeare called *Account of the Life* (1709). What Rowe believes is that Shakespeare was able to personalise in an appropriate way his characters, given that their behaviour and actions are adapted to the period of history in which the play is set. He also suggests that he specifically appreciates the figure of two characters: King Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey, who are in fact two of the main characters of the history play (Margeson 1990: 22). On the contrary, J. C. Maxwell, in his edition of *King Henry the Eighth* (1962) suggests that “the treatment of King Henry VIII as the central figure is particularly unsatisfactory: different views of his conscience (…), his decisions and judgements, are laid side by side without any conclusions being reached” (quoted in Margeson 1990: 25).

Another critic, Samuel Johnson, in *Notes to Shakespeare* (1957: 11, 65-6) does not agree with the opinion of who are the best depicted characters of the play. He thinks that the importance and success of *King Henry VIII* resides on Catherine of Aragon: “His admiration is reserved, however, for the scenes in which the queen appears, particularly 4.2, which he regards as ‘above any other part of Shakespeare’s tragedies, and perhaps above any scene of any other poet’” (Margeson 1990: 22). J. C. Maxwell also shares his opinion concerning the character of Queen Catherine and opposes Samuel Johnson affirming that in the scenes in which Queen Catherine appears there is “no unified impression, not even a complex one” (Margeson 1990: 25).

Peter Alexander is one of those critics who thinks that *King Henry VIII* is a play written by Shakespeare himself, not in collaboration with other authors, as he explains in his essay “Conjectural history, or Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*” (1930: 118). He also values the merit of Shakespeare for being able to provide a good structure and unity of the history play, together with the addition and maintenance of themes like compassion, power, ambition and regret throughout the whole play (Margeson 1990: 6).

Wilson Knight also claims in his *Crown of life* (1948: 230) that *King Henry VIII* is a worthy masterpiece composed by Shakespeare. Specifically he provides the following reflexion: “*Henry VIII* is (…) the most explicitly Christian of Shakespeare’s plays because of its emphasis on justice, truth and charity, and is thus the appropriate fulfilment of the histories and romances” (mentioned in Margeson 1990: 24).
To finish this section, we can establish that since the 18th century, there have been many different reflexions, opinions, hypotheses, positive and negative conclusions about the play according to a great number of scholars and critics. This, like for any other literary work, means that we have not yet completely confirmed or refuted a final view on the play, and is in need of further research.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of this sixth section is to provide a summary of the contents that we have been exploiting in the previous sections. In other words, the function of this conclusion is to recapitulate briefly the information that has been registered throughout the project. Furthermore, the conclusion could be considered as a self-evaluation section, considering that we reflect on the knowledge that we have acquired after having collected all the data. Hence, this is the reason why I personally consider that this project is a compilation of material that creates as a result an informative assignment. Additionally, another objective of this assignment is to make readers reflect on every idea that is developed. In this way, we oblige readers to establish their own conclusions and be able to justify from their own point of view if they agree with the material they are reading or not.

After this short introduction, we can review the central subjects that we have developed in this critical analysis of King Henry VIII by William Shakespeare. Firstly, we offered the contextualization of the play, where appears the main summary of the history play. At this point, we may remember that the atmosphere of the play takes us back to Tudor England and to one especial character, Henry VIII. Secondly, we referred to the authorship. As has been widely suggested by criticism, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher wrote the historical play. Certainly, this section is controversial because of the uncertainty regarding the hypotheses of the different researchers and historians about who was the author that had mostly contributed to the play. Moreover, as we have tested, there is not a definitive conclusion yet. Thirdly, the analysis of the play, one of the most important sections of the project. Here, we pay attention to the literary critical analysis of King Henry VIII. Finally, the hypothetical formulations of the play. This is another relevant section, given that we present the critical opinion of other authors as well as our own analytical and well-documented conclusions, which is the principal objective of this section and the whole project.
The production of this assignment has offered me an additional knowledge due to the collection of data related to the sovereignty of King Henry VIII, which were unknown for me. For instance, I can provide a couple of examples. Firstly, the cruelty of Cardinal Wolsey, which was the consequence of his own death and that of many other characters. This made me reflect on the fact that this is something that can happen to us nowadays. That is to say, that our bad actions can lead us along the wrong path. Secondly, a different character that called my attention was Catherine of Aragon, because before writing this assignment, I just knew a couple of things about her, that she was the daughter of the Catholic King and Queen of Spain and that she was the first wife of Henry VIII. What made me feel eager to continue reading the book was the result of that famous trial concerning the divorce, which personally I consider to be the main plot of the play. What really appealed my attention of this scene was the way in which a woman at that time fought for her rights and tried to defend herself from injustice. Again, this act reminds us of the current situation that women are suffering in the society of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Apart from the new knowledge acquired regarding the literary content of the historical play, I have learnt to write and organise a document in a more formal way, adapted to the conditions of writing required by a formal institution such as a University. To conclude, I would also like to add that connected to this last idea, I have learnt to access new online resources to get valuable information regarding English literature.

7. References

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Web resources:


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