

# **A Psycholinguistic Analysis to King Henry the VIII's Selected Poems and Lyrics**

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## **Abstract:**

Reading and studying the early Renaissance, it might seem out of place to consider King Henry VIII as an author, or even to consider that a monarch such as Henry chose to occupy himself with writing. Yet it is not in the least odd that Henry wrote. Henry VIII was a man drawn to poetic expression, even spontaneously so. Reading King Henry the VIII's character in history books reveal the fact that there was a foul poet aside, whose poetic indecency results in an increased distance from the monarch to something well known in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, but less so today: Henry's literary pursuits, and particularly his love of lyrics as a writer, a composer, and a performer. In the present study, there is an attempt of revealing something of the Henry's poetic character.

King Henry the VIII experienced many events in his life from his early childhood till his death. These events affected his physiological condition which had a great influence on his writings. Throughout this study, some of his poems and lyrics will be analyzed in a way that shows the effectiveness of these events and psychological conditions on the language of the poems and lyrics he used. The paper presents a psycholinguistics analysis to these poems and analysis.

**KEY WORDS:** Psycholinguistic analysis, King Henry VIII, poetic indecency, psychological conditions.

## **Introduction**

Poetry is nerved with ideas, blooded with emotions, held together by the delicate, tough skin of words. —Paul Engle (1908 -1991). Many people have experienced the astounding and transformational power of a beautiful poem. However, little empirical research has been done to examine the textual features or mental processes that engender such a sensation. In this paper, we propose a psycholinguistic framework for analyzing textual features that may be responsible for the poetic beauty in the poems of King Henry VIII. Previous research focused on quantifying poetic devices such as rhyme and meter (Hayward, 1996; Greene et al., 2010; Genzel et al., 2010), tracking stylistic influence between authors (Forstall et al., 2011), or classifying poems based on the poet and style (Kaplan & Blei, 2007; He et al., 2007; Fang et al., 2009). In this paper, we aim to show the affect of the

psychological condition of King Henry VIII on his writings (Poems and lyrics).

Generally, one demands two things of a poem. Firstly, it must be a well-made verbal object that does honor to the language in which it is written. Secondly, it must say something significant about a reality common to us all, but perceived from a unique perspective —W. H. Auden (1907 - 1973). This may not be the case of Henry's poems and lyrics. Nevertheless, they own these two features to some extent.

### **King Henry VIII**

Henry VIII (28 June 1491 – 28 January 1547) was King of England from 21 April 1509 until his death. He was Lord, and later assumed the Kingship, of Ireland, and continued the nominal claim by English monarchs to the Kingdom of France. Henry was the second monarch of the Tudor dynasty, succeeding his father, Henry VII. He became king when he was only 17 years old. His first wife named Catherine whom he married after he became the king. She was married to Henry's brother before he died. Henry and Catherine had six children, but only one girl, Mary, lived. King Henry wanted a son. In his religion (Catholic), is no divorce, so he asked the head of the church (the Pope) to cancel, or annul, his marriage. The Pope refused because it is against the religion. This made King Henry very angry and declared that the Pope didn't have any authority in England anymore and declared himself as the head of the English church. Henry divorced his first wife and married Anne Boleyn (his long last lover) in 1533, when he was 42 years old. The English Parliament passed a law that said that the King had the most power, or authority. Then he could officially call Anne his wife, and she became the Queen of England. He continued to help pass laws to separate his country from the Catholic Church. Henry created a new church called the Church of England. Everyone in England had to belong to the Church of England. Henry and Anne had a daughter, named Elizabeth I. Later when he got fed up with Anne killed her because he convinced himself that she was having a romantic relationship with someone else. He married Jane Seymour his third wife, who died soon after their son, Edward VI, was born. His fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was a German princess. He killed her because he wasn't able to love her and he was always angry at her. Henry's fifth wife, Catherine Howard, also accused of having a relationship with another man, so he killed her. His sixth and last wife, Catherine Parr, lived until after Henry died in 1547. (Wikipedia)

Henry will always be remembered for having so many wives killed, but his biggest influence was starting the Church of England and ending the Roman Catholic Church in England. The Church of England's beliefs and practices are similar to the Catholic Church, but the head of the church is the King of England instead of the Pope, like the Roman Catholic Church.

Today, the Church of England is still the official church in England, but the people can choose to belong to other religions. (World Book Online)

There is a chasm between the ways historians see Henry VIII and the way his subjects saw him, as written in history books. It would be wrong to reject the latter because today we are so much better informed. Both characterizations have to be held in tension. Fallible though Henry was, modern criticism cannot destroy the reality that to his people he was a great king

Henry VIII has the distinction of being the first English king to use vernacular courtly verse as a device for both talking about and actually doing politics; specifically. Henry's literary pursuits, and particularly his love of lyrics as a writer, a composer, and a performer. It might seem out of place to consider Henry VIII as an author, or even to consider that a monarch such as Henry chose to occupy himself with writing. Yet it is not in the least odd that Henry wrote. "If we are to believe Erasmus, Henry began his literary patronage as an eight-year-old in the summer of 1499, and, therefore, was already at this time aware of the role of the writer in the early Tudor court, and also of the reputation of the continental humanist who reports Henry's earliest beneficence". (Herman, 1993, pp.172-173)

Henry VIII was descended from a traditional English heritage. His ancestors included Yorkist nobility, minor English and Welsh knights, the illegitimate Lancastrian offspring of the mistress of John of Gaunt, and the European aristocratic connections of Jacquetta St Pol and Catherine de Valois. Genetic problems have been proposed as an explanation for his psychiatric and reproductive problems. Henry VIII as a young man appeared to be an ideal king; he was pleasant, jovial, gregarious and athletic. He delighted in sports, particularly jousting and martial arts. He wanted to fight in battle and become a military hero like his grandfather, Edward IV. Henry was also an intellectual, interested in theology, music and literary arts. He enjoyed the company of women and excelled on the dance floor. However, before his fortieth birthday, he began to undergo a personality change, becoming one of the worst of English monarchs, a paranoid, egotistical and brutal tyrant (Stride and Floro, 2013).

In the search for the real Henry the hardest question is to explain why was he as he was. The evidence is almost all second-hand; Henry left no diary and only a handful of his more than a thousand letters are at all personal. As the case of every human being there is the influence of childhood, unfortunately there is little evidence for Henry the child and the adolescent. Was he repressed, as some ambassadors in history books say? How was he affected by the early death of his mother and elder brother? What is the relationship between that laughing happy child and the man he became? What did he really feel about marrying his sister-in-law Katherine?

The mental decline of King Henry VIII from being a happy, charismatic and athletic young man into an increasingly paranoid, brutal tyrant in later life, ever more concerned at his lack of one or more male heirs, has attracted many medical diagnostic theories (Stride and Floro, 2013).

### **The Influence of Psychology on Writing Poems**

Studies have shown that poetry allows mental health patients to explore and reinterpret their emotions in useful ways. Through reading and writing poetry, patients are able to freely express their thoughts without the constraints of form and logic (Harrower, 1972). On the other hand, critics of poetry therapy have suggested that writing poetry may be harmful to psychological health, because it allows the poet to immerse herself in an inexplicable emotion without having to make sense or order out of it (Stirman & Pennebaker, 2001). For example, Silverman & Will (1986) claimed that Sylvia Plath's poetry may have undermined her control mechanisms and contributed to her death.

Does Henry's skill in writing poems and lyrics make more references to his psychological states and explore his emotional world with more depth and intensity? We examine this question by analyzing the words of some selected poems and lyrics written by Henry VIII using the connection between his psychological condition and the language he used. Our analysis is used to facilitate the understanding of Henry's psychological and emotional states through text analysis. As a result, most of the categories involve mental activity, words related to affective, social, and psychological processes. Henry's associations to understand and truly experience a new psychological and emotional condition truly affected his choice of words. He, like skilled poets and writers, was able to pick out specific sensory details that evoke deeper abstractions and generalizations.

Studies have shown that mental imagery facilitates relational association between concepts (Bower, 1970). Furthermore, Jessen et al. (2000) found neural correlates that suggest that concrete nouns are processed differently in the brain than abstract nouns. One of the reasons why we find poetic imagery striking may be due to the psychological power of imagery to evoke rich associations formed by culture and personal experience.

We assume that great poets produce poems that experts would consider better and more beautiful than poetry written by amateurs like King Henry. Although there might be exceptions, since for example experts may consider some poems written by amateur poets to be very beautiful and sophisticated, these pre-existing categories for the most part should be a good approximation of expert opinions. That is why King Henry's poems and lyrics are not so different than these great poets' poems and lyrics because they too are affected by the writer's (King Henry) psychological

conditions which he experienced through his stressful life. The ups and downs of his emotional life and the hard burden of being the monarch had huge influence on his use of words in his writings. To measure the effect of psychology on the likelihood of a poem being written by the amateur poet King Henry, the selected poems and lyrics are analyzed psycholinguistically.

### **Analysis**

The Psychological state of King Henry affected the writing of his poetry and lyrics especially his love letters. There are two aspects of his writing; first, there is always hesitance between two contexts; positive and negative where he uses linguistic items conforming to these two aspects, second, there is change in the use of the grammatical categories of the era of Tudors which explains that he was seeking for new horizons by emphasizing certain concepts and feelings. This maybe the case that Henry was seeking a balance between the internal pursuit of bettering one's own nature with humility and morality and the external control of the physical image (Snyman, 2013, p.9).

In his love letter 1, he is hesitant since he uses disadvantage and advantage as negative and positive items. He is not sure whether his beloved is really in love with him or not. He is seeking a deep love. Although, he is a king, he is restless, and wants that love of his mistress so much and then he promises to be her servant and would cast off the rest of the lovers out of his heart and thoughts. He is using extreme words to show his love and willing to be her loyal lover forever.

*In turning over in my  
Mind the contents of  
Your last letters, I have  
Put myself into great  
Agony, not knowing how to interpret  
Them, whether to my disadvantage,  
As you show in some places, or to my  
Advantage as I understand them in  
Some others, beseeching you earnestly  
To let me know expressly your whole  
mind as to the love between us two.*

*.... does not forbid me) I promise you  
that not only the name shall be given  
you, but also that I will take you  
for my only mistress, casting off all  
others besides you out of my thoughts  
and affections, and serve you only.*

*of tiring you. Written by the hand  
of him who would willingly remain  
yours, H. R.*

In love letter 3, again he calls himself servant to show his deep longing for his mistress love. The word servant is repeated twice ‘true servant’ and ‘your servant’. Yet, he often shows that he is important and brave, for example in: ‘a buck killed late last night by my own hand’. So, killing is mentioned in the letter, as he also mentions himself as a hunter. He wants his lover to remember him even when eating it.

*answer to my last letter; yet it seems  
to me that it belongs to a true servant  
(seeing that otherwise he can know  
nothing) to inquire the health of his  
mistress, and to acquit myself of the  
duty of a true servant, I send you this  
letter, beseeching you to apprise me  
of your welfare, which I pray to God*

*to remember me, I send you, by the  
bearer of this, a buck killed late last  
night by my own hand, hoping that  
when you eat of it you may think of  
the hunter;*

In love letter 4, there is image of surrendering his heart to his lover’s hand, he is also showing his distance from his lover by comparing it to longer days when the sun is more distant and the days are hotter. Here, he uses of metaphor about the sun, “the longer the days are, the more distant is the sun, and nevertheless hotter; so is with our love”. Since by absence they were kept a distance from each other, yet it retains its fervour, especially on his side. He uses positive and negative words such as ‘absence’ and ‘distance’ on one hand and other words such as ‘fervour’. There is also connection between the words showing his psychological state since he uses ‘pain of absence’, ‘I am forced to suffer’, and ‘the suffering would be intolerable’. He mentions his gift, a bracelet with his picture and ends the letter with ‘your loyal servant’.

*MY MISTRESS & FRIEND,  
my heart and I surrender our-*

*selves into your hands, beseeching  
you to hold us commended to your  
favour, and that by absence your af-*

*is this: the longer the days are, the  
more distant is the sun, and never-  
theless the hotter; so is it with our  
love, for by absence we are kept a  
distance from one another, and yet  
it retains its fervour, at least on my*

*suring you that on my part the pain  
of absence is already too great for  
me; and when I think of the increase  
of that which I am forced to suffer,  
it would be almost intolerable, but  
for the firm hope I have of your un-  
changeable affection for me: and to*

*place, if it should please you. This is  
from the hand of your loyal servant  
and friend,*

*H.R.*

In his love letter 11, Henry is again longing to his love that he is a way from her, he is telling her what happened in her absence. Again he is using extreme expressions to confirm his love by saying ‘for all the gold in the world’, ‘clog your conscience or mine’. At the beginning, he uses ‘mine own’, and this shows that he wants to own her and already takes her as his own.

*SINCE your last letters, mine own  
darling, Walter Welshe, Master*

*long ago. Wherefore I would not, for  
all the gold in the world, clog your  
conscience nor mine to make her ruler*

*Written with the hand de votre seul,  
H.R.*

In love letter 14, Henry starts his letter again by (mine own, sweet heart) which shows how obsessed he was with this love trying to prove

something about himself as a man. He seemed very insecure in many ways; that is why whenever he writes he assures Anne that he feels lonely and sad at times when he is a way from her. The words reflecting this feeling are (great elengeness, departing, time's longer, grieved me, in my hand).

Another point is that he truly was obsessed with Anne, he had a strong desire to have her. He was emotionally depended on women or he needed to conquer the opposite sex (history.heydence.blogspot.com). In the second half of the poem, he comforts himself that his pains would be half removed. Another point is that Henry was also seeking physical love which is clean in the last two lines (whish myself in sweet heart's harms, whose pretty dukkys I trust shortly to kiss):

*MINE own SWEETHEART,  
this shall be to advertise you  
of the great elengeness that I find here  
since your departing ; for, I ensure you  
methinketh the time longer since  
your departing now last, than I was*

*But now that I am coming to-  
wards you, methinketh my pains be  
half removed ; and also I am right well*

*my head; wishing myself (especially  
an evening) in my sweetheart's arms,  
whose pretty dukkys I trust shortly  
to kiss.*

*Written by the hand of him that  
was, is, and shall be yours by his own  
will,  
H.R.*

The Lyrics:

In his lyrics, again Henry seeks for spiritual elevation which is clear in the lyric *Green Groweth the Holly*, when he searches optimism through using spiritual and hopeful images such as *Green Groweth the Holly*, which may be interpreted as being green makes everything holly. He compares himself with green color and holly. He does not change his love to his lady as green is not changed to another color. He is seeking to be always faithful and promises to be hers only.

The linguistic items show his deep feeling for his lady to be a true lover. The adjectives, 'green', 'holy', 'faithful', and the verb 'promise'

show how desperate he was for showing his deep inner feeling or his thirst for that love. Although the word ‘faithful’ is not overt in the lyric, it is implied indirectly by:

*From all others only  
Her I me betake*

There is, also, ‘mine own’ used which is unique in that ‘mine’, and ‘own’ have the same meaning but used to emphasize and in turn shows his psychological state. He wants her that much and never gives up.

Another explanation is that this lyric is traditionally associated with the winter season especially Christmas. The words ‘Holy’ and ‘ivy’ are also associated with males and females, respectively. Together they are often seen in strife over issues such as mastery. Additionally, ‘holy’ also contains associations with foresters and hunters as well as with Christ, and ‘ivy’ with ‘Virgin’. Here, Henry draws on some aspects of the traditional ‘holy and ivy’ carols, but focuses on the amity of the two, their inseparability in adverse circumstances and holly’s invariability. Herein, the lover on impending departure, assures his lady of his constancy in love. The word ‘holy’ is proverbial, with reference to constancy in “Qui nunquam fabricat mendacia, bot quhen the holyne growing green” (Dunbar, 1893) (Cited in Siemenes, 2013). Through the words ‘betake’, ‘entrust’, and ‘commit’, there is a use of departure and the words ‘hath my heart’, and ‘ever shall’ where Henry associates himself with Christ through the vine (Greene, 1935).

In *where to should I express*. This is a song of departure, Henry explicitly shows that he is impatient and has grief in his heart and he is desperate for meeting his love by using the expressions ‘my inward heaviness’, he is also thinking and feeling pity for himself that he is always longing to see her, until they meet again:

*It is to me great pain  
Thus longe to endure*

The use of the words ‘wan and blo’ meaning pale and blue is showing the pale completion of the lover suffering in the throes of loves pain (Siemens, 2013, p. 104).

*The daisy delectable  
The violet wan and blo*

In *Whoso that will for gracë sue*, Henry is showing grace and what people need to be graceful; being true lovers in heart and indeed. He also explains here that people who say love is ill are those who are not clever and have no skill. He thinks that love is divine and given by God and therefore is perfect between any two people. The linguistic items used show

this deep feeling, for grace are as ‘true’, ‘heart’, ‘deed’, ‘perfect’, and ‘eschew’. Here the lyric presents an argument of justification against those who ‘can no skylle’ and therefore ‘yt dysdayne’ (Siemens, 2013, p. 122).

*Whoso that will for grace sue  
His intent must needs be true,  
And love her in heart and deed,  
Else it were pity that he should speed.  
Many one saith that love is ill,  
But those be they which can no skill.*

*Or else because they may not obtain,  
Hey would that other should it disdain.*

*Green Sleeves:*

This lyric is a traditional English folk song famous during the Tudor era. The words of the lyric reflect the relationship of the king and Ann Boleyn. He had an unrequited love for her and she kept him waiting to return his love. He was frustrated when he said ‘why did you so enrapture me?’; it shows his readiness to give the lady green sleeves anything, she wanted: the clothes, the jewels, as in ‘which cast my purse well- favorable’, and ‘liveried men waited up on her’ all aware of the game she was playing. Thus, he was confused as whether the lady green sleeve, would ever love him ([www.sixwives.info](http://www.sixwives.info)).

This lyric also shows his desire for natural love as well since the word green has sexual connotations as in ‘green gown’, a reference to the way that grass might be seen on lady’s dress if she had love outside (douglass miedt.com). Another interpretation is that green was the color of lightness in in love which is echoed in ‘green sleeves is my delight’ (douglass miedt.com). Another explanation is quite the opposite, green indicated truth and fidelity, for example, a knight may give a green armband to his true love to wear. This indicates his devotion, giving rise to ‘wearing your heart on your sleeve’, meaning to show your true feeling. It could be a nick name. Thus it remains a mystery.

*Alas, my love, ye do me wrong,  
To cast me off discourteously:  
And I have lovèd you so long,  
Delighting in your company!  
Greensleeves was all my joy,  
Greensleeves was my delight;  
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,  
And who but Lady Greensleeves.*

*I bought thee kerchers to thy head,  
That were wrought fine and gallantly;  
I kept thee both at board and bed,  
Which cost my purse well-favour'dly.*

*I bought thee petticoats of the best,  
The cloth so fine as might be;  
I gave thee jewels for thy chest,  
And all this cost I spent on thee.*

*Well! I will pray to God on high,  
That thou my constancy mayst see,  
And that, yet once before I die,  
Thou wilt vouchsafe to love me!  
Greensleeves, &c.*

*Greensleeves, now farewell! adieu!  
God I pray to prosper thee!  
For I am still thy lover true:  
Come once again and love me!*

*Without Dyscord:*

In this lyric, there is exposition concerning the unity of lovers from ‘dole of lovys pagne’, which is commonly associated with the pagne of the courtly love tradition ‘dyscard’ to the unity of hearts and souls of the lovers ‘a corde’. Addressed to lovers it concludes with a prayer for ‘sure love’, where the lover sues (Siemens, 2013, p. 113).

The words and expressions used show his loneliness and need of help as in the use of ‘sole, soul’, in the sense that he as a soul is alone when separated from each other. He, on some occasions, also needed help. At other occasions he is hopeless when denied saying “what remedy what remedy”.

*Without discord  
And both accord  
Now let us be;  
Both hearts alone  
To set in one  
Best seemeth me.  
For when one soul  
Is in the dole  
Of lovë's pain,  
Then help must have*

*Himself to save  
And love to obtain.*

*Where love so sues  
There no heart rues,  
But condescend;  
If contrary,  
What remedy?  
God it amend.*

### Grammatical Analysis

A number of grammatical aspects appear in his love letters and lyrics as in:

1. “my own” often appears in the opening lines as well as ‘myne own sweetheart, and ‘good sweetheart’. For example, ‘mine own’ is used often in determiner function as in:

Love letter 11:

*SINCE your last letters, mine own  
darling, Walter Welshe, Master*

Love letter 16:

*Mine own darling for lack of time  
But that I would you were in mine*

In his lyric *Green Growth the Holly*:

*A dien, mine own lady,  
A dien, my special*

2. Another feature of the love letters is the absence of the royal ‘we’. The king consistently refers to himself in the first person. He also uses ‘you’ not ‘thou’ to refer to Anne or he says the French form ‘votre’. ‘Thou’ was used by the social superiors in addressing their inferiors. So by using ‘you’, the king avoided the attention to differentiate between the Monarch and his sweet heart (Nevalainen and Yliopisto 2003, p. 127- 128). Also in *When should I express*, the use of ‘you’ and ‘me’:

*Make you fast and sure  
It is to me great pain*

3. The relative pronoun ‘which’ is used with reference to human antecedents as in love letter 11:

*Mr. Bell bein present; which hath certi-  
fied me that, for a truth, she had con-*

Also in (*Whoso that will all feats obtain*):

*Many one saith that love is ill,  
But those be they which can no skill*

4. He also uses the form ‘be’ in the plural form as in:

*By mercy of God, the rest of us  
Yet be well*

5. The monarch uses multiple negation as in love letter 11:

Nor, I trust, you would  
Not that neither for brother  
Nor sister, I should so disdain  
Mine honor or conscience

6. Henry uses the third person singular verb forms ‘hath’ and ‘doth’ as in love letter 11:

*For you best know that air doth  
Best with you*

Also in (*Green Growth the Holly*):

*Green growth the Holly, so doth the ivy  
Who hath my heart truly*

7. In all his love letters, he ends the letter as written with ‘the hand of your servant’, ‘friend’, ‘loyal servant’, ‘yours’, ‘de votre seul’, etc.

### **Conclusions**

1. There is an interesting distinction, in the selected poems and lyrics, between words with positive and negative outlooks and connotations versus words that reference positive and negative emotions. While the two pairs of categories are strongly correlated, they capture different aspects of a text’s emotional content. The positive and negative outlook categories contain many words that are not emotions but may evoke certain emotional attitudes.
2. King Henry does not use words that provide specific sensory details. He uses words to convey deeper meaning in his literary works, and he pays close attention to these patterns in order to go beneath the surface ordinary language.

3. King Henry use significantly more words concerned with his emotions at the time he wrote each poem. He embraces his human impulse to specify. He extracts and reports unique details that single out each experience that affected his poem from the rest.
4. King Henry poems and lyrics suggest that he is more likely eager to show and tell his emotions and the psychological condition he is experiencing at the time he was writing each piece.
5. Henry displays both his personal and his professional virility. Henry's lyrics were (at some level) pure entertainment, describing and inventing a world of pastime with good company.

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## تحليل لغويّ نفسيّ لمختارات من الأشعار والأشعار المغنات

للملك هنري الثامن

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### الملخص:

ليس من السهل التفكير عند قراءة ودراسة عصر النهضة بان هنالك ملك مثل هنري الثامن يشغل نفسه بكتابة الشعر. في الحقيقة ذاك الملك كان منجذباً جداً بالتعبير الشعرية، و عند دراسة التاريخ يجد المرء ان هنري كان ضليعاً بالأدب و اشعار القرن السادس عشر و بداية القرن السابع عشر. اشعار هنري خاصة المغنات تثبت بانه كان ادبياً و شاعراً. البحث محاولة لكشف شخصية هنري الشعرية.

الملك هنري الثامن اختبر العديد من الاحداث منذ طفولته لحد مماته، هذه الاحداث اثرت على حالته النفسية وبالتالي على اشعاره. خلال هذه الدراسة بعض من اشعاره و المغنات ستحلل لتظهر تأثيرات الاحداث و حالته النفسية على اللغة التي استعملها في هذه الاشعار. البحث يقدم تحليل لغوي نفسي لها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحليل لغوي نفسي، الملك هنري الثامن، قدرات شعرية، حالات نفسية.