In Act 1, Scene 1 of *Henry VIII*, the audience encounters two English noblemen, Buckingham and Norfolk, chatting on the spectacular meeting of Henry VIII and the French king at the Field of the Cloth of Gold which was one of the most phenomenal events in early modern western diplomacy. The Duke of Buckingham is here apologetic for his not being part of the chivalric, inter-national event due to his “untimely ague.” Buckingham’s position in relation to the royal affair is not much different from that of the audience in terms that what happened is re-presented to him via Norfolk’s reporting and hearing. This opening scene that Edward Berry calls wittily "a lesson in perception"(231), I would claim, is a showcase for the play with its implicit reference to history writing (and historical representation) and its complexity. What is here foregrounded is the fact that the audience’s, as well as Buckingham’s, perception of the past is based upon what
they hear—or upon its narrative representation. Norfolk’s account of and Buckingham’s response to what happened in the vales “‘Twixt Guines and Andres” do direct our attention both to the rhetorical aspect and epistemological problem of representing the past. From the outset of the performance, the scene is to remind the audience of the fact that we are always already bound to the stories that are re-told or re-presented in the name of history. In this presentation, therefore, I will attempt to argue that Henry VIII of Shakespeare as well as John Fletcher embarks upon the issue of history or historical truth as a representation which is always subject to the interpretive process of writing and narrating, certainly a critical matter that any historical writer might have taken seriously in early modern England.

To Buckingham who missed the actual event, Norfolk first eulogizes with gusto the royal meeting as a magnificent affair which is “Beyond thought’s compass”(1.1.36). In the immediate dialogue of Norfolk and Buckingham, however, the pompous verbal portrayal of the regal conference quickly degenerates into an indictment against an ill-advised display of royal extravaganza. Though the French and English kings are initially compared to suns(1.1.6, 33, 56), “the earthly glory” of their encounter is immediately vilified as “this vanity” that only does “minister communication of/ A most poor issue”(1.1.85-87). The pomposity and triumph of the event is characterized as a “costly treaty” which “swallowed so much treasure” and did lend itself “Only to [Wolsey’s] pomp as well in France/ As here at home” (1.1.163-66). In the same breath, Henry’s triumphal stance is compared to that of Bevis, a medieval romance hero whose dubious heroics are more or less folkloric and demystified in early modern England. Here becomes the audience already unsure about how to think of their representation of royal business. Was it a political triumph of royalties or just a hollow, vain-glorious waste(i.e., "fierce vanities")?

The audience becomes unsure of how to take Norfolk’s report, which is somewhat ironic in consideration of the play’s subtitle—“All is True.” Since there