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# Gold in William Shakespeare's King Henry VIII (1613)

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- 1 “All that glisters is not gold” (*Merchant of Venice* 2.7.65). This well-known quotation which draws a sharp contrast between truth and deceit, surface and depth, offers only one glimpse into the complex representation of gold in Shakespeare's drama. While in this early comedy gold symbolises the quest for Portia's beauty and wealth and exposes human greed, in Shakespeare's historical plays, gold invariably epitomises royalty and power that are materialised by stage properties such as the golden crown and sceptre. In his two tetralogies, rivals and enemies launch into bloody battles for the “golden circuit” (*2 Henry VI* 3.1.151) or the “golden sceptre” (*1 Henry VI* 5.2.139); in *Richard II*, gold is turned into a powerful symbol of the disgrace of the king who gives up his crown on stage (4.1). Nearly twenty years later, Shakespeare revisits these thematic lines and imagery in his last play *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, written in collaboration with John Fletcher in 1613, and presents the audience with unexplored facets of this most sought-after precious metal. In this Jacobean historical play centred on King Henry VIII's divorce and second marriage to Anne Boleyn – a period of instability and uncertainty in English history – the glitter of gold which reveals religious hypocrisy and ambition is surprisingly used to strengthen royal power and justify James I's lineage through the myth of the phoenix. Although gold has been studied to great extent in *Timon of Athens* or *The Merchant of Venice*<sup>1</sup> where this metal proves to be a dominant feature, the unusual dramatisation of gold at play in *King Henry VIII* seems to have gone nearly unnoticed by scholars. Beyond the historical references of the encounter at the Field of the Golden Cloth, Shakespeare dramatises the magnificence of royal power and lineage not only through stage properties, as was the case in early historical plays, but also by relying on the visual rhetoric of ekphrasis and the art of jewellery. The influence of the lavish glittering sceneries typical of court masques on Shakespeare's dramatisation of gold in this play unveils the evolution of the genre of drama on the Jacobean stage.

## “Pomp and majesty”

- 2 A few months after the Prince of Wales' death, James I's son, Shakespeare and Fletcher chose to focus on the Tudor era by exploring the political and religious crisis arising from King Henry VIII's divorce and marriage to Anne Boleyn whose coronation is lavishly dramatised on stage in act 4 scene 1. In his invaluable introduction to *King Henry VIII* in the third Arden edition, Gordon McMullan brings to the fore Shakespeare's ambiguous treatment of these pivotal events in English history:

[*Henry VIII* is] a sophisticated play, at once celebratory and cynical about display, which meditates on the progress of Reformation in England, reading life since Henry VIII's day as a series of bewildering changes in national and personal allegiance, and presenting history as the product of testimony that is by its very nature varied, contradictory and irresolvable. (McMullan 6)

- 3 The last scene centred on the christening of King Henry's and Anne's daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth I, is not only a way to commemorate the dead Queen who passed away exactly a decade before, but also turns out to be a tribute to another Elizabeth, James I's daughter, whose political marriage to Prince Frederick, Elector Palatine, one of the defenders of Protestantism in Germany, had just been celebrated a few months before, exactly on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1613. The sudden death of Henry, Prince of Wales, James I's heir to the throne, in November 1612, challenged the Stuarts' legitimacy for the English throne, and was perceived as a great loss for the Protestants who considered the prince to be a staunch defender of their faith, unlike his father. Beyond the obvious echo between the two Henrys, the dramatization of King Henry's decision to sever ties with Rome in order to marry Anne Boleyn before a Jacobean audience is undoubtedly tinged with political propaganda to affirm James' lineage and parentage to the Tudor dynasty. Some critics go as far as claiming that this play is filled with Protestant propaganda<sup>2</sup> whilst Glynne Wickham qualifies such readings by showing that the positive treatment of King Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon, may suggest that the king probably wished to secure possible Catholic matches.
- 4 Despite the focus on pivotal historical scenes and echoes to recent events, *King Henry VIII* opens onto the narration of the peace treaty signed between France and England in 1520, which is here voiced by a secondary character, namely the Duke of Norfolk: “Then you lost / The view of earthly glory” (1.1.13-14). This paradoxical statement introducing the vivid depiction of the encounter between the two kings brings to mind the rhetorical device used by one of the two gentlemen in *The Winter's Tale* to depict the reconciliation between the two kings: “then you have lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of” (5.2.43-44). The Duke's insistence upon the “view” that is not presented on stage, but that is to be created by his speech and imagined by the audience, illustrates the focus on sight that structures the prologue to this play, which repeatedly lays emphasis on the act of seeing a performance.<sup>3</sup> This remark also introduces the long ekphrastic description of the encounter, a rhetorical device that Shakespeare experimented with in his two narrative poems and in many plays.<sup>4</sup> The picture drawn by Norfolk of the glittering and lavish encounter between the two kings lays emphasis upon the excessive pomp displayed during the treaty designed to strengthen the friendship between the two nations:

Today the French,  
All clinquant, all in gold like heathen gods

Shone down the English; and tomorrow they  
 Made Britain India. Every man that stood  
 Showed like a mine. Their dwarfish pages were  
 As cherubims, all gilt. The madams too,  
 Not used to toil, did almost sweat to bear  
 The pride upon them, that their very labour  
 Was to them as a painting. Now this masque  
 Was cried incomparable; and th'ensuing night  
 Made it a fool and beggar. The two kings,  
 Equal in lustre, were now best, now worst,  
 As presence did present them...  
 When these suns –  
 For so they phrase'em – by their heralds challenged  
 The noble spirits to arms they did perform  
 Beyond thought's compass that former fabulous story  
 Being now seen possible enough, got credit  
 That Bevis was believed.  
 (1.1.18-30 / 33-38)

- 5 In one of his letters, the diplomat Sir Henry Wotton, who attended the play on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1613 when the first Globe theatre was burnt down, laid stress on the lavish decoration displayed on stage and the richly adorned costumes worn by the actors: “The King’s players had a new play, called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of Pomp and Majesty, even to the matting of the stage” (Wotton 32-33). In his study devoted to King Henry VIII, David Starkey notes that the meeting between the English King and the French King Francis I in June 1520 at the Field of the Cloth of Gold—or in French *le camp du drap d’or*—“became a legend in its own day and has remained one ever since. Like most legends, it is misunderstood. We remember the magnificence, thanks to the resonance of ‘cloth of gold’, we forget that ‘field’ meant tiltyard” (Starkey 50). This legend was visually heightened by the well-known painting bearing the name of the event (*The Field of the Cloth of Gold*, Anonymous, circa 1545, Royal Collection Trust). This painting celebrates the three-week festivities surrounding the signing of the peace treaty between France and England that took place in Balinghem on an English territory near Calais. It is generally thought to have been commissioned by Henry VIII twenty five years later to be displayed in Whitehall Palace. This picture is considered to be anonymous since it was made by several hands. The golden colour is used to focus on the king himself and some of the tents where banquets, jousting and masques took place. The cloth used for the tents as well as the garment were actually woven with silver and gold threads, and the place was named after this particular type of fabric. Even though there is no evidence that Shakespeare may have seen this picture, critics agree that one of his main sources of inspiration for *King Henry VIII* was Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England* (1587). Holinshed narrates this meeting focussing on the same details as those shown in the painting:

the two kings met *in the vale of Andren*, accompanied with such a number of the nobilitie of both realmes, so richlie appointed in apparell, and costlie jewels, as chaines, collars of SS and other like ornaments... The two kings meeting in the field, either saluted other in most loving wise, first on horseback... and, after they had thus saluted each other, they went both together into a rich tent of cloath of gold. (Holinshed 425)



**THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD, ANONYMOUS (C. 1545), OIL ON CANVAS, ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST, HAMPTON COURT, CREATIVE COMMONS**

- 6 While Holinshed focuses on the display of wealth with the jewels, probably made of gold, and the golden colour of the tents where the kings met, Shakespeare draws a subtle contrast between the divine golden light and the earthly glitter of superficial pageants. The two kings are associated with the image of the sun (1.1.33), a traditional symbol of the colour of gold. In his treatise devoted to heraldry, *Le Blason des couleurs* (1528), Herald of Sicily reminds his readers that gold is the noblest colour and the principal metal in heraldry:

Le principal métal qui monstre couleur est or lequel, selon sa nature, comment disent les maîtres, est le plus noble... Avec ce, il représente le soleil, qui est très noble lumineux et superfluant lumière, et dit la Loy que chose n'est plus belle que clarté. Et pour cette excellence, dict l'Escriture, que le juste et la sainte personne ressemble à l'or et au soleil. (Herald of Sicily 21)<sup>5</sup>

- 7 The radiance of the two kings is heightened by the word “lustre” (1.1.29), another image of an intense light. According to Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard in *Silent Elizabethans*, “lustre is the intensity of the chromatic impact of a colour, its radiance and visual effect, as its etymology ‘lustrare’, to illumine, confirms” (Costa de Beaugard 87). The metaphor of the sun, the epitome of divine light, is sublimated by the re-enactment of the ideal of chivalry, epitomized by Bevis (1.1.38), a hero of the medieval romance *Sir Bevis of Hamtoun*. The natural golden light of the royal suns stands in sharp contrast with the fake glitter of the French followers of King Francis I. The portrait of the French side exposes the negative nature of gold. The adjective “clinqant” (1.1.19), which means glittering with gold, is devoid of any negative connotation in English unlike French. Gordon McMullan signals that “clinqant” was “originally a technical term for a thin plate lace of gold or silver” (McMullan 214). This adjective is debunked by the comparison to “heathen gods”, a reference to the biblical episode of the golden calf (*Exodus 32.3-7*), the symbol of idolatry. The heavenly celestial figure of the gilded cherubim<sup>6</sup> (“as cherubims, all gilt” 1.1.23) is minimized by the earthly image of “dwarfish pages”. In *Cymbeline* (1611), golden cherubims symbolise Imogen’s purity and innocence, and their celestial nature is strengthened by their position on the roof: “The roof o’th’chamber / With golden cherubins is fretted. Her andirons / (I had forgot them) were two winking Cupids” (2.4.87-89). The “golden cherubins” ornamenting Imogen’s room are technically different from those described in *King Henry VIII* insofar as they are “gilt” and not “golden”. This

linguistic variation highlights the ambiguous aspect of gold – whilst “golden” unequivocally alludes to the colour or the material nature of the precious metal, the verb “to gild” refers to the technique of covering with a thin layer of gold, thus endowing an object with a deceiving radiance as it only shines on the surface. The Puritanical condemnation of vanity and pomp reaches its climax with Norfolk’s scorn towards the French women’s inappropriate use of cosmetics (“the madams too, / Not used to toil, did almost sweat to bear / The pride upon them, that their very labour / Was to them as a painting” 1.1.23-26). The image of the glistening perspiration of French women ironically reflects the glittering cherubims.

- 8 Norfolk’s seemingly anti-Catholic speech first directed against the French addresses in fact the extravagant display of wealth and power that was designed by Cardinal Wolsey, one of Henry VIII’s closest advisers. In act 3 scene 2, Norfolk and the earl of Surrey denounce Cardinal Wolsey’s boundless ambition: “Thy ambition / Thou scarlet sin, robbed this bewailing land / Of noble Buckingham, my father in law” (3.2.254-256). The colour scarlet is imbued with a moralising tone as it alludes to the colour of the Cardinal’s dress and is perceived as the chromatic symbol of human corruption in the Bible. The phrase “scarlet sin” is derived from a passage in *The Book of Isaiah* where the redness of sin is to be purified and turned into the purity of white: “though your sins were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow: though they were redde like scarlet, they shall be as wool” (*Isa* 1.18). The Earl of Surrey accuses the Cardinal of deceiving the monarch and his court:

By my soul  
 Your long coat, priest, protects you; thou shouldst feel  
 My sword i’th’lifeblood of thee else. My lords,  
 Can ye endure to hear this arrogance?  
 And from this fellow? If we live thus tamely,  
 To be thus jaded by a piece of scarlet,  
 Farewell, nobility: let his grace go forward  
 And dare us with his cap, like larks.  
 (3.2.275-282)

- 9 The verb “dare”, a synonym for “to dazzle”, plays on the original meaning of the word scarlet which initially referred to brightness and was associated with gold in the Middle Ages. The image of the birds being deceived and trapped by the brightness of the red shade of the cardinal’s cap brings to the fore Wolsey’s dubious strategy to manipulate the King through the supposedly honourable appearance of his red robe. When the Cardinal understands at the end of this scene that he has fallen into disgrace, he regrets the time when he was accompanying the king: “No sun shall ever usher forth mine honours, / Or gild again the noble troops that waited / Upon my smiles” (410-412). The image of the gilded army may have been inspired by Holinshed’s colourful description of Wolsey: “he proceeded forth furnished like a cardinall: his gentlemen being verie manie in number, were clothed in liverie coats of crimson velvet of the best, with chaines of gold about their necks”.<sup>7</sup> However, the verb “to gild” underlines the discrepancy between the Cardinal and the King, since the former was only “gilt” like the French cherubims in the opening scene and the king, again symbolised by the sun, could be the only centre of the golden and divine light.

## A new Golden Age?

- 10 After Wolsey's disgrace, gold is reintroduced on stage in the first two scenes of act 4 so as to dramatize the contrasted fates of Henry VIII's first two wives.<sup>8</sup> While scene 1 presents the audience with a public scene for the celebration of Anne Boleyn's lavish and glittering coronation, scene 2 throws light upon the privacy of former Queen Katherine who has a vision where characters are dressed in white and gold. Act 4 scene 1 opens with the conversation between two gentlemen introducing Anne's coronation. The sound of trumpets interrupts their dialogue and indicates the beginning of the procession:

5 Mayor of London, bearing the mace. Then GARTER, in his coat of arms, and on his head he wore a gilt copper crown.

6 Marquess Dorset, bearing a sceptre of Gold, on his head a demi-coronal of gold. With him the Earl of SURREY, bearing the rod of silver with the dove, crowned with an earl's coronet. Collars of esses.

7 Duke of SUFFOLK, in his robe of estate, his coronet on his head, bearing a long white wand, as High Steward...

8 A canopy borne by four Cinque Ports, under it the Queen ANNE in her robe, in her hair, richly adorned with pearl, crowned.

9 The old Duchess of Norfolk, in a coronal of gold wrought with flowers, bearing the Queen's train.

10 Certain ladies or countesses, with plain circlets of gold, without flowers.  
(4.1.36)

- 11 This silent pageantry passing over the stage is commented upon by the gentlemen whose presence on stage signals a metadramatic scene, a play within the play which silently echoes Norfolk's ekphrastic description of the Field of the Cloth of Gold in the opening scene. The magnificence and the radiance of the Field of the Cloth of Gold is now visualised on stage, revealing another facet of gold. The new queen is compared to an "angel" by the second gentleman who envies the King: "Our king has all the Indies in his arms" (4.1.45). The reference to the Indies usually confused with America in early modern England, probably conjured up images of gold, precious stones and jewels which are visualised on stage in the pageant. Some members of the audience were probably familiar with the travel narratives in the New World such as Richard Eden's *Historie of Travayle in the West and East Indies* (1577) where the Indians met by Columbus are reported to "cast themselves by heapes into the sea, and came swimming to the shyppes, bringing gold with them" (fo 9v).
- 12 The detailed description of the scenery dominated by gold and silver is also reminiscent of the sumptuous events organized for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, James I's daughter, to Elector Palatine on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1613. In the second Arden edition of *King Henry VIII*, R.A Foakes suggests that the way Anne Boleyn is dressed in the coronation scene, with her "hair richly adorned with pearl and crowned," could be evocative of Princess Elizabeth's bridal dress. The glittering scenery may have been inspired by some of the entertainments given for the event, more precisely Thomas Campion's *Lord's Maske* which was performed on the wedding day. In this masque, silver statues set in a gilded scenery are turned into women:

While this cloud was vanishing, the wood being the under-part of the Scoene, was insensibly changed, and in place thereof appeared foure Noble women-statues of silver, standing in severall nices, accompanied with ornaments of Architecture, which filled all the end of the house, and seemed to be all of gold-smithes work. The

first order consisted of Pillasters all of gold, set with Rubies, Saphyrs, Emeralds, Opals, and such like. The Capitels were composed, and of a new invention. Over this was a bastard order with Cartouses reversed, comming from the Capitels of every Pillaster which made the upper part rich and full of ornament. Over every statue was placed a history in gold, which seemed to be base releave; the conceits which were figured in them were these. In the first was Prometheus, embossing in clay the figure of a woman, in the second he was represented stealing fire from the chariot-wheele of the Sunne: in the third, he is exprest putting life with this fire into his figure of clay; and in the fourth square, Jupiter enraged, turnes these new made women into statues. Above all, for finishing, ran a Cornish, which returned over every Pillaster, seeming all of gold and richly carved. (Campion 200-201)<sup>9</sup>

13 Although *King Henry VIII* was not performed for these celebrations, the echoes between the lavish sceneries of Campion's masque and the glittering show of Anne Boleyn's coronation in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII* clearly indicate the influence of the rich ornamentation used in court masques on Shakespeare's later plays.<sup>10</sup> This colourful pageant also brings to mind the "pomp and majesty" displayed for Katherine's trial where the king sitting "under the cloth of state" (2.4), namely a canopy, is surrounded by characters glittering with silver insignia.

14 The emphasis on gold in scene 1 is echoed by Katherine's spiritual vision of characters dressed in white and gold in act 4 scene 2. Linda Micheli notes that "these [the coronation] details are matched almost point for point in the simpler beauty of Katherine's heavenly vision" (Micheli 463). Her vision is presented as a pageant passing over the stage dramatising "six personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces, branches of bays or palm in their hands" (4.2.81). E.E Duncan-Jones has suggested that Shakespeare may have been inspired by a funeral oration for Margaret of Navarre written by Charles de Sainte Marthe in 1550 (Duncan-Jones 142-143). The ironical dialogue between these two opposed scenes brings to the fore the contradictory values of gold in *King Henry VIII*.

15 The play closes with the christening of the future Queen Elizabeth I, Anne Boleyn's daughter and Cranmer's prophetic vision:

Nor shall this peace sleep with her; but as when  
 The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,  
 Her ashes new create another heir  
 As great admiration as herself,  
 So shall she leave her blessedness to one  
 (When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness)  
 Who from the sacred ashes of her honour  
 Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,  
 And so stand fixed...  
 Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,  
 His honour and the greatness of his name,  
 Shall be and make new nations.  
 (5.4.39-47 / 50-52)

16 The emblem of the phoenix dying and resurrecting through flames foreshadows the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and her heir James VI of Scotland who became James I in 1603. The final image of royal power which had been signified by the ambiguous glitter of gold in the first acts is replaced by the divine light of the eternal renaissance of the phoenix, a powerful emblem used in Queen Elizabeth's propaganda—and later on James I—to dramatise the complex royal lineage of the Tudors and Stuarts. In classical mythology, the phoenix was associated with the sun. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid reminds the reader

that after the death of the phoenix in his nest made of cinnamon and myrrha, a new phoenix is born for another five centuries (Ovid, Book 15, l.391-407). Christianity turned this myth into another symbol of Christ's resurrection and two different versions of the phoenix's death circulated in the Renaissance. In Clement's version, the new phoenix is born once its father's flesh is putrefied and becomes a metaphor for man's death and resurrection.<sup>11</sup> The best-known version undoubtedly remains the one described in *Physiologus* where the phoenix sacrifices its life in flames:

There is a species of bird in the land of India which is called the phoenix, which enters the wood of Lebanon after five hundred years and bathes his wings in the fragrance [...] Then the bird enters Heliopolis laden with fragrance and mounts the altar, where he ignites the fire and burns himself up. The next day the priest examines the altar and finds a worm in the ashes. On the second day, however, he finds a tiny birdling. On the third day he finds a huge eagle. (Clement 13)

- 17 This myth of renewal was related to Queen Elizabeth I in her lifetime and was also associated with the image of the Pelican<sup>12</sup> which participated in the construction of the political image of the maiden Queen. According to Louis Montrose, the myth of the phoenix was a mythical answer to the delicate issue of succession and the Queen's lineage: "the symbolic economy of the Elizabethan imaginary, the Phoenix was associated with the quasi-mystical powers inhering in the queen's virginity. The prominence of this image and its associated motto in the later years of the reign suggests that the perceived succession crisis was being given imaginary resolution in a fantasy of the Queen's perpetual self-renewal" (Montrose 55). This emblem of the Virgin Queen appeared in many official portraits of the Queen, *The Phoenix Portrait* by Nicholas Hilliard (c.1575, National Portrait Gallery) being the best-known example.<sup>13</sup> The myth of the phoenix was "resurrected" so to speak by James I who tried to re-enact this myth to justify his legitimacy as the Queen's spiritual heir despite the fact that his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was one of the main rivals of the English queen. In one of his sermons preached before the new King during his entry in London in 1604, Henry Hooke compares James I to the new phoenix:

For when the rare Phoenix of the world, the queene of birds... was now through age to be turned into dust and ashes, though she appeared unto men to die, yet she died not, but was revived in one of her own blood... her vertues of Christianitie and princely qualitie rested on him, who stood up a man as it were out of the ashes of a woman. (Hooke sigs. C2v-C3)



Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I, the "Phoenix" Portrait* (c. 1575), oil on panel, 78.8x61 cm, National Portrait Gallery, Creative Commons

- 18 By re-enacting the myth of the Phoenix in the last scene of *King Henry VIII* in 1613, Shakespeare ironically reverberates the anguish over royal lineage following the early death of the Prince of Wales, which echoes the political turmoil over Queen Elizabeth's unmarried status. However, the miracle resulting from the death of the "bird of wonder" is that Princess Elizabeth's marriage is a promise of renewal whilst James I becomes the "bright sun of heaven" (5.4.50) pouring over his kingdom the divine golden light as King Henry VIII did. The phoenix was also connected with gold for alchemists, as is evidenced by Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani's study of the phoenix: "[L]'un des quatre oiseaux qui symbolisent les quatre couleurs fondamentales : il correspond emblématiquement au rouge, désignant ainsi le soleil et l'or philosophique" (Mathieu-Castellani 203<sup>14</sup>). This reading of the phoenix seems to be encapsulated by the famous Drake jewel that the Queen presented to Sir Francis Drake after the defeat of the Spanish armada. According to Karen Dalton, the black figure, the white woman and the phoenix represented on this jewel symbolised the three steps necessary to restore the Golden Age: "The black emperor reigns over the initial black (nigredo) stage of the transmutation. Elis: the whitening (albedo) phase. The final red state (rubedo) is embodied in the classic symbol of the philosopher's stone, the Phoenix" (206). This last interpretation throws light upon another aspect of this highly anamorphic play. The renewal of the Phoenix through the figures of the two Elizabeth may well signify that a new Golden Age is possible thanks to James I all the more so as the King desperately attempted to resurrect the myth of the Golden Age that his spiritual mother, Queen Elizabeth I, brilliantly dramatised in her reign. The reference to the "new nations" over which the new king is shining could allude to the new colonies established in the New World as was the case with Virginia offering new lands which were supposed to be replete with glittering gold as was related by Arthur Barlowe who compared Virginia in 1584 to a new "golden age" (Barlowe 728).

19 Hence, Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII* revisited the diverse representations of gold inherent in his early drama in completely different ways. Although the conventional opposition between truth and deceit symbolised by the glitter of gold was conjured up again in the first scenes of this play, the portrayal of royal power stands in sharp contrast with Shakespeare's early historical plays, and even some tragedies such as *Macbeth*. In the tetralogies, the craving for the golden crown leads to fierce fights for power and some of the bloodiest battles in English history, such as the War of the Roses. Likewise, in *Macbeth*, the eponymous character's plot to obtain the "golden round" (1.5.28) paves the way for regicide epitomized by the dead King Duncan's "silver skin laced with his golden blood" (2.3.113). *King Henry VIII* is also devoid of the cynical representation of gold in *Timon of Athens* where the commercial value of the precious metal is vilified. The historical events of the Field of the Cloth of Gold as well as the coronation of Anne Boleyn highlight the positive value of gold as a symbol of divine light, a reading inherited from the medieval art of heraldry. The glorious portrait of James I as a new sun in the last scene not only echoes the portrait of Henry VIII in gold in the opening scene, but also reinforces his political vision of the divine power of royalty. The final image of the reborn phoenix shining like a star, conjures up for a Jacobean audience their King's effort at legitimising his lineage with the late Queen Elizabeth. Louis Montrose points out that Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII* represents "the most rhetorically opulent version" of the mythical representation of James I as a new phoenix (Montrose 306).

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## NOTES

1. See A. Cairncross, "Shakespeare and the Golden Age", *South Central Bulletin* 30.4 (1970): 173-175. For the *Merchant of Venice*, see for instance, E. Sklar, "Bassanio's Golden Fleece", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 18 (1976): 500-509 and H. Weinfield, "'We are the Jasons, We Have Won the Fleece': Antonio's Plot (and Shakespeare's) in *The Merchant of Venice* (What Really happens in the Play)", *European Legacy* 15.2 (2010): 149-158.

2. See for instance Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975; William Baillie, "Henry VIII: a Jacobean History", *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1979): 247-266; Donna Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1992.

3. The prologue to *King Henry VIII* attracts the spectators' attention to the diverse interpretations they might give to the performance they are about to see: "those that come to see" (9); "Think ye see / The very persons of our noble story" (25-26); "Then, in a moment, see / How soon this mightiness meets misery" (29-30).

4. The best-known example of ekphrasis remains the long description of the painting of Troy in *The Rape of Lucrece*.

5. My translation: "the main metal which is coloured is gold which is the noblest of them all... It symbolises the sun, the most noble and powerful source of light, and the Law says that it is the most beautiful light. The Book says that because of its quality, the just and saint person looks like gold and the sun".

6. Naseeb Shaheen signals that the Cherubims are primarily related to the image of gold in *Genesis* (*Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999, 196-197).
  7. Quoted by John Margeson (ed.), *King Henry VIII* (1990), The New Cambridge Edition. Cambridge: CUP, 2012, 145.
  8. Linda McJ. Micheli points out that Anne and Katherine are “polar characters identified with the old order and the new, respectively” (Micheli 453).
  9. For a detailed study of this masque, see David Linley, *Thomas Campion*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986, 190-210.
  10. Some scholars have studied the impact of court masques on Shakespeare's dramatic writing. See, for instance, J.D. Cox, “Henry VIII and the masque”, *ELH* 45 (1978): 390-409 and Northrop Frye, “Romance as masque”, in Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (eds.), *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1978, 11-39.
  11. “Let us consider the strange and striking phenomenon which takes place in the East, that is, in the regions of Arabia. There is a bird which is called the phoenix. It is the only individual of its kind, and it lives five hundred years; and when it approaches dissolution and its death is imminent, it makes itself a nest out of frankincense and myrrh and the other spices, this it enters when the time is fulfilled, and dies. But out of the decaying flesh a sort of worm is born, which feeds on the juices of the dead animal until it grows wings”, in “Epistles to the Corinthians”, *The Epistles of Saint Clement of Rome and Saint Ignatius of Antioch*, translated by James A. Kleist, New York, 1946, 25.
  12. “The Pelican, that of the Queen as a nurse and mother to her people, willing to sacrifice herself for their welfare; the Phoenix, that of the Queen as a unique and self-sufficient being, whose constancy was given verbal form in her motto, *semper eadem*” (Montrose 55).
  13. See Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, London: Pimlico, 2003, 82.
  14. My translation: “one of the birds that symbolises the four main colours. It is the emblem of red and refers to the sun and the philosophical stone”.
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## ABSTRACTS

Although among Shakespeare's works, gold proves to be a dominant feature of plays such as *Timon of Athens* or even *The Merchant of Venice*, his later play, *King Henry VIII* (1613), hinges upon a subtle and intricate codification of gold. In this play, this highly ambivalent colour can, on the one hand, symbolise religious hypocrisy and ambition, and on the other hand, royalty, spirituality and lineage. Right from the opening scene, gold is tinged with pejorative tones when Norfolk exposes the excessive pomp displayed during the treaty signed between King Henry VIII and King Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold near Calais, an encounter organised by the ambitious Cardinal Wolsey. After Wolsey's disgrace, gold is reintroduced on stage in act 4, scene 1 to dramatize Anne Boleyn's lavish coronation. The detailed description of the scenery dominated by gold and silver is reminiscent of the sumptuous court masques performed under James I's reign, more precisely those performed on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1613 to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine. The emphasis on gold through stage costumes and scenery is echoed by Katherine's spiritual vision of characters dressed in white and gold in act 4 scene 2. The ironical dialogue between these two opposed scenes brings to the fore the contradictory values of gold in *King Henry VIII*.

This study aims at exploring the complex and intricate meanings of gold in this play by primarily relying on historical recordings and mythological readings. The subtle references to the use of gold in the visual arts, more precisely miniatures and the art of jewellery, bring to light the aesthetic as well as political values of gold in early modern England. The influence of court masques with their lavish glittering sceneries on Shakespeare's writing reveals the evolution of the dramatic genre and the Jacobean stage.

À l'inverse de *Timon of Athens* et *The Merchant of Venice*, où l'or joue un rôle prédominant, la dernière pièce de Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, représentée en 1613, offre une vision différente de ce métal précieux. En tant que couleur, l'or symbolise non seulement la royauté et la spiritualité, mais aussi l'hypocrisie religieuse et une ambition dévorante. Dès la scène liminaire, l'or est dénigré par Norfolk qui dénonce la somptuosité excessive affichée lors du traité de paix signé par les rois Henri VIII et François I<sup>er</sup> au camp du drap d'or près de Calais, une rencontre politique orchestrée par l'ambitieux cardinal Wolsey. Après la chute de Wolsey, l'or est matérialisé sur scène à l'acte 4 lors du couronnement d'Anne Boleyn. Les détails fournis par les didascalies démontrent la domination de l'or et de l'argent, des couleurs qui évoquent les masques de cour somptueux organisés sous le règne du roi Jacques I<sup>er</sup>, en particulier le 14 février 1613 à l'occasion du mariage de la princesse Élisabeth avec l'Électeur du palatin. L'or, présent dans le décor et sur les costumes des personnages, apparaît à nouveau à la scène 2 de l'acte 4 au moment où Catherine d'Aragon a une vision : des personnages vêtus de blanc et d'or apparaissent alors sur scène. Ce dialogue ironique entre les deux scènes met en exergue les valeurs contradictoires de l'or dans *King Henry VIII*.

Cet article propose une étude des significations et de la représentation de l'or dans cette pièce en s'appuyant sur diverses sources. Au-delà des récits historiques, la mythologie, l'orfèvrerie ou encore l'héraldique permettent de mettre en lumière une mise en scène de ce métal précieux très originale et assez inattendue chez Shakespeare au regard des représentations de l'or dans ses pièces précédentes.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** gold, golden age, masque, phoenix, royalty, James I, Elizabeth I

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