HOLINSHED AND THE TUDOR HISTORICAL DRAMA

THE USE OF HOLINSHED'S CHRONICLES
IN
THREE TUDOR HISTORICAL DRAMAS

BY

MARYANN RUTH LISK, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October, 1971

MASTER OF ARTS (1971)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Use of Holinshed's Chronicles in Three Tudor Historical Dramas

AUTHOR: Maryann Ruth Lisk, B.A. (Trent University)

SUPERVISED: Dr. R. W. Vince

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 96

PREFACE

The second edition of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England Scotland and Ireland has long been acknowledged as the primary source for Shakespeare's history plays. Works like W. G. Boswell-Stone's Shakespeare's Holinshed (1896) and A. and J. Nicolls' Holinshed's Chronicles as Used in Shakespeare's Plays have made relevant passages from Holinshed easily available to the interested student. It seems to me, however, that the existing appraisals of the Chronicles are rather too cursory, in that they acknowledge the work's importance without discussing its exact nature and treat it from an exclusively literary rather than a historical viewpoint. Moreover, very little attention has been paid to its influence upon the non-Shakespearan historical drama of the early 1590's. Apart from Irving Ribner's influential book The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (1956), recent published work on these plays has concentrated on their role as interesting preludes to the greater work of Shakespeare, rather than as significant contributions in their own right. Work on the two anonymous plays Thomas of Woodstock and The Troublesome Raigne of King John has indeed been scant, aside from their inclusion in source studies of Shakespeare's Richard II and King John. Marlowe's Edward II

has fared considerably better as the work of an outstanding dramatist, but the emphasis here has been on its significance to the Marlowe canon and to Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy. In all three cases discussion of the use of Holinshed has usually been confined to the statement that his work provided most of the necessary material.

In the following chapters I will attempt to redress the balance somewhat by offering a detailed comparison between Holinshed and the three plays I have mentioned. Chapter One places the Chronicles within the context of Tudor historical thought by way of a brief summary of the basic principles of sixteenth-century historiography and their influence upon Holinshed and his contemporaries. Chapters Two through Four will compare each of the plays with the Chronicles in an attempt to determine the dramatist's approach to his source material and the degree to which Holinshed's interpretation may have influenced that approach. Finally, Chapter Five will offer my conclusions as to the existence of any common influence of Holinshed's work upon the plays I have discussed and the advantages of the Chronicles as a source for the historical drama.

I have tried as far as possible to use facsimile editions of my primary texts. All quotations from the Chronicles are taken from Volume Two of the 1965 facsimile by AMS Press of an edition printed in London in 1807. For Thomas of Woodstock and Edward II I have used the Malone

Society Reprints of 1929 and 1925 respectively, while for The Troublesome Raigne of King John I have used Geoffrey Bullough's 1962 edition in the fourth volume of his Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

I wish to thank Dr. R. W. Vince for his assistance in the preparation of this thesis.

CONTENTS

I

HOLINSHED'S CHRONICLES

Like many other writers of this period, Tudor historiographers exhibited in their work a curious mixture of past and present. From the past they inherited the medieval Christian viewpoint of the monastic chroniclers, who looked upon history as the demonstration of God's plan for mankind, and as a valuable storehouse of examples for the encouragement of personal morality.[1] Writing in Latin for a select group of readers, these chroniclers attempted to compile a world history beginning with the Creation and proceeding by way of a year-by-year narrative to the present. Because they lacked a sense of anachronism and a sufficiently skeptical attitude towards their sources, they rarely attempted to organize or examine their material.[2] Furthermore, their belief in God's absolute predominance in the affairs of men seriously impaired their ability to speculate objectively on the human role in historical events.[3] Consequently, the medieval chronicles are for the most part made up of a loosely-structured amalgam of fact and legend whose value as "historical documents" in the modern sense is at best very limited. These characteristics

---

[1]F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought, San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1967, p. ix.

[2]Levy, p. ix.

[3]Levy, p. ix

found their way from the Latin monastic chronicles into the vernacular histories and town chronicles of the late fifteenth century,[4] and from there into the works of the Tudor historians, where they exerted a prevailing influence that all the innovations of the Tudor period failed to erase.

Two events are chiefly responsible for stimulating the advances in sixteenth-century historiography. First, the rise of English humanism at the beginning of the century brought about the importation of historical views already well established in Italy and France. The revival of classicism led to a re-examination of the Greek and Roman historians whose emphasis on the human role in past events[5] helped to influence a shift towards a more secular, politically-oriented historical outlook.[6] At the same time, a renewed interest in Britain's Roman and Saxon heritage brought about the rise of antiquarianism and the consequent discovery of more accurate information about the past.[7] The arrival of Continental scholars like the Italian historian Polydore Vergil helped to introduce new techniques of history-writing, such as the concept, first used in Vergil's Anglica Historia,

---

[4]The two most influential of these vernacular histories were Higden's Polychronicon and the Brut, both of which were among the first books to be printed by Caxton. (Levy, p. 10)

[5]M. M. Reese, The Cease of Majesty, London: Edward Arnold, 1961, p. 3.

[6]Levy, p. 7.

[7]Levy, pp. 200-201.

of organizing the events of English history around the reigns of the kings.[8] Even as these influences were making themselves felt, a second, more revolutionary force arrived to disrupt the old order. The coming of the Reformation led to a greater interest in history as political and religious polemic, as Protestant apologists such as John Bale reinterpreted the events of England's past to demonstrate the existence of a thriving anti-Papal tradition.[9] The cumulative influence of both these events helped to destroy the medieval concept of world history, and to replace it with a more secular, political English history, organized around the personality of each successive monarch, whether historical or legendary, and concentrated upon the glorification of English political and religious institutions.

Yet as I mentioned earlier, the innovations of the Tudor period did not entirely supersede the medieval concept of Providentially-dominated history. On the contrary, this concept successfully merged with the sixteenth-century focus on human affairs to form a view that acknowledged God's will as the supreme cause of events, and at the same time sought practical political lessons in the secondary human causes.[10]

---

[8]Levy, pp. 170-72.

[9]F. Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, pp. 17-19.

[10]Levy, p. 4.

Perhaps the finest example of this view may be found in Edward Halle's account of the Wars of the Roses,[11] which demonstrates that Divine Providence was the primary feature in the founding of the Tudor dynasty and analyzes the political reasons for each King's success or failure. This viewpoint fulfilled the demands of moral and political didacticism which to the sixteenth-century historian outranked in importance the necessity for historical accuracy and objectivity.[12] As one commentator has put it:

> At the Renaissance classical didacticism . . . joined hands with the medieval belief in providence to produce a highly specialized and tendentious form of historical writing that has no exact parallel in any other century.[13]

In the midst of all these changes the popular chroniclers of the sixteenth century maintained a surprisingly conservative stand. Of course, a few of the new developments did find their way into the chronicles by the end of the century,[14] and the antiquarian discoveries significantly added to the amount of material available to the chronicler.[15]

---

[11] One of the best summaries of Halle's view and its significance is to be found in Shakespeare's History Plays by E. M. W. Tillyard, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962, pp. 45-9.

[12] Ernest William Talbert, The Problem of Order, Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1962, p. 127.

[13] Reese, p. 11.

[14] Levy, pp. 170-72.

[15] Levy, pp. 200-201.

But while they made use of some of the new techniques, these sixteenth-century compilers seem to have put little faith in the accompanying tendency towards selectivity and historical skepticism that marked the work of Polydore Vergil and his contemporaries. As F. J. Levy points out, this conservatism can probably be attributed to the chronicler's idea of a moral obligation to the readers. Because he viewed history as a storehouse of examples useful for moral and political instruction, he tended to include all details, however trivial or apocryphal they might seem to be, in the hope that they might contribute something to the reader's edification. The question of judgement was left almost entirely up to the reader,[16] while the chronicler sought as far as possible to remain strictly a recorder who apologized for unintentional intrusions of his own opinion.[17] Consequently, the chronicles of the late sixteenth century bear a relatively close resemblance to their medieval predecessors, the monastic records, and the London city chronicles,[18] in that they consist of a loosely-structured, year-by-year narrative of events, occasionally interspersed with bits of moralizing, where reports of natural phenomena and price changes take their place beside accounts of national and foreign affairs. Such works enjoyed considerable popularity among a citizenry whose demand for

---

[16] Levy, p. 169.

[17] A good example of this practice may be found in Holinshed's "Preface to the Reader" (pp. ix-x).

[18] Levy, pp. 17-18.

historical information of all sorts made it particularly receptive to this type of writing. The following extract from John Stow's A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles best outlines the primary reasons for this popularity:

> Amongste other Bookes, which are in this our learned age published in great nombers, there are fewe, eyther for the honestie of the matters, or commoditie whiche they bringe to the common-wealthe, or for the plesauntnes of the studie and reading, to be preferred before the Chronicles and Histories, what examples of men deservinge immortalitye, of exploits worthy great renowne, of vertuous living of the posteritie to be embraced, of wise handling of waighty affayres, dilligently to be marked and aptly to be applyed; what incouragement of nobilitie to noble feates, what discouragement of unnatural subjectes from wicked treasons, pernitious rebellions and damnable Doctrines: to conclude, what perswasions to honesty, godlines, & vertue of all sort, what diswasions from the contrarie is not plentifully in them to be found?[19]

In answer to the demand several popular chronicles made their appearance during the sixteenth century. They varied widely in quality from the rather pedestrian work of the printer Richard Grafton to Halle's influential account of the Lancaster-York conflict. But the most ambitious and comprehensive work of this type made its first appearance in the year 1577, with the publication of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland.

According to the dedicatory letter to Sir William Cecil (v-vii) the work was at first designed to encompass a complete history and description of the world together with

---

[19] found in Levy, p. 168.

maps and illustrations. However, the death of its originator, the printer Reginald Wolfe, and the demands of its financial backers forced Wolfe's successor Holinshed to limit his scope to that of British history and geography. Holinshed was himself responsible for the chronicles of England and Scotland, while William Harrison wrote the description of these two countries, and Richard Stanyhurst the history and description of Ireland.[20] In 1587, several years after Holinshed's death, a group of editors under the direction of one John Vowell, alias Hooker, brought out a second version, the one used by the dramatists of the 1590's. This edition is considerably larger than the original, but it unfortunately suffers from a lack of coherence that has done little to enhance its reputation among historians and literary critics.[21] Yet its comprehensiveness makes it a mine of information for the dramatist to fashion according to his own tastes.

In his "Preface to the Reader" (ix-xii) Holinshed outlines his methods in the manner of the conventional sixteenth-century chronicler. His purpose is that of the moral instructor and patriot who deplores the neglect of writers better than himself and seeks to:

---

[20]Levy, p. 182.

[21]Both Tillyard and Reese, for example, view the work as a fairly competent piece of "hack" writing whose popularity with the reading public made it a valuable source. See Tillyard, pp. 11, 56-8 and Reese, p. 58.

> . . . put them in mind not to forget their natiue countries praise (which is their dutie) the incouragement of their woorthie countriemen, by elders aduauncements; and the daunting of the vicious, by foure penall examples, to which end . . . chronicles and histories ought cheefelie to be written. (p. ix)

With this in mind, he claims that he has "spared no pains" to accumulate every available written record and eye-witness report (p. ix). Holinshed professes a strict neutrality in the treatment of the material he has gathered.

> . . . For my part, I haue in things doubtfull rather chosen to shew the diuersitie of their writings, than by ouer-ruling them, and vsing a premature censure, to frame them to agree to my liking; leauing it neuerthelesse to each mans iudgement to controll them as he seeth cause. (p. ix)

Yet it is possible to discern Holinshed's opinions by means of certain hints in the organization and narrative. For example, the marginal notations sometimes go far beyond the tabulation of chronological and regnal years and the acknowledgement of sources to offer a personal assessment. A notable instance of this occurs in the section devoted to Edward II, where the chronicler prefixes the account of a bishop's defiance with the note: "the presumptuous demeanour of prelates" (p. 575). Of even greater value are the assessments of the personality and abilities of each king immediately following the account of his reign. Finally, Holinshed's tendency to moralize, and, on occasion, his juxtaposition of material provide in the narrative itself many valuable indications of personal bias to the discerning reader. Just what

comprised Holinshed's interpretation can be seen from a more detailed look at the three reigns dealt with in the plays under discussion; namely those of John, Edward II and Richard II.

Holinshed's view of King John is strongly coloured by the Reformation concept of this monarch as a valiant but unsuccessful opponent of Rome's exploitation of England. Sharing the opinion that John's reputation suffered unjustly at the hands of pro-Catholic historians like Polydore Vergil,[22] the chronicler seeks to redress the balance by presenting the King as an imprudent, temperamental man victimized by the clergy and the self-seeking nobles. Although he does not suppress any information to the contrary, Holinshed constantly endeavours to mitigate John's more unattractive deeds by attributing them to a deplorable tendency to make ill-advised decisions in the heat of passion. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the account of John's conflict with his nephew Arthur of Brittany. While he does not hide

---

[22]Several references to this matter occur throughout the account. The following statement provides an excellent example of the chronicler's attitude.

> But such was the malice of writers in the past, which they bare towards king John, that whatsoeuer was doone in preiudice of him or his subiects, it was still interpreted to chance through his default, so as the blame still was imputed to him, . . . yet to thinke that he deserued the tenth part of the blame wherewith writers charge him, it might seeme a great lacke of aduised consideration in them that so should take it.
>
> (p. 279)

the fact that Arthur's title to the throne was better than John's, Holinshed takes care to emphasize the undesirability of a child-king dominated by so unsuitable a Protector as Arthur's mother, Constance of Brittany (p. 274). Moreover, he takes special note of Arthur's hostile response to the King's efforts at reconciliation by describing the boy as "one that wanted good counsell, and abounding too much in his owne wilfull opinions" (p. 285). In recording the circumstances surrounding Arthur's mysterious disappearance, Holinshed dutifully sets down all the conflicting accounts and concludes with this comment:

> But some affirm that King John secretlie caused him to be murthered and made awaie, so as it is not throughlie agréed vpon, in what sort he finished his daies: But verelie king John was held in great suspicion, whether worthilie or not, the lord knoweth. (p. 286)

Yet the fact that Holinshed follows this statement with an instance of John's clemency towards one of Arthur's principal sympathizers (p. 287) indicates a definite tendency to believe the best of the King.

But it is in the accounts of the Papal interdiction and the defection of the nobility--two events that no patriotic English Protestant could view with equanimity--that Holinshed becomes most outspoken in his support of King John. Although he deplores John's heedless behaviour and oft-expressed distrust of his nobles, the chronicler shows the barons' subsequent decision to side with the Dauphin Lewis

as an unpardonable treason for which they were justly repaid by the Dauphin's treachery (p. 334). As far as the King's quarrel with the Pope is concerned, there is absolutely no doubt where Holinshed's staunchly Protestant sympathies lie. Rising for once above his usual rather pedestrian style of writing, he paints a vivid picture of the wretched state of the country in the grip of the Papal interdiction.

> It was surelie a rufull thing to consider the state of this realme at that present, when as the king neither trusted his péeres, neither the nobilitie fauoured the king; no, there were verie few that trusted one another, but each one hid & hoarded vp his wealth, looking dailie when another should come and enter vpon the spoile. The communaltie also grew into factions, some fauouring & some cursing the king, as they bare affection. The cleargie were likewise at dissention, so that nothing preuailed but malice and spite, which brought foorth and spred abroad the fruits of disobedience to all good lawes and orders, greatlie to the disquieting of the whole state. (p. 299)

John's submission to the Pope thus arose out of sheer necessity, rather than any willingness on the King's part, as Holinshed makes abundantly clear:

> Indéed, he condescended to an agréement with the pope (as may be thought) more by force than of deuotion and therefore rather dissembled with the pope (sith he could not otherwise choose) than agreed to the couenants with any hartie affection. (p. 317)

In short, Holinshed leaves the reader with the general impression of a King more sinned against than sinning; one who with all his many character defects still did not merit the censure that the unfriendly historians of three centuries

had heaped on him. In the words of the chronicler:

> Certeinelie it should seeme that man had a princelie heart in him, and wanted nothing but faithful subiects to haue assisted him in reuenging such wrongs as were doone and offered by the French king and others. (p. 339)

Edward II does not receive such magnanimous treatment. Right from the beginning of his account Holinshed stresses this King's wanton headstrong behaviour which eventually earned him the contempt of everyone at home and abroad. Particularly injurious both to himself and the realm was Edward's habit of placing complete trust in corrupt advisors who used their position to further their own interests. Holinshed's attitude to the most famous of these advisors, the Gascon Piers Gaveston, is best illustrated by the following comment upon the favourite's summary execution in 1312:

> A iust reward for so scornful/ and contemptuous a merchant, as in respect of himselfe (bicause he was in the princes fauour) esteemed the Nobles of the land as men of such inferioritie, as that in comparison of him they deserued no little iot or mite of honour. But lo, the vice of ambition, accompanied with a rable of other outrages, euen a reprochfull end with an euerlasting marke of infamie, which he pulled by violent meanes on himselfe with the cordes of his owne lewdnesse, and could not escape the fatall fall. (p. 552)

Nor is he any more lenient towards Gaveston's successors, the two Spencers. Their misgovernment, together with the King's weakness, brought about the disgrace of Bannockburn and the reversal of English fortunes abroad, so that as early as 1319 Edward had begun to lose the respect of both

nobles and commons (p. 558). Consequently he soon lost what little power he had over his more unmanageable barons, whose factious behaviour eventually brought about his deposition and murder.

Yet despite his condemnation of the King's weakness, Holinshed in no way condones the rebellion that brought about his downfall. However inept Edward might have been as a monarch, his exalted position made any attempts to defy his rule treasonous. Although he gives ample enough reasons for their provocation, Holinshed depicts the warring group of barons as rivalling Edward's favourites in their presumptuous behaviour. At one point he voices his disapproval of the King's clemency towards their one-time leader, the Earl of Lancaster, with this comment:

> Wherein though he did more than stood with the dignitie of his roiall title, in somuch as he had the earle's life at his commandment, yet in that he tolerated such insolencie of behaviour, as it was vnseemelie to be shewed against the person of his prince, the kings clemencie and patience is highlie therein to be commended; though his forbearing and seeking means of quietnesse did neuer a whit amend the malignant mind of the earle, whose hart was so inchanted with ambition and supereminent honour, that he quite forgot the good lesson of submission and good allegiance. (p. 564)

Queen Isabella's conduct provides the impetus for a denunciation of the depravity to which women will sink when evil counsel leads them astray (p. 578). Edward's decision to abdicate elicits an outburst of pity from the chronicler:

> Ah, lamentable ruine from roialtie to miserable calamitie, procured by them chéefelie that should

> haue beene the pillars of the kings estate and not the hooked engines to pull him downe from his throne. (p. 585)

In short, Edward II is presented as a figure with all the potential for tragedy; one whose personal defects did to a great extent bring about his own downfall, yet who, to use Holinshed's words:

> . . . purged the same by repentance, and patientlie suffered manie reproofes, and finalie death it selfe . . . after a most cruell maner. (p. 587)

Though he never actually draws the parallel, Holinshed depicts Richard II in a fashion very similar to his account of Edward II. Once again he presents the reader with a King whose folly earns him the contempt and hatred of those who should have been his most loyal advisors. Like his great-grandfather Richard put his faith in corrupt favourites, all of whom oppose the legitimate authority of the royal uncles, the Dukes of Lancaster, York and Gloucester. Holinshed records how the King's efforts to further the cause of his favourites leads him into an active conspiracy to destroy his uncles, particularly the Duke of Gloucester (pp. 781-3), whose murder in 1397 began the chain of events that eventually brought about Richard's deposition. The Chronicles abound with instances of Richard's stubborn disregard of sound advice and his unreasonable fury at the least sign of opposition. Yet once again it is the factious behaviour of those who should have supported their King which, according to Holinshed's

account, is chiefly responsible for the evil that befell Richard II. Indeed, the "good" councillors were perhaps even more to blame than the favourites in that they neglected their responsibility as protectors of a highly impressionable child-king. As Holinshed points out:

> [Richard] was of good disposition and towardnesse, but his age being readie to incline which way soeuer a man should bend it, those that were appointed to haue the gouernement of his person, did what laie in them now at the first, to keepe him from all maner of light demeanor. But afterwards, when euery one began to studie more for his owne priuate commoditie, that the aduancement of the commonwealth, they set open the gates to other, which being readie to corrupt his good nature, by little and little grew familiar with him, and dimming the brightnesse of true honour, with the counterfeit shine of the contrarie, so maskered his understanding, that in the end they brought him to tract the steps of lewd demeanour, and so were causes both of his and their owne destruction. (pp. 715-16)

Instances of defiance on the part of the royal uncles, particularly the Duke of Gloucester, occur frequently throughout the account. More important, Holinshed accords Gloucester the most unfavourable treatment as "a sore and a right seuere man who might not by any meanes be remooued from his opinion and purpose, if he once resolued vpon any matter" (p. 794). Influenced, no doubt, by the conventional "Tudor myth" idea of Richard II as a martyred King whose deposition and murder aroused divine retribution in the form of the Lancaster-York conflict, Holinshed thus lays most of the blame for England's misgovernment squarely upon the shoulders of Richard's opponents, who, after shirking their responsibilities in the first place,

compounded their error by defying the King's rule once they realized he was beyond their control. As he most emphatically states in his summary of the reign:

> But if I may boldlie say what I thinke: he was a prince the most vnthankfullie vsed of his subiects, of any one of whom ye shall lightlie read. (p. 869)

The preceding discussion reveals the existence of certain common features in Holinshed's accounts of these three reigns. First of all, each of them depicts a king who was faced with a serious revolt by his nobles caused in large measure by his own weakness. In two cases this revolt eventually brought about the deposition and murder of the king, while in the third it subjected the realm to the dangers of foreign intervention. In all three instances Holinshed roundly condemns the rebels' actions, even as he deplores the royal folly that caused them. In this way he uses the reigns as negative examples to stress the need for the existence of a mutual trust between King, nobles and commons, where each adheres strictly to his responsibilities towards the others. Secondly, Holinshed dwells on the role of the councillor by demonstrating in two of the reigns the terrible results that occur when corrupt advisors gain the King's ear. As the following chapters will point out, these are the very issues picked up by the playwrights who looked to the Chronicles for their material. Indeed, Holinshed afforded these dramatists an excellent source, because he included a wealth

of information without too obtrusive an interpretation.[23] It remains to see just what each of the three dramatists made of it.

---

[23]Levy, p. 184.

II

THOMAS OF WOODSTOCK

For the purposes of comparison with the play, Holinshed's account divides the reign of Richard II into two distinct sections, each of which is dominated by a group of royal favourites. The first takes in the years from about 1382, following the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt, to 1388, when the battle of Radcot Bridge and the Merciless Parliament brought about the defeat of Richard's first attempt to rule independently. During this time the King's adherents included Robert de Vere, Duke of Ireland, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, the Archbishop of York, and the Chief Justice, Sir Robert Tresilian. With the fall of these men at the hands of Gloucester and his supporters, there begins the next phase of the reign, in which Richard gradually reasserts his power. This period lasts until the King's deposition in 1399, and includes the events leading up to the murder of Thomas of Woodstock, the two years of absolute rule following this murder, and Henry Bolingbroke's usurpation. In Holinshed's account, the second group of favourites, Bushy, Bagot, Greene and Scroope, belong exclusively to these final two years, although one can assume that at least some of them were about the Court before this

time.[1] In constructing the play Thomas of Woodstock the dramatist has used this second group of favourites, added Sir Robert Tresilian from the first group to their number, and assigned to them, and to the remainder of the dramatis personae, events chosen from throughout the chronicle version. The following comparison illustrates the way in which this was done.

The play opens with the discovery of an attempt on the part of the favourites to poison the Dukes of Lancaster and York together with their chief supporters, the Earls of Arundel and Surrey. The dramatist has constructed the details of this scene from two separate incidents from the Chronicles, neither of which had anything to do with the other. The first involves a conspiracy in 1386 between the King and his first group of favourites to do away with Woodstock and his faction for their support of Parliament's moves against the Earl of Suffolk. Holinshed's account of the matter reveals, I think, a certain degree of skepticism about the truth of the incident:

> Herevpon (as it was said, whether trulie or otherwise, the lord knoweth) by a conspiracie begun betwixt the king & such as were most in fauor with him, it was deuised that the duke of Glocester . . . and such other lords as fauored the knights and burgesses . . . should be willed to a supper in London, there to be murthered. (p. 774)

---

[1]There is a reference in Holinshed to a Sir Henry Greene as one of the murderers of the Carmelite friar mentioned on p. 17 of this paper. However, it is not clear whether this man is the same person as the favourite, whom Holinshed calls Thomas (p. 839).

Apart from a possibly metaphorical reference to a supper "where such sharpe sauce was prouided" (p. 774), there is no mention in Holinshed of the proposed method to be used; nor is there any reference either to a murderer or to an informer, though we are told that Woodstock somehow got news of the plot (p. 774). The Carmelite friar who serves in the play as both potential murderer and informer has his origins in an incident from the year 1384, when just such a friar brought an accusation of treason against the Duke of Lancaster, but was cruelly murdered before the matter came to trial (p. 763). The fact that Richard accuses Lancaster of this murder, together with the Duke's reply to the charge, firmly establish that the dramatist has linked the two events:

> kynge: yo^{u} haue forgotten vncle Lancaster
> ho^{w} yo^{u} in prisone murdered cruelly
> a fryer Carmalit be cause he was
> to bring in euidence against yo^{r} grace
> of most vngragious deed^{s} & practises
>
> lanck: & yo^{u} my lord remember not so well
> that by that Carmalett at london once
> when at a supper, youd haue poysond vs
> (2795-2802)

It seems to me that the playwright combined the two events for both dramatic and didactic reasons. Dramatically, the combination adds to the effectiveness of the scene by providing the murderer and informer missing in the chronicle account, and introduces a character-type who bears strong

associations with plots of this sort.[2] Secondly, by interpreting Holinshed's doubtful allusion to mean poisoning, and, unlike the chronicler, specifically excluding the King from the conspiracy (144-5), the dramatist emphasizes the perfidy of the favourites to prepare the audience for their subsequent actions.

The characters introduced in this scene reveal a similar liberal handling of the chronicle material. In Holinshed's account neither Lancaster nor York figured in this incident, especially the former who was out of the country at the time.[3] Nor was Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, at any time Lord Protector, a post held, according to Holinshed by the Earl of Warwick (p. 726). Indeed, one of the Duke's principal grievances against the King was his own lack of influence in the royal council, a fact that made him jealous even of his own brothers.[4] It was Lancaster who seems

---

[2]Plays like Bale's Kynge Johan and The Troublesome Raigne of King John employ just such a character. Moreover, the association of several plots to assassinate the Queen with the Jesuits probably had its effect on the mind of the average playgoer.

[3]According to Holinshed's account, the Duke of Lancaster left for Spain in 1386, and did not return from the Continent until November of 1389. Thus he played no part in the uprising of 1388.

[4]As an example of Gloucester's jealousy one may cite Holinshed's account of his disappointment at Lancaster's failure to assert his right to Gascony in 1395. Apparently Woodstock felt that his elder brother's absence would give more power within England to himself. (p. 831)

to have enjoyed the position of the elder statesman who usually held the King's respect, if not always his favour, while York did not particularly care to be at the center of political affairs.[5] The dramatist's portrayal of the three royal uncles thus involves a transferring of characteristics, particularly between Lancaster and Woodstock, while York remains basically the same as his chronicle counterpart. Lancaster becomes a rather splenetic individual whose angry outbursts worry his peace-loving brother:

> lanc: by kingly Edwards soule, my Royall ffather
> Ile be reuenged at full on all ther liues
>
> yorke: nay if yo^r rage breake to such hye extreames
> yo^u will preuent yo^r self, & loose reuenge
> (74-7)

Such behaviour is more suitable to Holinshed's Woodstock, whose brothers were often hard put to excuse his fits of temper before the King (p. 235). There is no record in the Chronicles of the homespun clothing that symbolizes Woodstock's character both here and throughout the play. Finally, while the chronicler does record Gloucester's popularity with the commons,[6]

---

[5] Holinshed describes York as "a man rather coueting to liue in pleasure, than to deale with much businesse, and the weightie affaires of the realme" (p. 831).

[6] See, for example, Holinshed's account of the common people's reaction to Gloucester's absence from the country in 1391:

> About the same time, the duke of Glocester went into Prutzen land, to the great griefe of the people that made account of his departure, as if the sunne had beene taken from the earth; . . . for in him the hope of the commons onelie rested.
> (p. 814)

he hints that personal ambition and a desire to balk the King may have played a greater part in his actions than concern for the commonwealth. The other three characters introduced here, Cheyney, Arundel and Surrey, figure less importantly both in the play and in the source. Surrey is totally fictional, while Cheyney rates only two references as one of Gloucester's followers arrested after the Duke's murder in 1397 (pp. 838, 843). Arundel, whose role as Admiral will be mentioned later, remains much the same as his prototype in the Chronicles, described by Holinshed in the following manner:

> . . . Among all the noblemen of this land . . . there was none more esteemed; so noble and valiant he was that all men spake honour of him. (p. 842)

The second scene introduces the royal faction, beginning with Bagot, Greene and Tresilian. Little is to be found in Holinshed about any of these characters. Bagot and Greene make their first appearance along with Bushy and Scroope as Richard's adherents in 1397, when they acted as prolocutors in the parliament of that year (p. 839), and Holinshed mentions later that they were prominent members of Richard's council (p. 843). Only one incident in the Chronicles indicates their relationship to the King, namely, a reference to Bushy's manner of speaking during the parliament of 1397:

> Sir Iohn Bushie in all his talke, when he proponed any matter vnto the king, did not attribute to him titles of honour, due and accustomed, but inuented

> vnused termes and such strange names, as were rather agréeable to the diuine maiestie of God, than to any earthlie potentate. (p. 840)

However, none of them receives the attention devoted to the king's earlier favourites, Robert de Vere and Michael de la Pole. While it is not possible to draw exact parallels, it seems likely that the dramatist had these latter two in mind in his characterization of the favourites. For example, as the scene opens, Tresilian informs Greene of Richard's desire to see him (225-6), to which Bagot adds the request:

> prethee swete Greene
> vissett his highnes & forsake these passions (227-8)

These lines suggest, I think, that Greene enjoyed a closer relationship with the King than did the others, an idea reinforced by the fact that he is the one set on by the rest later in the play to persuade Richard to farm out the kingdom:

> . . . to make all hole, we haue left that smooth-facte
> flattering greene to followe him close, & hele neuer leaue,
> till he has donne it I warrant ye (1796-8)

While there is no indication in Holinshed that Greene ever held such a position, Robert de Vere most certainly did.[7] Tresilian is almost exclusively a product of the dramatist's own creation. First mentioned in the Chronicles as one of those justices employed to try those apprehended after the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, he impresses the reader as an

---

[7]See, for example, p. 774 for an instance of the King's generosity towards de Vere.

over-zealous prosecutor:

> After this the king came . . . to Chelmisford, where he appointed sir Robert Trisilian to sit in iudgement of the offenders and rebels of that countrie, wherevpon an inquest being chosen, a great number were indited, arreigned, & found giltie, so that vpon some one gollowes there were nine or ten hanged togither. (p. 748)

Apart from this, he receives scant attention from Holinshed, who mentions only that Tresilian participated as Chief Justice and a member of Richard's faction in the events leading up to the rising of 1388. Out of this shadowy figure from the Chronicles the dramatist has created a fully developed evil character closely resembling the conventional stage "Machiavel". This becomes especially apparent in his soliloques:

> but yet vntell myne office be putt on
> by kingly Richard, Ile conseale my selfe
> frameing such subtle lawe that Ianus like
> may wth a duble fface, salute them boeth
> Ile search my brayne & turne the leauef of lawe
> witt make vs great, greatnef keeps ffoolef in awe
> (288-93)

This and the subsequent conversation with the fictional Nimble (295ff.) illustrate the dramatic capital to be gained from these characters, perhaps as a result of their freedom from any limits imposed by the source material. Because Holinshed has said so little about the Chief Justice, the playwright was free to make him the author of all those abuses of law and government against which the royal uncles complain so vociferously.

Having thus introduced both the opposing factions, the dramatist next brings them together in the presence of

the King. Richard's marriage to Anne of Bohemia actually took place in 1382 when both were still children, and there is no indication in Holinshed of the new Queen's character or of any hope that she would influence her husband. Woodstock's angry outburst at the taunts of the King and his favourites (456ff.) are based on similar chronicle accounts of such exchanges,[8] but the dramatist alters the Duke's motives from those of jealous frustration to a righteous anger at Richard's neglect of the realm. The mutiny for which Gloucester holds the King and his followers responsible (478-82) seems to refer to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, in which none of the favourites played any part (pp. 735ff.). The affair of the captured ships (497ff), already mentioned in the first scene (84-98), once again incorporates two separate events from the Chronicles. The first occurred in 1386, when the English captured certain hulks and six carracks belonging to some Genoese merchants but returned them at the request of Michael de la Pole, then Lord Chancellor. Holinshed records the people's reaction to what they considered a "sellout" to the foreigners:

> Wherevpon much murmering arose among the kings subiects, taking it in euill part, that they [the merchants] should be suffered so to go their waies to releeue the enimies of the realme, with such goods as were once brought

---

[8] In one instance Holinshed records how Woodstock berates Richard for the giving up of the town of Brest, and even goes so far as to accuse the King of personal cowardice (pp. 834-5).

> into the Englishmens possession, and speciallie the lord chancellor was verie euill thought of, for showing so much fauor vnto these strangers. (p. 777)

Arundel's capture of the Flemish fleet took place in 1387, when he took eighty wine-laden ships. There is no record that the profits failed to reach their proper destination in this case, since by Holinshed's account the Earl was scrupulously honest over the distribution of the prize, though his resulting popularity with the commons gained him the envy of the royal favourites (pp. 778-9). By dovetailing the two events and implicating Richard in a flagrant abuse of fair dealing, the playwright increases the magnitude of Arundel's exploit at the same time as he illustrates the futility of such courage in the face of the realm's misgovernment. The same holds true for Richard's dispensation of offices to the favourites in defiance of his uncles, a move that combines several accounts from Holinshed. The conversation between the uncles after the King's departure (567ff) further emphasizes the state of affairs with its restatement of the wrongs just committed and the report of a rebellion (591-2) which, according to Holinshed, took place in 1382, and which Gloucester himself quickly suppressed (p. 747). The reactions of Lancaster and Woodstock to this news once again illustrate the dramatist's tendency to transfer characteristics from one to the other. The hot-tempered Lancaster advocates revolt:

> take open Armes, Ioyne w^th^ the vexed Comons
> & haile his minions from his wanton syde
> ther heads cutt off the people∫ satisfyd (606-8)

This is precisely the course that Holinshed's Woodstock adopted in the rising of 1388 (pp. 784ff.). Yet in the play this same character becomes the advocate of moderation:

> not so, not so, alacke the day good brother
> we may not soe affright the tender prince
> wele beare vs nobly, for the kingdome∫ safty
> & the kings honno^r^, . . . (609-12)

Although this attitude is not strictly parallel to Holinshed's Lancaster, it certainly does not fit the character of that "sore and . . . right ſeuere man" (p. 794), Thomas of Woodstock, who had absolutely no qualms about affrighting the tender prince, even with threats of deposition (pp. 792-3).

The next scene, showing the relationship between Richard and his "minions", can be traced to several remarks in Holinshed about the influence of the King's first group of favourites, especially in the years just prior to their fall in 1388. Rightly fearing the malice of Gloucester, Arundel and his supporters, de Vere and de la Pole did their utmost to prompt Richard to take action against the magnates. To quote Holinshed:

> There increased therefore in the king an inward hatred, which he conceiued against the lords, these men putting into his eare that he was like no king but rather resembled the shadow of one; saieng it would come to passe that he should be able to doo nothing of himselfe, if the lords might inioy that authoritie which they had taken vpon them. (p. 777)

In the play this same argument is taken up by Greene:

> may not the lyon Rore because hees younge
> what are yo^{r} vncles but as Elyphants
> that sett ther aged bodyes to the oake
> yo^{u} are the oake against whose stocke they leane
> fall from them once, & then distroy them euer
> (646-50)

Tresilian's branding of the uncles as traitors (656-66) is probably based on the chronicle account of a council held at Nottingham in 1388. At this council Tresilian and several other justices endorsed a document that nullified the measures forced on the King by Gloucester and his supporters, and asserted that this faction deserved to suffer a traitor's death (pp. 781-3). Bushy's use of the chronicle to goad Richard into declaring his majority (682ff) may be interpreted as a deliberate misreading by the ambitious favourite, or a legitimate mistake caused by Holinshed's failure to note the change of year in the margin of the Chronicles.(p.781) Judging from the dramatist's portrayal of Bushy, the former interpretation seems to me more logical, since it produces the desired effect on the young King. Richard's conversation with the Duke of York (751ff) once more brings out the gentler nature of this uncle, and his distress at the gulf between the two factions, a point brought out in the following remark from Holinshed:

> . . . The said duke of Yorke, being verelie a man of a gentle nature, wished that the state of the common-wealth might haue been redressed without the loss of any mans life, or other cruell dealing . . . (p. 795)

In this way the playwright sets the stage for the King's dramatic seizure of power.

Richard's declaration of his majority actually took place in 1389, not in 1387, as the dramatist has it (738). The King's parable of the youth deprived of his patrimony (859ff) appears in Holinshed's account of the event, though not within the context of trickery as it does in the play:

> In like sort dealt the king with the residue of his officers, asieng that he ought not to be inferior in degree & of lesser account than an other ordinarie heire . . . sith the law and custome of the realme of England auerreth that euerie heire being in the gardianship of anie lord, when he is growne to be of one and twentie yeares of age, ought presentlie to inioy the inheritance left him by his father, and is lawfullie to possesse his patrimonie, and freelie to dispose and order his owne goods and chattels to his liking. (p. 799)

Similarly, Richard's assertion of his prerogative to "elect & chuse, place & displace/ such officers as we o^{r} self shall like off" (910-11) is a dramatic rendering of Holinshed's version of his speech:

> . . . We will haue our kingdome in our owne hands, and officers and seruitors of our owne appointing at our pleasure; secondlie, as shall seeme to vs auaileable, . . . to elect, choose, and preferre vnto offices such as we doo well like of, and at our pleasure to remooue such as be presentlie resiant . . . (p. 799)

In Holinshed's account Gloucester and Arundel lost their places on the council at this time (p. 799), but there is no record of any action being taken against either York or Lancaster.

Next the playwright devotes a considerable portion of the action to a dramatization of England's suffering under the unrestrained misgovernment of Richard and his favourites. The oppressive measures to which he constantly refers belong to the last two years of the King's reign, following the murder of Gloucester, when, in Holinshed's words:

> being now as it were careless, [the King] did not behaue himselfe (as some haue written) in such discréet order as manie wished; but rather . . . forgot himselfe, and began to rule by will more than by reason. . . . (pp. 843-4)

Both the guard of archers and the hall at Westminster derive from the aftermath of the Duke's murder, but Holinshed interprets their origins much more favourably than does the dramatist.[9] Though he sought elsewhere for the exact details,[10] the playwright may have had in mind this disapproving remark from Holinshed on the excesses in clothing when he created the amusing episode between Woodstock and the overdressed court messenger:

> And in gorgious and costlie apparell they exceeded all measure, not one of them that kept within the bounds of his degree. Yeomen and groomes were clothed in silkes, with cloth of graine and skarlet, ouer sumptuous as may be sure for their estates. . . . (p. 868)

---

[9]According to the Chronicles, Richard employed the guard of archers because he feared for his safety as a result of Gloucester's plot to imprison him (p. 838). The hall at Westminster was ordered to be built to house the parliament of 1397 (p. 839).

[10]A. P. Rossiter traces them to Stowe. See Woodstock: A Moral History, London; Chatto and Windus, 1946 p. 22.

The measures employed to gain money and ferret out complainers also date from the period 1397-99, long after the death of Tresilian, to whom the dramatist ascribes their invention (1240ff.). The sending out of spies and the proposed farming out of the kingdom receive relatively little credit with Holinshed. The first is placed eighteenth on a list of charges brought against the King at his deposition and later referred to as "these articles and other heinous and detestable accusations" (pp. 860-61), while the second is mentioned as a rumour (p. 849). The issuing of blank charters fares somewhat better in that Holinshed treats it as an actual happening (p. 849), but the scant attention it receives in the Chronicles in no way compares with its importance to the play. Once again both dramatic and didactic considerations govern the handling of this material. The conversation between Woodstock and the courtier and his horse (1411ff.), and the antics of Nimble with the "pestiferous" Bailiff of Dunstable (1525ff) are scenes of unquestionable comic value. As such they provide an enjoyable interlude between scenes of dramatic tension involving direct clashes between the two opposing factions. At the same time, however, they further the plot by demonstrating the effects of Richard's wanton misgovernment and Tresilian's machinations upon the realm, and thus provide a suitable prelude to the climactic events of Woodstock's murder and the subsequent rebellion.

According to Holinshed, Woodstock's arrest in 1397

resulted from the Duke's treasonous behaviour rather than the King's active malice. Angered at the new accord with France and his own lack of influence in the royal council, Woodstock plotted with the Earls of Arundel, Warwick, Nottingham and Derby to seize power, imprison the King along with the Dukes of Lancaster and York, and execute the remainder of Richard's adherents (p. 836). Richard did indeed take part in his uncle's arrest, but not, as the dramatist states, under the cowardly guise of a masque. Instead, he displayed considerable courage and self-control in acting as a decoy to lure the Duke away from the security of his home at Plashey (pp. 836-7). By contrast, the dramatist repeatedly emphasizes Richard's cowardice by having the King insist on the stopping of Woodstock's harangue (2161ff.), and the favourites repeated denials of his obvious presence (2173, 2184). Woodstock's murder in Calais follows the chronicle account fairly closely with the important exception, to be discussed later, of the substitution of Lapoole for Thomas Mowbray as the governor of the fortress and the man responsible for the carrying out of Richard's orders. Lapoole's debate with his conscience over the proposed murder (2415-32) is probably based loosely on Holinshed's account of Mowbray's delay in carrying out of the murder until threatened with death by the King (p. 837). The alleged method by which the Duke was murdered remains the same, though it

undergoes considerable intensification at the hands of the dramatist through the introduction of the two murderers (2386ff) and the ghosts of Edward III and the Black Prince (2440ff.). The primary difference lies in the interpretation of Woodstock's murder. Holinshed seems to regard the event as a deplorable but not unnatural result of Woodstock's rash behaviour, as his summary of the Duke's character indicates:

> This was the end of that *noble man, fierce of nature, hastie, wilfull, and giuen more to war than to peace; and in this greatlie to be discommended, that he was euer repining against the king in all things, whatsoeuer he wished to haue forward. (p. 837)

Moreover, he states that by at least one account Woodstock confessed his crimes to a justice sent by the King (p. 837). In the play Woodstock dies a steadfast martyr to the cause of upright government, ready to do his duty towards his King to the very end. With the departure of his moderating influence, the forces of retribution confront the conscience-stricken King and his cowardly favourites.

In the play the process of nemesis begins with the death of Richard's beloved wife, Good Queen Anne. In the chronicle account, Anne of Bohemia died in 1394, three years before Woodstock's murder, by which time Richard had married the French princess Isabel. The armed rebellion led by the Dukes of Lancaster and York to revenge their brother's murder has no basis in the chronicle account. On the contrary, Holinshed states that the two Dukes took the matter very

quietly, though they were considerably grieved:

> Surely the two dukes when they heard that their brother was so suddenlie made awaie, they wist not what to saie to the matter. . . . But . . . after their displeasure was somewhat asswaged, they determined to couer the stings of their griefes for a time, and if the king would amend his maners, to forget also the iniuries past.
> (p. 838)

This contrasts sharply with Lancaster's militant stand in the play:

> If he be dead, by good king Edwards soule
> wele call king Richard to a strickt account
> for that & for his Realmes misgouerment
> (2737-9)

For the details of this rebellion the dramatist seems to have used Holinshed's account of the uprising led by Gloucester in 1388 which resulted in the fall of Richard's first group of favourites. Roused by the activities of Richard and his faction, particularly at the council of Nottingham mentioned earlier,[11] Gloucester and his supporters gathered an armed force in an attempt to coerce the King (pp. 784-5). Like their counterparts in the play (2687-8), the commons flatly refused to fight what they considered to be the King's true supporters (pp. 785-6), thus placing Richard in a most vulnerable position. Lancaster's call to arms:

> yo^{u} peeres of England Raisd in Righteous Armes
> here to readifye o^{r} Countryes Rueine
> Ioyne all yo^{r} harts & hands neuer to cease
> till wth o^{r} swords we worke faire Englands peace
> (2740-43)

---

[11] See p. 29.

recalls Holinshed's account of a similar oath sworn by Woodstock and his supporters to remain true to their purpose until death (p. 786). Similarly the final confrontation between the two factions (2775-2846) resembles Holinshed's record of the meeting between Richard and Gloucester which attempted to patch up their differences. In both cases the king asserts his ability to destroy the rebels and the lords reply in a defiant manner [(Woodstock, 2775-83), (Holinshed, p. 787)]. However, the chronicle account does not contain the insults which the two sides exchange in the play, in particular, Lancaster's tirade against the King (2817-27). The battle that follows is based on a skirmish fought at Radcot Bridge in 1388 which crushed the King's hopes of gaining the upper hand over the rebellious magnates. Tresilian's cowardly decision to flee before the battle recalls a similar action by Robert de Vere, Richard's principal favourite at this time. According to the Chronicles, all the favourites escaped the magnates' vengeance by fleeing the country (pp. 793-4). Greene was executed in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke during the events leading to Richard's deposition (p. 851). Richard's lament over Greene's body (2876-86) once again suggests the more intimate relationship enjoyed by this favourite, a position that did belong to Robert de Vere. Indeed, the dramatist may have had the following account from Holinshed in mind when he wrote this particular speech:

> Yée haue heard that in the yeare 1392 Robert Veer duke of Ireland departed this life in Louaine in Brabant. King Richard therefore this yeare [1395] . . . caused his corps being inbalmed, to be conueied into England, . . . appointing him to be laid in a coffine of cypress, and to be adorned with princlie garments, hauing a chaine of gold about his necke, and rich rings on his fingers. And to shew what loue and affection he bare vnto him in his life time, the king caused the coffine to be opened, that he might behold his face bared, and touch him with his hands . . . (p. 830)

As a result of Radcot Bridge, King Richard was forced to swear an oath supporting the rule of Gloucester and the magnates. As Holinshed puts it:

> In these troubles was the realme of England in these daies, and the king brought into that case that he ruled not, but was ruled by his vncles, and other to them associate. (p. 796)

Like his counterpart in the play (2932ff.), Chief Justice Tresilian was betrayed by one of his own men, and suffered hanging at the hands of the victorious nobles (p. 794).

This, then, forms the probable basis for the events that comprise the plot of Woodstock. However, one must also consider that in Holinshed's account the murder of Gloucester led indirectly to Richard's deposition (p. 869), and that the favourites mentioned in the play met their deaths at the time of this deposition. Although the play's incompleteness precludes the formation of definite conclusions about the dramatist's final intentions, certain indications suggest that he did not wish to concern himself with the issues surrounding the overthrow of a legitimate monarch. First of

all, there are Woodstock's frequent references to the need for a moderate reaction to the King's misgovernment. As I mentioned earlier, he is the one who restrains the more violent Lancaster. Though he constantly warns Richard of the disorder that will result from such wanton rule, he will have no part of it himself. As he tells the disguised Richard just before his arrest:

> . . . heeʃ oʳ kinge, & gods great deputye
> & if ye hunt to haue me second ye
> in any rash attempt against his state
> a fore my god, Ile nere consent vnto it
> (2140-43)

Since the audience's sympathies are so obviously meant to be placed on the side of the Duke, it seems reasonable to believe that the dramatist endorsed his moderate viewpoint. Moreover, even the more violent Lancaster stops short of the idea of deposition. His victorious statement after the battle refers only to the overthrow of the favourites:

> Thus princly Edwards sonnes In tender care
> of wanton Richard & ther ffathers realme
> haue toyld to purge faire Englands plessant field
> of all those ranckorous weedʃ that choakt the growndʃ
> & left hir plessant meadʃ like barron hillʃ (2958-62)

Richard's departure from the scene before the final resolution leaves the issue unresolved, perhaps deliberately so, though once again, unfinished nature of the manuscript leaves all in doubt.[12]

---

[12] There is no way of telling how many leaves of the manuscript are missing. If, as many critics think, only a few lines follow the point where the play breaks off, then the lack of any resolution with the King may be viewed as a deliberate measure. It is possible, however, that the dramatist inserted another scene involving Richard.

A more conclusive piece of evidence lies in the exclusion of certain historical personages closely associated in the Chronicles with the events surrounding Richard's deposition. First, there is the earlier-mentioned substitution of Lapoole for Thomas Mowbray. In Holinshed's account Mowbray first threw in his lot with Gloucester's faction, but subsequently changed sides and betrayed the Duke's plot to the King (p. 836). Later, his quarrel with Bolingbroke sparked the chain of events leading to the King's eventual overthrow. Even more significant is the complete exclusion of Bolingbroke himself. According to Holinshed, Henry of Bolingbroke played a prominent role in the uprising of 1388; indeed, he led the victorious forces at the battle of Radcot Bridge (pp. 789-90). Yet the playwright has chosen to eliminate him altogether, and to supply a fictional character, the Earl of Surrey, to take his place. In neither case is there any logical reason to exclude these characters. For this reason I believe that he wished to avoid too close an association with the overthrow of Richard II, or indeed of any divinely-appointed monarch.

This leads to the question of exactly what the dramatist sought to accomplish in the construction of this play. As the preceding account shows, the principle of historical accuracy was for him a totally unimportant issue. Although he relied heavily on Holinshed's account, he failed to observe

the proper time sequence, and freely transferred both actions and viewpoints from one historical personage to the other. Yet the resulting play is not a random jumble of events and personalities loosely based on historical truth, but a dramatically satisfying illustration of the evils of misgovernment. Herein, I think, lies the basis for the dramatist's apparently cavalier treatment of Holinshed's material. Both E. M. W. Tillyard[13] and Irving Ribner[14] have pointed to the play's strong affinity to the morality tradition. Like the conventional morality, this play follows a pattern based on the contention of good and evil forces for control of a single man, in this case, a king. This accounts, I think, for the presentation of the historical figures as static personalities. For example Woodstock, as the chief representative of good government, remains the same "Plain Thomas" to his death, while Richard adheres to his wilful, petulant attitude even in the face of defeat. Similarly the patterning of materials from Holinshed around an unhistorical account of the opposition and ultimate defeat of evil councillors results from the playwright's desire to present a political morality with figures taken from history rather than the usual abstractions. Thus, instead of figures such as Sover-

---

[13]E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, Harmonsdworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962 p. 121.

[14]Irving Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare, London: Methuen, 1965

eignty, Evil Counsel and Good Counsel, the author provides King Richard, Tresilian and Woodstock, and employs chronicle material to construct a lesson in the many facets of proper government. As A. P. Rossiter has pointed out:

> It is true, as far as it goes, that the author "pays scant respect" . . . to the chronicle; but this is because he wrote about other things which he judged more respectworthy.[15]

---

[15]Rossiter, p. 25.

III

THE TROUBLESOME RAIGNE OF KING JOHN

The Troublesome Raigne of King John provides an interesting example of that technique of compressing source material for the purposes of dramatic presentation commonly known as "telescoping". As several critics have pointed out,[1] Holinshed's account of the events covered in this play falls into three distinct sequences that occurred over a total of nineteen years, from the death of Richard I to the final defeat of the invading French army. The first of these centered around Arthur of Brittany's claim to the throne, and lasted from John's accession in 1199 to Arthur's mysterious death and its aftermath in 1203. Two years later, there began the long conflict with Rome, which ended with John's submission to Pope Innocent in 1213. The Barons' Revolt and the French invasion make up the final sequence, which began in 1214 and did not finally come to an end until 1218, two years after John's death. As the following, more detailed comparison will demonstrate, the author of the play took the events themselves from Holinshed with little significant reinterpretation. His main departure from the Chronicles lies

[1] See, for example, Geoffrey Bullough, Later English History Plays, Vol. IV of Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962 p. 9.

in his compression of these events to create the impression that they occurr ed in a continuous, highly inter-related manner instead of episodically as they do in the Chronicles. Such compression was, I believe, absolutely necessary if the playwright was to fulfil his intention: namely, the creation of a dramatic presentation illustrating by means of a historical example the evils of papal interference and internal discord.

The play opens with the accession of John and the formal presentation of Arthur's claim to the English throne (I, 1-65). According to Holinshed, these events did not happen in nearly so orderly a fashion. On the contrary, fighting broke out as soon as news of Richard I's death became known, when several of England's continental possessions decided to support Arthur's hereditary claim "by generall consent of the nobles and péeres" (p. 273), and John spent over a month reducing them to submission before he returned to England for his coronation (p. 274). The same holds true for Philip of France's role in the conflict. There is no record in Holinshed that he ever sent an ambassador to John to demand the territories and declare war on England. Instead, Philip waited until John was occupied elsewhere and then invaded Normandy (p. 276). Nor did he demand either England or Ireland for Arthur, but only the continental territories of Poitiers, Anjou, Tourraine and Maine (p. 277).

The dramatist is more accurate in his brief description of the part played by Eleanor, the Queen Mother (I, 1-8) who in Holinshed's words:

> being bent to prefer hir sonne John, left no stone vnturned to establish him in the throne. (p. 274)

John's promise to rule well (I, 10-14) is paralleled in Holinshed by the oration of Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, at John's coronation. While presenting the new King to his people, the prelate described him as:

> a man . . . but that for his owne part, will applie his whole endeuour, studie, and thought vnto that onelie end, which he shall perceiue to be most profitable for the commonwealth, as knowing himselfe to be borne not to serue his owne turne, but for to profit his countrie, and to seeke for the generall benefit of vs that are his subiects. (p. 275)

Holinshed makes only one reference to Richard I's bastard son, whose "discovery" occupies the remainder of the first scene (I, 66-421).

> That same yere [1199] Philip, bastard sonne to King Richard, to whome his father had giuen the castell and honour of Coinacke, killed the viscount of Limoges in reuenge of his fathers death . . . (p. 270)

Obviously, this allusion provides at best a slender basis for the dramatic discovery-scene of the play, for Holinshed mentions neither the bastard's last name nor the circumstances surrounding his birth. More important, the fact that Richard granted him a castle makes it reasonably certain that the court knew of Philip's existence before John's accession.

Thus, "the discoverie of Kirg Richard Cordelions Base Sonne" mentioned in the title[2] belongs to the dramatist alone, and was probably meant to provide a suitable introduction to a character of central importance to later scenes. The origins of Fawconbridge himself present a more complex problem, for the dramatist clearly had no information on his historical counterpart. Critics of both this play and Shakespeare's King John have pointed out several possibilities,[3] some of which come from outside Holinshed, and are thus beyond the scope of this study. While I am not in a position to judge the merits of all these possibilities, it is my belief that the playwright depended more heavily on the chronicle account of King John's reign than the critics suggest. Many of the deeds assigned to Fawconbridge properly belong to John's chief advisors and most trusted barons. As these appear most frequently in later scenes, they will be discussed more fully in the appropriate section.

The next three scenes (I, ii -iv) compress nearly a year's sporadic fighting in various parts of France into a single battle before the city of Angiers. The choice of

---

[2]The full title to Part One reads: "The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions Base sonne (vulgarly named, The Bastard Fawconbridge): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey . . . ".

[3]For a thorough discussion of the origins of Fawconbridge see the introduction to the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare's King John, ed. John Dover Wilson, Cambridge: University Press, 1954, pp. xl-xli.

this city as the focal point of the action probably rests on its frequent mention in the Chronicles as a city which changed hands several times and which suffered accordingly (pp. 272-9). Its citizens did not, however, play the role of neutral mediators assigned to them in the play. On the contrary, Holinshed states that they were among the first people to declare their support for Arthur upon the death of Richard I (p. 273). The hereditary claim of Prince Arthur receives in the play as sympathetic a treatment as is possible without seriously censuring John's actions. There is no doubt in Holinshed of John's far superior claim, as his brother's designated heir, the sworn choice of the English nobility, and a mature man far more suited to rule than a young boy. The chronicler makes relatively little of Arthur except to show how his claims served as an excuse for the French king's ambitious designs against the English territories. The dramatist amplifies this idea, chiefly by developing the characters of Arthur and his mother, Constance of Brittany, far beyond the shadowy figures that appear in the Chronicles. As a result he creates considerable sympathy for the young prince, who emerges as an appealing figure, wise beyond his years, but caught up in the ambitious plans of his mother and the real villain of the piece, Philip of France. This is illustrated by the confrontation just before the battle, when the rival claims are fully set out in the quarrel be-

tween Constance and Eleanor (I, 510-45). Here the dramatist is closely following Holinshed, who deplores such instances of feminine interference in state affairs:

> Surelie quéene Elianor the kings mother was sore against hir nephue Arthur, rather mooued thereto by enuie conceiued against his mother than vpon any iust occasion giuen in the behalfe of the child; in that she saw if he were king, how his mother Constance would look to beare most rule within the realme of England, till hir sonne should come to lawfull age to gouerne of himselfe. So hard it is to bring women to agree in one mind, their natures commonlie being so contrarie, their words so variable, and their déeds so vndiscréet.
> (p. 274)

In the argument over the will (I, 519-25) Queen Eleanor holds the upper hand, a fact that must have been familiar to anyone who had read Holinshed's account of Richard I's death:

> In short, . . . preparing his mind to death, . . . [Richard] ordeined his testament, or rather reformed and added sundrie things vnto the same which he before had made at the time of his gooing foorth towards the holie land.
>
> Vnto his brother Iohn he assigned the crowne of England, and all other his lands and dominions, causing the Nobles there present to sweare fealtie vnto him.
> (p. 270)

Yet in contrast to the defiant insults hurled by Constance and Philip, Arthur's speeches display a reasonable but courageous attitude, and a shrewd grasp of the situation. Consequently, the dramatist manages to uphold the rightness of John's stand, while at the same time he makes of Holinshed's indistinct and much less sympathetically-portrayed young

adolescent[4] a prince with the wisdom of an adult and the pathetic appeal of a child.

According to Holinshed, the peace treaty of 1200 which brought about the marriage between the Lady Blanch and the Dauphin Lewis ended hostilities until 1202, whereupon Philip of France "with no small arrogancie" suddenly renewed his demands on Arthur's behalf and declared war (p. 284). It is at this point in the play (I, 966ff.) that the dramatist first departs from the chronicle account to begin "telescoping" the three historical sequences. As I mentioned earlier, John's conflict with Pope Innocent III had nothing to do with his trouble with Arthur, but began in 1205, fully two years after the young prince's death. Nor did the Pope adopt all the punitive measures at once, but spread them over three years, from 1208 when the bull of excommunication and interdiction was published (p. 297) to 1211, when the Pope absolved John's subjects of their allegiance (p. 303). Indeed, Holinshed specifically states that Innocent "gaue him [John] libertie and time to consider his offense and trespasse so committed" (p. 296). In the play all these events are compressed into a single ultimatum from Cardinal Pandulph, who thus becomes responsible for the renewal of fighting between English and French over Arthur's claim. This compression

---

[4]According to Holinshed (p. 190), Arthur was born in 1187. Thus he would be twelve years old at Richard's death, and fifteen at the time of his capture in 1202.

achieves a number of purposes central to the overall theme of The Troublesome Raigne. First, it provides a logical and dramatic means of promoting the action connected with Arthur and at the same time demonstrates the futility of Arthur's chances in view of the French King's self-interest. Secondly, it presents King John in a most favourable light by contrasting his courageous stand against Rome with Philip's submissiveness. But most important, it helps to establish John's conflict with Rome as the root cause of all his troubles. The external forces that will eventually cause his ruin are thus first introduced in this scene.

John's triumph and the capture of Arthur (I, vi-ix) follow Holinshed's account of the battle at Mirabeau in 1202, during which Arthur captured Queen Eleanor but later fell victim to a surprise attack (pp. 284-5). Once again the playwright creates sympathy for the young prince by contrasting his treatment of Eleanor with the taunts of his mother (I, 1057-79), thus following Holinshed's statement that Arthur treated his grandmother "verie honorablie and with great reuerence" (p. 284). But he departs significantly from the Chronicles to portray the young prince's conduct after his capture. In the play Arthur replies to his uncle's request to submit in tones that bespeak a quiet courage:

> Unckle, my Grandame taught her Nephew this,
> To beare captivitie with patience.
> Might hath prevayld not right, for I am King
> of England, though thou weare the Diadem.
> (I, 1095-8)

This contrasts sharply with the belligerent reply which Holinshed disapprovingly records:

> But Arthur like one that wanted good counsell, and abounding too much in his owne wilful opinion, made a presumptuous answer, . . . commanding king John to restore vnto him the realme of England, with all those other lands and possessions which king Richard had in his hand at the houre of his death. For sith the same apperteined to him by right of inheritance, he assured him, except restitution were made the sooner, he should not long continue quiet. (p. 285)

As the same time, the dramatist attaches far more sinister overtones to John's reaction. Holinshed's account says only that the King was "sore mooued" at the prince's words, and ordered his strict imprisonment, first at Falais and later at Rouen (p. 285). In the play, John's orders to Hubert de Burgh clearly indicate what the King has in mind:

> Hubert de Burgh, take Arthur here to thee,
> Be he thy prisoner: Hubert keepe him safe,
> For on his life doth hang thy Soveraigne's crowne,
> But on his death consists thy Soveraigne's blisse:
> Then Hubert, as thou shortly hearst from me,
> So use the prisoner I have given in charge.
> (I, 1118-23)

By definitely indicating John's intentions the playwright lays the groundwork for the King's later implication in Arthur's death. No matter what happens to Arthur now, John will be certain to suffer the blame.

The French reaction to Arthur's capture (I, 1135-80) further extends the compression of historical events by introducing the subject of Lewis's claim to the English throne, an issue which in Holinshed does not arise until the barons'

revolt of 1214-18 (p. 328). Its occurrence at this point adds another link between the anti-papal struggle and the subsequent revolt, and affords a further demonstration of the legate's complete unscrupulousness in his endeavours to secure England's submission. The end of this scene marks the first significant combination of the forces which encompass John's final ruin.

After a brief comic interlude showing Fawconbridge's antics among the corrupt inhabitants of a monastery (I, 1181-1313), events move quickly towards their climax with the attempt to blind Arthur. Once again the dramatist lays a greater proportion of the guilt on John's shoulders by making the warrant seem to come from him alone, whereas Holinshed states that the King issued the command "through persuasion of his councellors" in an attempt to quiet the rebellious Breton nobility (p. 286). Moreover, he expands Holinshed's allusion to the young prince's "lamentable words" at his prospective mutilation (p. 286) into an eloquent plea for the supremecy of divine justice over royal commands (I, 1367-90). Finally, Hubert's decision to spare Arthur is given a much more favourable interpretation in the play:

> I faint, I feare, my conscience bids desist:
> Faint did I say, feare was it that I named?
> My King commands, that warrant sets me free:
> But God forbids, and he commandeth Kings:
> That great Commander counterchecks my charge,
> He stays my hand, he maketh soft my heart.
> (I, 1433-8)

Holinshed ascribes Hubert's decision to a shrewd assessment of John's temper and a careful regard for his own safety:

> For he considered that king John resolued vpon this point onelie in his heat and furie, . . . and that afterwards, vpon better aduisement, he would both repent himselfe so to haue commanded, and giue them small thanke that should sée it put in execution. (p. 286)

These re-interpretations allow the dramatist the opportunity to introduce the familiar theme of the limits of both royal power, and the subject's duty towards his king. It is an issue to which he will return later in the play.

Part One ends with the opening of the rift between King John and his barons. The second coronation which begins this scene actually took place in 1202 (p. 285), and there is no record in Holinshed of either its background or implications. Holinshed does, however, record several instances of bad feeling between King and nobility throughout John's reign. John continually fined his barons for their refusal to follow him in his wars with France, and demanded hostages from some of them to insure their good behaviour.[5] Moreover, he required a new oath of allegiance from them in 1209 (p. 299), a fact that indicates a significant lack of faith in their loyalty. Yet at no time does Holinshed indicate that the English nobility raised any fuss over Arthur's imprisonment

---

[5]For example, Holinshed records that in 1211 John demanded hostages of several nobles whom he feared would turn from him as a result of the Pope's decree absolving the English people of their oath of allegiance. (pp. 298-9).

or death. On the contrary, all requests for the prince's freedom and rebellions at his death were carried out by the Breton nobility who were Arthur's own vassals (p. 286). In transferring their actions to the English barons the dramatist once again constructs a logical connection between the two unrelated sequences involving Arthur's downfall and the nobles' revolt. This brings up another significant departure from the Chronicles, this time concerning the playwright's choice of Pembroke, Salisbury and Essex as the chief spokesmen for the discontented nobles. According to Holinshed, these three men remained loyal to the King throughout his troubles with the barons. Indeed, Essex occupied the powerful position of Lord Chancellor until his death in 1213 (p. 313), while Pembroke and Salisbury withstood threats from their fellow nobles (p. 320) to remain on John's side right up to his death. It is my belief that the playwright undertook this flat contradiction of Holinshed for the specific purpose of creating a central role for Philip Faweonbridge as the embodiment of true nobility, and patriotism symbolically clothed with a bastard's title. The achievement of such a purpose necessarily involved the transferring of actions from the historical characters, Pembroke, Salisbury and Essex, to the Bastard. The dramatist then had the choice of either omitting these men altogether, or placing them on the opposite side. Because these three earls were the most prominent noble-

men of John's reign, it seems to me likely that he chose the latter course to emphasize the significance of their defection and the Bastard's choice to remain loyal.

The episode of Peter the Hermit (I, 1497ff.) follows Holinshed's account of the event, which took place in 1213. Like the chronicler, who calls Peter "a deluder of the people, and an instrument of satan raised vp for the inlargement of his kingdome" (p. 311), the dramatist portrays the hermit as an idle troublemaker who makes a living out of people's credulity (I, 1289-1313). To dramatize Peter's prophecy, the phenomenon of the five moons, reportedly seen at York in December of 1200 (p. 282) is inserted here and given a significance found nowhere in the Chronicles. John's reaction to the hermit's prediction (I, 1640-59) is an intensification of Holinshed's account, which states that Peter's words "did put . . . a feare of some great mishap in his hart, which should grow through the disloialtie of his people" (pp. 311-12).

The first part ends with a temporary reprieve for John in the form of Hubert's news of Arthur's safety. Yet the three forces that eventually bring about his downfall are already present, and need only one incident to set them in motion. This incident occurs at the opening of the second part with the death of Prince Arthur.

As I mentioned in Chapter I, Holinshed provides several

versions of Arthur's death and leaves the choice up to the reader. The first of these versions claims the prince died accidentally while trying to escape from Rouen by leaping from the walls into the river below (p. 286), while the others allege that he died of natural causes or was murdered on the King's orders (p. 286). From these accounts the playwright chose the first one (II, 1-29), altering it slightly to make possible the discovery of Arthur's body. This choice is highly significant to the rest of the play in that it specifically relieves John of actual complicity in Arthur's death, and makes of this death another in the series of external forces that finally overwhelm the unfortunate monarch. Moreover, it achieves this purpose without destroying any of the pathos surrounding Arthur's ill-fated career. Instead, the dramatist shifts the blame squarely onto the shoulders of the barons, who decide to revolt on an assumption of the King's guilt for which they have no proof, and which the audience knows to be false (II, 77-109).

The next scene (II, ii) depicts the combination of all the forces marshalled against John and his resulting submission to the Pope. Once more the playwright compresses the events of several years into a single catalogue of formidable external pressures. For example, John's lament over his many cares treats incidents that took place in the years 1204, 1208, and 1216 respectively as if they happened all at once:

Was ever King as I opprest with cares?
Dame Elianore, my noble Mother Queene,
My onelie hope and comfort in distresse,
Is dead, and England excommunicate,
And I am interdicted by the Pope

. . . . . .

The multitude (a beast of many heads)
Doo wish confusion to their Soveraigne:
The Nobles blinded with ambitious fumes,
Assemble powers to beat mine Empire down,
And more than this, elect a forren King,
(II, 225-37)

In addition, he reinforces the links he has created between the separate historical sequences by showing the conflict with Rome to be the chief cause of John's other misfortunes:

The Pope of Rome, tis he that is the cause,
He curseth thee, he sets thy subjects free
From due obedience to their Soveraigne:
He animates the Nobles in their warres,
He gives away the Crowne to Philips Sonne,
And pardons all that seeke to murther thee:
(II, 267-72)

The King's submission to Pandulph (II, 260-348) follows Holinshed in asserting that John was forced to submit out of sheer desperation (p. 306), and that he dissembled with the Pope (p. 317). However, the playwright departs from the Chronicles to insert a two-line prophecy of the Reformation (II, 280-81) which was possibly inspired by John Bale's play Kyng Johan.[6]

---

[6]At the end of the first act of Bale's play an Interpreter summarizes the events of John's reign according to the view of the Reformation historians, and makes a more specific connection.

This noble Kyng Johan, as a faythfull Moyses,
Withstode proude Pharao for hys poore Israel,
Mydnynge to brynge yt owt of the lande of darkenesse,
But the Egyptyanes dyd agaynst hym so rebell,
That hys poore people ded styll in the desart dwell,
Tyll that duke Josue, whych was our late Kynge Henrye,
Clerely brought us in to the lande of mylke and honye.

In general, the play departs from the chronicle account only in the extent to which the conflict with Rome becomes the root cause of all King John's subsequent misfortunes. With John's submission, this sequence of events comes to an end, and leaves the stage clear for the working out of the baronial revolt. From this scene forward, John's relations with the Papacy appear only in the light of this later conflict.

The conspiracy of St. Edmundsbury (II, iii) incorporates several decisions taken by the barons over the entire course of their revolt. According to Holinshed, this meeting produced a resolution to force John to guarantee certain ancient liberties outlined in a document that formed the basis for the famous Magna Charta (pp. 317-18). Only in 1216 did the nobles offer the crown to the Dauphin, when severe defeats at the hands of the King rendered their situation desperate (p. 328). The play intensifies the nobles' culpability by dovetailing these two events into a seemingly willing surrender to a foreign power for the overthrow of the legitimate monarch. Similarly, the barons' grievances (II, 380-418) depict the shallowness of their cause. Anyone familiar with the Chronicles would probably remember that Holinshed dismissed the allegations concerning Chester's banishment and the nobles' "private wrongs" (II, 401) as "coniectures of such writers as were euill affected towards the kings cause" (p. 319), while the issues of Arthur's death and the Pope's curse have already been shown to be unjust-

ified. Thus the dramatist makes it quite clear that in turning to Lewis the barons are committing a premeditated act of treason. The meeting with the Dauphin follows the chronicle account of the council at London in 1216 where, in return for the barons' sworn allegiance the Dauphin "vsed them so courteouslie, gaue them so faire words, and made such large promises, that they beleeued him with all their harts" (p. 331). By including this meeting and following it with an account of Lewis's intended treachery (II, 584-693) the dramatist underscores the dangers of internal discord against which the Bastard had so eloquently spoken (II, 446-88), and firmly establishes the latter as the sole remaining spokesman for true allegiance.

According to Holinshed's account, the civil war between King John and the barons under the leadership of the Dauphin lasted just under five months, from Lewis's arrival in May of 1216 to John's death the following October (pp. 331-36). Like his counterpart in the play, Lewis defies the Pope to assert his claims to England, and was consequently excommunicated (p. 332), as the rebellious barons had been the previous year (p. 326). In both cases Holinshed records that the Dauphin and his followers appealed their case to Rome (p. 332), and in the meantime completely ignored the Pope's decrees. In the play this sequence of events follows immediately upon the reconciliation with Rome, and, with a nice

stroke of irony, completely deflates the legate's vaunted claims of the Pope's absolute power. To emphasize the futility of Pandulph's boast, the dramatist couches the reply of the French nobles in terms far blunter than those found in Holinshed:[7]

> This must not be: Prince Lewes keep thine owne,
> Let Pope and Popelings curse their bellyes full.
> (II, 681-2)

Their attitude also furthers the theme of misplaced loyalty by illustrating the hypocrisy of Lewis and the English barons, who had formerly used the Pope's curse as an excuse for their actions.

The events of the war receive comparatively little attention in the play apart from the mere reporting of their occurrence, usually by the Dauphin. Once again, the Bastard Fawconbridge assumes a role assigned by Holinshed to one of John's trusted followers, in this instance that of a Norman soldier called Foakes de Brent who was active in the campaign against the rebellious barons, and a man whom, in Holinshed's words, "the king had . . . in great estimation" (p 328).[8] With the exception of the lines exhorting the English barons to return to their proper allegiance (II, 758-62), Meloun's

---

[7]Holinshed states merely that the French nobles swore to defend the principle that a King could not give away his power as John had done (p. 330). This was one of the main pretexts upon which Lewis based his right to the English crown, and Holinshed records that both he and Philip his father took considerable care to explain it to the Pope's legate.

[8]Discussed by John Dover Wilson

confession of Lewis's intended treachery follows Holinshed's account (p. 334). However, the playwright diverges from the Chronicles to depict the barons' reaction to the confession. Holinshed states only that Meloun's words caused considerable distress among the Englishmen and that:

> manie of them inwardlie relented, and could haue bin contented to haue returned to king John, if they had thought that they should thankfullie haue beene receiued. (p. 334)

In the play the barons' decision to submit at this point (II, 778-85) prepares the way for the final resolution of the conflict at the death of King John.

The final two scenes depict the end of the ruinous civil war with the death of King John and the succession of his son Henry III. Holinshed provides several accounts of the circumstances surrounding the King's death without any attempt to judge their accuracy. Indeed, he discounts the question of accuracy completely with the remark:

> How soeuer or when soeuer or where soeuer he died, it is not a matter of such moment that it should impeach the credit of the storie, . . . (p. 336)

Instead of dwelling on the circumstances, the chronicler prefers to ascribe John's downfall to the overwhelming pressure of his subjects' disloyalty which brought about the anguish of mind that hastened his death (p. 337). While he too alludes to the King's extreme grief at his misfortunes (II, 786-98), the playwright specifically links John's death

with the anti-papal conflict by choosing from Holinshed the version in which the King is poisoned by a monk at Swinstead Abbey. To make the connection even more explicit, certain details are altered from the chronicle account. For example, Holinshed states that an angry remark by the King on the abundance of grain around the abbey provoked one of the monks to carry out the murder "being mooued with zeale for the oppression of his countrie" (p. 336). In the play this motive is changed to a desire to revenge the wrongs suffered by the clergy during John's reign (II, 869-83), and it receives further emphasis from the manner in which the Abbot joyfully condones the monk's intentions (II, 923-9). In this way the dramatist is able to maintain the idea that the corrupt influence of Rome lay at the root of all John's troubles.

In the play the death of King John brings about a quick resolution of the conflict, when the barons return to their proper allegiance and Lewis gives up his claims under the realization that without support from within his cause is hopeless (II, 1167-73). This marks a considerable departure from the Chronicles, which record that the civil war continued until 1213, when Lewis agreed to withdraw from England after a severe defeat at Lincoln (pp. 246-8). Moreover, John's death did not bring about the wholesale repentance of all the rebellious barons; their revolt from Lewis was spread over the entire two-year period of civil war (pp. 340-

48). The Earl of Pembroke's role in the proclamation of Henry III's accession and the marshalling of the young King's forces against the French is once again transferred to Fawconbridge, the epitome of true patriotism. All these changes serve to bring the drama to a satisfactory conclusion that underscores the ideals of patriotism and internal accord vital to the well-being of England. Appropriately, it is the Bastard who reiterates this ideal in the closing words of the play:

> Let England live but true within it selfe,
> And all the world can never wrong her State.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If Englands Peeres and people joyne in one,
> Nor Pope, nor Fraunce, nor Spaine can doo them wrong.
>
> (II, 1188-96)

In the preceding paragraphs I have shown how the playwright has used the available material from Holinshed's Chronicles to create a dramatization of the evils of internal disloyalty and papal oppression. A comparison of this treatment with that of Thomas of Woodstock reveals several conspicuous differences. First, the author of The Troublesome Raigne adhered with only a few minor exceptions to the sequence of events found in the Chronicles, instead of imposing his own sequence on a number of events chosen from throughout the account of a single reign. To fit the specific needs of the drama, the former playwright compresses and inter-relates the major happenings of John's reign to form a much more

historically-oriented plot. Secondly, The Troublesome Raigne does not, like Woodstock, depart significantly from Holinshed's interpretation of events. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Holinshed depicts John as an unfortunate ruler, cursed with the active disloyalty of his own subjects and the unjustified interference of ambitious foreign powers. The play diverges significantly from this interpretation only in its tendency to emphasize the issue of papal interference, and to make it the primary cause of John's other misfortunes. Finally, the characters in The Troublesome Raigne exhibit at times an individuality totally beyond the range of the shadowy abstractions to be found in Woodstock. For instance, King John's assessment of his complicity in the fate of Prince Arthur (I, 1687ff.) reveals a depth of vision that Plain Thomas or Richard II could not possibly have displayed. Yet these glimpses of individuality still tend to drop from sight in the face of the over-riding political and moral considerations. In the end, it is not King John's personality with which we are concerned, but the political and religious ideas for which his unhappy reign serves as an example. Only with the advent of Marlowe and Shakespeare does the issue of individual personality, for which Holinshed's Chronicles provides an ample fund of information, achieve a position of greater importance within the context of the play.

IV

EDWARD THE SECOND

Marlowe's Edward II is considered to be the finest non-Shakespearean example of the English historical drama.[1] Unlike the plays I have discussed so far, it is the creation of a master dramatist, and bears the signs of his individualistic outlook and highly creative imagination. Yet it shares with these two plays one important feature: namely, an almost exclusive dependence upon Holinshed's Chronicles for the substance of its plot. Given this absolute similarity in the nature of the source material, it is necessary to determine just what characteristics in Marlowe's handling of the Chronicles raises his play to a position of such obvious superiority. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, I believe the outstanding feature of Marlowe's contribution to be a much greater emphasis on characterization that lifts the shadowy chronicle personages beyond the level of mere political or moral abstractions to that of thinking and feeling individuals whose conflicts and suffering can elicit an emotional response that in turn enhances the presentation of the political theme.

Like the anonymous playwrights, Marlowe employed

---

[1] See, for example, Irving Ribner, "Marlowe's Edward II and the Tudor History Play", Shakespeare's Contemporaries, edd. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962, p. 141.

several methods to compress the mass of unrelated chronicle material into a logical, swift-moving dramatic narrative. Holinshed's account, which covers a period of twenty-three years, from Edward's accession in 1307 to Mortimer's execution in 1330, contains a multitude of detail about foreign and domestic wars, natural disasters, political manœuvering, and the like. Marlowe passed over most of this information altogether to concentrate upon those events directly related to the rise and fall of Edward's two favourites, the confrontation between King and barons, Edward's deposition and murder, and the consequent fortunes of Roger Mortimer the Younger. Having selected these details, he "telescoped" them into a plot that seems to cover no more than a year or so.[2] Significantly, over half the play (1-1532) is devoted to the five-year period of Piers Gaveston's influence, with the result that this first of Edward's favourites seems to dominate a greater part of the King's reign than the Chronicles would suggest. After Gaveston's death events begin to move very quickly, so that the much longer rule of the Spencers is disposed of in just under six hundred lines (1533-2109). The remainder of the play (2110-2888) concentrates upon Edward's suffering and Mortimer's rise and fall. Such an

[2]This telescoping often leaves something to be desired in the way of logic, as for example when it provides for the recall of Gaveston from Ireland without giving him sufficient time to arrive there.

uneven distribution of emphasis is justified by the fact that Marlowe's interest lay in the personalities rather than the events of Edward II's reign, and in particular, the personality of Edward himself. Therefore, he devoted the greatest amount of space to those events which best reveal the development of these personalities, as the following, more detailed comparison will indicate.

The play opens with the introduction of Piers Gaveston, who has just returned from exile at the request of the new King. The favourite's expressed intention to defer to none but Edward (20-25), and his treatment of the three poor men (26-52) mirror Holinshed's account of his behaviour throughout the five years of his domination:

> The king indeed was lewdlie led, for after that the earle of Cornewall was returned into England, he shewed himselfe no changeling, . . . but through support of the kings fauour, bare himselfe so high in his doings, which were without all good order, that he séemed to disdaine all the péeres & barons of the realme.
>
> (pp. 550-51)

Similarly, his later assault on the Bishop of Coventry (184-216) enlarges upon the chronicle version, which states merely that Gaveston caused the Bishop to be imprisoned and received the confiscated lands (pp. 546-7). However, Marlowe departs from the unfavourable chronicle account to assign Gaveston a sincere affection for his royal patron. For example, the receipt of Edward's letter of recall prompts the following ecstatic speech:

> Sewwte prince I come, theſe theſe thy amorous
> lines,
> Might haue enforſt me to haue ſwum from France,
> And like Leander gaſpt vpon the ſande,
> So thou wouldſt ſmile and take me in thy armes.
> The ſight of London to my exiled eyes,
> Is as Elizium to a new come ſoule,
> Not that I loue the citie or the men,
> But that it harbors him I hold ſo deare,
> The king, vpon who e boſome let me die,
> And with the world be ſtill at emnitie.
> (10-17)

These are hardly the words of a mere self-seeker. Moreover, the fact that Gaveston is soliloquizing at this point lends his speech an extra ring of sincerity, since he has no reason to hide his true feelings. In addition, the Gaveston of the play emerges as a considerably more sophisticated figure than his counterpart in Holinshed. His lyric description of the pleasures he intends to devise for the King (53-74) contrasts sharply with the chronicler's record of the entertainments he provided:

> . . . The foresaid Peers . . . furnished his court with companies of iesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughtie ribalds, that the king might spend both daies and nights in rioting, plaieng, blanketing, and in other such filthie and dishonourable exercieseſ. . .
> (p. 547)

Marlowe thus presents in the opening scenes a complex figure, whose attitude towards his royal master betrays a curious mixture of genuine affection and blatant arrogance. Against the chronicler's moral strictures he sets the elements of a certain fascination with this sophisticated upstart whose actions reveal his contempt for conventional morality.

Marlowe introduces a similar complexity into the triangular relationship between Edward, his favourite, and the baronial faction. Holinshed, who views the whole affair strictly from the standpoint of the barons, professes amazement that:

> . . . the king should be so inchanted with the said earle, and so addict himselfe, or rather fix his hart vpon a man of such corrupt humour, against whome the heads of the noblest houses in the land were bent to deuise his ouerthrow.
>
> (p. 549)

He records that the magnates were prompted to banish the favourite:

> . . . in hope that the kings mind might happilie be altered into a better purpose, being not altogither corrupted into a venemous disposition, but so that it might be cured if the corrupter thereof were once banished from him.
>
> (p. 549)

The anti-Gaveston faction was led by the earls of Lincoln, Warwick and Pembroke, all of whom had sworn a deathbed promise to Edward I to prevent the favourite's return at all costs (p. 551). There is no indication that the two Mortimers took any part in the procedings against Gaveston, while on the King's side the earl of Kent was much too young at the time to participate in political decisions.[3] Furthermore, Holinshed omits any reference to Queen Isabella aside from the record of her marriage to King Edward in 1308 (p. 547).

---

[3]Holinshed records that Edmund of Kent was born in 1301 (p. 533). He was thus only six years old at the time of his half-brother's accession.

Marlowe's version presents quite a different picture. First, he introduces the idea of homosexuality with all its attendant complexities into the Edward-Gaveston relationship. On the one hand, Edward's infatuation is a vice which causes him to neglect his royal duties. Only when it concerns his favourite does he take any interest in his rights as sovereign:

> Thy woorth ſweet friend is far aboue my guifts,
> Therefore to equall it receiue my hart,
> If for theſe dignities thou be enuied,
> Ile giue the more, for but to honour thee,
> Is Edward pleazd with kinglie regiment.
> (169-73)

Moreover, the relationhsip exerts a destructive effect upon the sacred bond of marriage, as Marlowe's unhistorical introduction of the Queen into the Gaveston episode so effectively points out:

> For now my lord the king regardes me not,
> But dotes vpon the loue of Gaueſton,
> He claps his cheekes, and hanges about his neck,
> Smiles in his face, and whiſpers in his eares,
> And when I come, he frownes, as who ſhould ſay,
> Go whether thou wilt ſeeing I haue Gaueſton
> (269-74)

Yet there is a certain lyric quality in the expression of their love that suggests it is not altogether to be condemned. This is evident from the first meeting of the two men:

> Edw, What Gaueſton, welcome: kis not my hand,
> Embrace me, Gaueſton as I do thee:
> Why ſhouldſt thou kneele,
> Knoweſt thou not who I am?
> Thy friend, thy ſelfe, another Gaueſton,
> Not Hilas was more mourned of Hercules,
> Than thou haſt beene of me ſince thy exile.

Gau. And ſince I went from hence, no ſoule in hell
Hath felt more torment then poore Gaueſton.
(148-56)

It becomes even more pronounced when contrasted with the rough speech of the angry barons, whose just indignation at the favourite's misrule does not totally excuse their threatening conduct towards the King. This is particularly true of Young Mortimer, first among the barons to speak consistently of armed resistance:

Coſin, our hands I hope ſhall fence our heads,
And ſtrike of his that makes you threaten vs.
Come vnckle, let vs leaue the brainſick king,
And henceforth parle with our naked ſwords.
(129-32)

Moreover, the barons themselves make it clear that it is not so much the homosexual attachment as the personal insults of one they consider a base upstart that chiefly prompt their actions. Once again, Young Mortimer, the magnate destined to become leader of the King's opponents, best expresses their attitude. In reply to his uncle's long speech justifying the idea of such relationships, he replies:

Vnckle, his wanton humor greeues not me,
But this I ſcorne, that one ſo baſelie borne,
Should by his ſoueraignes fauour grow ſo pert,
And riot it with the treaſure of the realme,

. . . . . .

Whiles others walke below, the king and he,
From out a window, laugh at ſuch as we,
And floute our traine, and ieſt at our attire:
Vnckle, tis this that makes me impatient.
(732-49)

Thus Marlowe prevents the sympathies of his audience from

resting exclusively with either side in the conflict over the favourite by subtly balancing Holinshed's anti-Gaveston account with indications of a broader, more complicated viewpoint in which both King and barons seem equally at fault.

According to the Chronicles, Gaveston was twice banished, once in 1308 and again two years later (pp. 549, 551). Only the first of these is treated in any detail, and it is from this account that Marlowe draws most of his material, such as the meeting of the lords at the new temple (295), and the King's unwilling consent (402-3) wrung from him according to Holinshed "bicause he saw himselfe and the realme in danger" (p. 549). However, Marlowe does alter the facts to introduce the threat of excommunication from the Archbishop of Canterbury (366-79) whom he unhistorically describes as Papal legate. But by far his most significant change in the chronicle material involves the introduction of Queen Isabella as the person who convinces the barons to bring about Gaveston's recall. Holinshed makes no mention of any discord between Edward and his wife during Gaveston's reign as favourite. Rather, he attributes this turn of events to his successor, Hugh Spencer the Younger, who by 1322 had seen to it that she was "clenelie worne out of the kings fauour" (p. 570). By transferring the blame for this alienation to Gaveston, Marlowe achieves two dramatic purposes. First, he emphasizes once again the nature of the

King's affection for his "minion", and points out its adverse effect on his marital obligations. At the same time, it provides the means of bringing the Queen into contact with her future lover, young Mortimer, who, as I mentioned before, does not appear at this point in the chronicle source. Isabella's whispered conference with the young earl and his subsequent change from adamant opposition to advocacy of Gaveston's recall (551ff.) indicate a closeness between the two that Holinshed does not even suggest until near the end of Edward's reign. Finally, Marlowe enlarges upon the barons' motives for agreeing to the favourite's recall. According to Holinshed, they felt that the King might be induced to mend his ways if his minion were restored to him, and that Gaveston would likely encourage this process under the certain knowledge that the barons had the power to exile him again if they so desired (pp. 549-50). Marlowe emphasizes the more sinister motives of placing the favourite in a position that would facilitate his murder (590-96), and providing the nobles with a legitimate excuse for revolt (605-15). He thus makes it obvious that the ensuing reconciliation between Edward, Isabella and the barons (647-714) will be at best a measure of very short duration.

The introduction of Young Spencer and Baldock at this point (757-839) marks the first major compression of the historical time sequence. Holinshed first mentions the

Spencers at their rise to prominence in 1313, fully a year after Gaveston's execution (p. 552). Nor is there any indication of a connection either with Gaveston himself or with the Earl of Gloucester's daughter, whom Gaveston had married in 1307 (p. 547). Indeed, Holinshed asserts that the younger Spencer initially owed his court appointment to the barons who preferred him because "it was knowne to them well inough that the king bare no good will at all to him at the first" (p. 552). Spencer's industrious efforts soon won him Edward's favour, however, "and that farther than those that preferred him could haue wished" (p. 552). Baldock is first mentioned at his appointment as Lord Chancellor, thanks to the patronage of the two Spencers (p. 570). Holinshed's comments on these characters are brief and hostile. Young Spencer and his father are described as "notable instruments to bring [Edward] vnto all kind of naughtie and euill rule" (p. 552), while Baldock is dismissed as "a man euill beloued in the realme" (p. 570). Marlowe enlarges upon these comments by showing the two men through their private conversation to be a pair of cynical would-be courtiers bent on securing a position of importance at the cost of moral scruple:

> Then Baldock, you muſt caſt the ſcoller off,
> And learne to court it like a Gentleman,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You muſt be proud, bold, pleaſant, reſolute,
> And now and then, ſtab as occaſion ſerues.
>
> (787-94)

However, Marlowe's chief reason for including this scene seems to be the achievement of a smooth and dramatically logical transition between Gaveston and the Spencers as favourites of the King and the primary targets of baronial hatred. By establishing a connection with Gaveston (769-70) Marlowe is able to get round the necessity for a long explanation of Spencer's rise to power, and to provide the means for his introduction to Edward in a later scene (1091-1108). Furthermore, the suggestion that Young Spencer might have been Gaveston's "companion" (769) implies without further need for explanation that his relationship with Edward totally resembles the Earl of Cornwall's. Thus Marlowe can skip over the thirteen-year period of Spencer's rule as favourite without noticeably sacrificing the logical continuity of his plot and creating awkward gaps in the action which a stricter adherence to the historical sequence would most certainly have brought about.

Marlowe's version of the events leading up to Gaveston's execution involves only a few changes from the chronicle account. While Holinshed records that the barons were provoked into open revolt by the favourite's insulting language, Marlowe implies that it was the barons who caused the final breach by their actions in the "device scene" (852ff.). The insult of Gaveston's that evokes a violent response from the earls:

> Baſe leaden Earles that glorie in your birth,
> Goe ſit at home and eate your tenants beefe:
> And come not here to ſcoffe at Gaueſton,
> Whoſe mounting thoughts did neuer creepe ſo low,
> As to beſtow a looke on ſuch as you.
> (918-22)

seems thus more justified, and certainly more brilliant, than the coarse abuse attributed to his counterpart in Holinshed:

> . . . He called the earle of Glocester bastard, the earle of Lincolne latelie deceased bursten bellie, the earle of Warwicke the blacke hound of Arderne, and the earle of Lancaster churle.
> (p. 551)

The capture of Mortimer Senior by the Scots (959ff.) is Marlowe's own invention which serves to emphasize the complete breach between Edward and the nobles and to distribute the blame for it more evenly between the two sides. On the one hand, Young Mortimer's anger is justified, for Edward behaves most arrogantly in refusing to ransom a man captured while fighting in the King's war. Moreover, the accusations which Mortimer and Lancaster hurl at Edward (1001-43) reflect the King's inexcusable neglect of his duty to the commonwealth, brought on by his infatuation for Gaveston. To emphasize the King's incompetence, Marlowe even moves the time of the battle of Bannockburn, which actually took place in 1314, into the period of Gaveston's influence (1030-43). Mortimer 's contemptuous account of this battle dramatizes the chronicle version, which states that the English army was:

> brauelie furnished, and gorgeouslie apparelled, more seemelie for a triumph, than meet to incounter with the cruell enimie in the field.
> (p. 553)

On the other hand, the nobles have obviously decided on a course of armed resistance before Edward's refusal. As word arrives of Mortimer Senior's capture, Lancaster has just finished issuing the following command:

> Now ſend our Heralds to defie the King,
> And make the people ſweare to put him down.
> (956-7)

and while Lancaster and Young Mortimer approach the King to demand the earl's ransom, Pembroke and Warwick are dispatched to levy men for the coming war (967-73). It is only with the rejection of Kent near the end of the scene (1058-69) that Edward is shown to be totally in the wrong. This unhistorical act of folly also supplies a deficiency in the chronicle material, which gives no reason for the Earl's sudden defection to the barons' side. The scene ends with the introduction of Baldock and Young Spencer (1091-1108) anticipated by their earlier conversation.[4] The dramatist has thus manipulated the chronicle material in such a way that the lines of opposition have been firmly drawn, not only for the imminent conflict over Gaveston, but also for the war that will bring about Edward's ruin. Only the Queen remains as yet uncommitted.

After a brief scene completing the account of Kent's defection, Marlowe proceeds quickly to the capture and execution of Piers Gaveston (1136-1378). Here the play closely resembles Holinshed's account (pp. 551-2) in all but one

---

[4]See pp. 73-4.

important respect; namely, the role assigned to Queen Isabella. While Holinshed mentions only that Edward and Gaveston left her at Tynemouth Castle (p. 551), Marlowe makes her responsible for revealing the favourite's whereabouts to the pursuing barons (1193-1201). Besides providing a logical reason, missing in the Chronicles, for the barons' knowledge of Gaveston's flight towards Scarborough, this innovation of Marlowe's affords him an excellent opportunity to dramatize Isabella's growing regard for Young Mortimer. Her soliloquy at the nobles' departure (1215-25) reveals her to be increasingly drawn towards the young earl, whose concern for her safety contrasts sharply with Edward's previously-expressed indifference:

> So well haſt thou deſeru'de ſweete Mortimer,
> As Iſabell could liue with thee for euer,
> In vaine I looke for loue at Edwards hand,
> Whoſe eyes are fixt on none but Gaueſton:
> (1215-19)

Although she is still willing to return to the King, in the hope that with Gaveston's death she will no longer be forced to compete for his affection, Isabella demonstrates in this speech that a change in her loyalty will be by no means difficult for her should matters fail to improve.

Having thus finished with Gaveston, Marlowe passes quickly over succeeding events-so quickly, in fact, that he compresses over ten years of chronicle material within the compass of one scene (1381-1576). The first part of this segment completes the development of the Edward-Spencer

relationship by introducing the father and illustrating the younger Spencer's succession to Gaveston's position as favourite, all of which, as I mentioned before, took place over a much longer period. Marlowe's characterization of Old Spencer as a soldierly Englishman determined to fight loyally for his king (1412-25) has no foundation in the Chronicles, where the accounts of both father and son are consistently unfavourable. Its insertion is, I think, a deliberate attempt on Marlowe's part to balance the previously unattractive impression of the Spencers with an indication of a commendable fidelity to Edward at a time when everyone else is deserting him. Next, the Queen's departure for France is moved back from 1325 so that her subsequent revolt might be brought in without undue explanation (1445-75). The reasons given for the French embassy are a condensed version of Holinshed's account, though Marlowe does change the name of the territory involved from Aquitaine and Poitou to Normandy and omits the fact that the Spencers purposely discouraged Edward from going to France himself because they feared for their safety (pp. 574, 577). Omitting entirely the gradual increase of hostility between the barons and the two Spencers, which in Holinshed occupies the years 1313-1321 (pp. 5558-61), Marlowe gives the impression that the preceding sequence of events took place in the time required for Arundel to carry the King's request to the barons and return with news of Gaveston's death. This

enables him to disregard the largely unrelated and dramatically uninteresting events of the years 1312-22 and to relate the King's victory over the barons directly to his vengeful anger over the execution of his favourite. A comparison with Holinshed's account reveals the dramatic advantages of such compression. The chronicler depicts Edward's reaction to Gaveston's death in much the same fashion as it appears in the play.

> When the king had knowledge hereof, he was woonderfullie displeased with those lords, . . . making his vow that he would sée his death reuenged, so that the rancour which before was kindled betwixt the king and those lords, began now to blase abroad, and spred so farre, that the king euer sought occasion how to worke them displeasure.
>
> (p. 552)

However, ten years and several pages of material intervene before this revenge is accomplished with the execution of the Earl of Lancaster. At this point Holinshed feels it necessary to reiterate the King's motives for his conduct towards the Earl:

> The king séemed to be reuenged of the displeasure done to him by the earle of Lancaster, for the beheading of Peers de Gaueston earle of Cornewall, whome he so deerelie loued . . . (p. 569)

Marlowe allows no such impression of remoteness to occur by so compressing the narrative that the King rushes into battle with the news of his favourite's execution still fresh in his mind. The battle and its aftermath (1578-1703) derive their substance from Holinshed's account of Edward's two

victories at Burton-on-Trent and Boroughbridge in 1322 which resulted in the capture and execution of the Earl of Lancaster (pp. 566-69). Marlowe relegates Lancaster to a position of secondary importance by including among those executed the Earl of Warwick, Gaveston's actual murderer, who according to Holinshed escaped the King's revenge by dying a natural death in 1316 (p. 554). Consistent with his earlier depiction, he also brings the Earl of Kent into this battle, whereas Holinshed states that Edmund was at this time fighting for his brother in France (pp. 575-6). Kent's appearance and second banishment (1628-30) explain his subsequent association with Mortimer's escape to France (1683-1703), which in the chronicle account took place in 1323, thus anticipating Mortimer's joining the Queen by three years (p. 575). With their departure for France all is set for the dramatization of Edward's final downfall.

Holinshed reports that Queen Isabella and Prince Edward remained in France in defiance of Edward's repeated demands for their return, until the spring of 1326, when King Edward issued a proclamation which denounced them as enemies of the realm and seized their possessions (p. 578). Although he gives all the possible motives for the Queen's conduct, the chronicler obviously favours the view that she intended to cause trouble in England.

> Others write, and that more truelie, how she being highlie displeased both with the Spensers and the

> king hir husband, . . . did appoint indeed to return into England, not to be reconciled, but to stir the people to some rebellion, whereby she might reuenge hir manifold iniuries . . . (p. 578)

The bribery of the French King thus becomes a justifiable precaution against the possibility of her receiving any help from her brother, especially since several of the barons' faction, among them Mortimer, had joined her in France (p. 579). Marlowe creates a somewhat different impression by placing the episode of the bribery directly after Edward's victory over the barons and before any clear indication that Isabella is contemplating armed resistance (1661-79). While it is true that Young Spencer accuses her of complicity with the recently-defeated barons to effect the King's overthrow (1668-70), Marlowe gives no clear indication that he is to be taken at his word. Spencer's actions thus become within the context of the play a means of driving the Queen to desperation. This is borne out in the following scene (1704ff.) where Marlowe depicts Isabella's unhappy situation just before Sir John of Hainault arrives to offer help.

> A boye, thou art deceiude at leaſt in this,
> To thinke that we can yet to tun'd together,
> No, no, we iarre too farre, vnkinde Valoys,
> Vnhappie Iſabell, when Fraunce reiects,
> Whether, O whether dooſt thou bend thy ſteps. (1713-17)

Even after the acceptance of Sir John's offer, there is no talk of a possible invasion of England until Young Mortimer arrives to urge its desirability.

> . . . madam, right makes roome
> Where weapons want, and though a many friends
> Are made away, as Warwick, Lancaſter,
> And others of our partie and faction,
> Yet haue we friends, aſſure your grace in England,
> Would caſt vp cappes, and clap their hands for ioy,
> To ſee vs there appointed for our foes.
> (1759-65)

Such words considerably enlarge upon the chronicle version, which states only that Mortimer was one of the banished English nobles who followed the Queen and her son to Hainault (p. 579). This change permits the demonstration of Mortimer's growing influence over the Queen and his emergence as leader of the growing opposition to King Edward and the Spencers. In this way Marlowe provides the dramatization of Mortimer's rise to power omitted in Holinshed, and gradually begins the shift in sympathies entirely towards King Edward.

Holinshed reports that Edward II's capture took place two months after the Queen's landing in England, and that during his retreat towards Wales the English people turned from their allegiance almost without resistance (pp. 581-3). Only after several proclamations from the Queen's camp, asking King Edward to return and govern according to the people's wishes, had failed to produce any reply did the parliament decree that Prince Edward be appointed Lord Warden (p. 583). Marlowe dramatizes this information by means of an unhistorical pitched battle in which the victorious forces of the Queen under Young Mortimer's leadership summarily dispose of the King's followers (1880ff). Once again the

dramatist indicates the true state of affairs through Edmund of Kent, whose relenting soliloquy (1893-1910) contains the first totally reliable proof of the Queen's infidelity and Mortimer's ambitious intentions:

> Edward, this Mortimer aimes at thy life:
> O fly him then, but Edmund calm this rage,
> Diſſemble or thou dieſt, for Mortimer
> And Iſabell do kiſſe while they conſpire,
> And yet she beares a face of loue forſooth:
> (1902-6)

His perceptive observations are immediately afterwards reinforced by Mortimer's forwardness in dealing with the elder Spencer (1971-5) and in directing the pursuit of the King (1975-81). In addition, Marlowe once again inserts an unhistorical depiction of Old Spencer's sturdy loyalty to Edward in his courageous defiance of Mortimer and the Queen:

> Rebell is he that fights againſt his prince,
> So fought not they that fought in Edwards right.
> (1973-4)

Mortimer's contemptuous response: "Take him away, he prates" (1975), marks the degree to which his ambition has made him arrogant. It is clear from this scene that the Queen's faction can no longer legitimately pose as England's deliverers.

Marlowe's account of the capture of the King and his favourites at Neith Abbey considerably enlarges upon the strictly circumstantial report of the Chronicles for the purpose of eliciting the greatest possible sympathy for Edward's plight. Holinshed makes no mention of any affectionate farewell between Edward and his friends; nor does he indicate the

attitude of Baldock and Young Spencer, aside from a brief remark that the latter starved himself and thus hastened his execution (p. 584). Indeed, the chronicle account suggests that the executions were justified by the inclusion of the information that verses from the Fifty-Second Psalm were embroidered upon the armour in which Young Spencer was drawn and quartered (pp. 583-4). By contrast, Marlowe allows the two favourites a most sympathetic portrayal at this point by depicting their affectionate leave-taking of the King (2056-68), Young Spencer's grief at Edward's departure (2089-93), and Baldock's fortitude in the face of certain death (2094-2101). Moreover, he adds an extra measure of sympathy to the King's plight through the compassionate ~~attitudes~~ speeches of the Abbot, and, more important, the Earl of Leicester, whose duty it is to make the arrests, and whose obvious distress over the King's unhappiness contrasts sharply with the cold efficiency of his partner Rice ap Howell (2034-2109). This sympathetic portrayal is carried even further in the following scene in which Edward is forced to abdicate (2110-2279). According to Holinshed, a parliament at Westminster passed an ordinance which deposed Edward II because "he was not worthie longer to reigne", and elevated Prince Edward in his place (p. 584). Misled by his mother's apparent grief, the Prince refused to accept the crown unless his father was willing to abdicate. Con-

sequently, a deputation from the parliament went to Killing-worth Castle to obtain Edward II's consent (pp. 584-5). Holinshed records the unhappy King's reaction to these demands in the following manner:

> . . . The king in presence of them all, notwithstanding his outward countenance discouered how much it inwardlie grieued him; yet after he was come to himselfe, he answered that he knew he was fallen into this miserie through his owne offenses, and therefore he was contented patientlie to suffer it, but yet it could not greeue him, that he had in such wise runne into the hatred of all his people: notwithstanding he gaue the lords most heartie thanks, that they had so forgotten their receiued iniuries, and ceased not to beare so much good will towards his sonne Edward, to wish that he might reigne ouer them. Therefore to satisfie them, . . . he vtterlie renounced his right to the kingdome and to the whole administration thereof. And lastlie he besought the lords now in his miserie to forgiue him such offenses as he had committed against them. (p. 585)

Marlowe presents a far different picture by showing an unrepentant King convinced of his blamelessness and consumed with frustrated anger against those who have wronged him.

> For such outragious paſſions cloye my ſoule,
> As with the wings of rancour and diſdaine,
> Full often am I towring vp to heauen,
> To plaine me to the gods againſt them both:
> But when I call to minde I am a king,
> Me thinkes I ſhould reuenge me of the wrongs,
> That Mortimer and Iſabell haue done.
> But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
> But perfect ſhadowes of a ſun-ſhine day?
> (2130-38)

In addition, the dramatist substitutes for the King's consent to abdicate the more potent symbol of the crown as the object of conflict. Edward's agony of mind is thus visibly heightened

by the necessity of having to give away this tangible representation of his kingly status.

> But ſtay a while, let me be king till night,
> That I may gaze vpon this glittering crowne,
> So ſhall my eyes receiue their laſt content,
> My head, the lateſt honor dew to it,
> And iointly both yeeld vp their wiſhed right.
> (2170-74)

Unlike Holinshed's submissive King, who realizes the cause of his misery and begs forgiveness of the nobles for his past folly, Marlowe's Edward remains to the end pathetically unaware of his deficiencies as a ruler.

> Commend me to my ſonne, and bid him rule
> Better than I, yet how haue I tranſgreſt,
> Vnleſſe it be with too much clemencie?
> (2238-40)

By making Edward such a pathetic figure in this scene, Marlowe succeeds in maintaining the impression of his lamentable state without making the martyr of him that Holinshed implies. Even as he creates sympathy for the unhappy King, Marlowe does not let his audience forget that Edward brought much of the trouble on himself by the same extravagant but ineffectual histrionics that he indulges in with such abandon throughout this scene. He thus paradoxically depicts Edward II as a more strongly-defined individual than his chronicle counterpart by emphasizing his most pervasive weakness.

Marlowe's version of Edward's ill-treatment and murder fully dramatizes Holinshed's already moving account. The chronicler reports the several changes in Edward's keepers

and comments disparagingly on the Queen's hypocritical conduct towards her husband.

> . . . The quéene would send vnto him courteous and louing letters with apparell and other such things, but she would not once come neere to visit him, bearing him in hand that she durst not, for feare of the peoples displeasure, who hated him so extreamelie. Howbeit she with the rest of her confederats (no doubt) laid the plot of their deuise for his dispatch, though by painted words she pretended a kind of remorse to him in this his distresse, & would séeme to be faultlesse in the sight of the world . . . (p. 586)

Holinshed attributes the dismissal of Edward's sympathetic custodians and the final devising of his murder to the Bishop of Hereford, who bore a long-standing grudge against the deposed King for previous abuses (p. 586). He also reports an abortive plot by the Earl of Kent and others to rescue the King, an attempt which, as it turned out, hastened Edward's murder (p. 586). Kent, however, escaped punishment at this time, and was not executed until 1329, when he was deluded by a conjuring monk into believing his brother to be still alive and trying to rescue him (p. 597). Edward's murder is recorded in all its grisly detail. Marlowe follows this account closely, and alters it only to gain a greater degree of sensational effect and to heighten the perfidy of Young Mortimer and the Queen. To achieve the first, he invents the chillingly efficient professional murderer Lightborn, whose dialogue with the fearful King heightens the pathos of the latter's death. The second is brought about

by the transferral of all those measures Holinshed attributes to the Bishop of Hereford to Mortimer. Thus the Earl becomes the one responsible for ordering Edward's keepers to mistreat him (2337-60), and for sending the unpointed letter with his murderer (2510-30). Both he and the Queen are here shown at their worst, so as to throw Edward's desperate position into even sharper relief.

> Qu, But Mortimer, as long as he ſuruiues,
> What ſafetie reſts for vs, or for my ſonne?
>
> Mort.iu., Speake, ſhall he preſently be diſpatch'd and die?
>
> Qu, I would hee were, ſo it were not by my meanes.
>
> (2329-34)

Once more Marlowe uses the Earl of Kent to demonstrate the true extent of Mortimer's duplicity and arrogance, first in his attempt to win Prince Edward's support (2371-2426), and later in his bold stand after his capture (2596-2638). Except for the invention of Lightborn, Marlowe adheres to Holinshed's account of the murder in every important respect. Thus he follows the Chronicles in representing the final degradation of a king whose folly may have occasioned his downfall, but who fell victim to an even more culpable display of ambition and cruelty.

In his final scene Marlowe compresses the events of three years into a forceful illustration of the distribution of justice. According to Holinshed, Mortimer and the Queen remained in control of affairs until 1330, when the Earl was

suddenly arrested, convicted of Edward II's murder and an excessive intimacy with the Queen Mother, and executed. Isabella got off rather lightly with honourable confinement to one place (pp. 588-9). Marlowe alters the account to emphasize the downfall of the over-confident Mortimer and the final emergence of a just ruler in the form of the young Edward III. Mortimer's unhistorically defiant stand at his death completes Marlowe's characterization of this complex figure whose untamed pride that forbids him to "Jue for life vnto a paltrie boye" (2838). His calm acceptance of his fortune somewhat qualifies the drawing of moral conclusions about the justice of his fall. Nevertheless, the play ends on a note of hope, with the advent of just but firm government under the rule of a prince who shows himself highly unlikely to repeat his father's mistakes.

In the first chapter of this paper I mentioned that Holinshed's depiction of Edward II's reign contains all the elements of a tragedy, albeit in a rather diffuse form. While it shows the King to be largely responsible for his downfall by his wilfully foolish adherence to corrupt favourites, the chronicle account indicates that his suffering and death far exceed the limits of justice, especially since they proceeded from a malice far more heinous than Edward's folly. Marlowe does not, in my opinion, significantly depart from Holinshed's idea for all his changes in the chronicle material. Throughout

the play he presents Edward II as a character who lacks the self-awareness to realize his folly and the sense of perspective to balance his attachment to his "minions" with a responsible approach to his kingly duties. His weakness for favourites provokes the censure of the audience as well as the nobles, and his treatment of the Queen in the first part of the play is highly reprehensible, particularly since it proceeds from too ready a belief in his wily favourite. Yet all this fades into the backgrouhd in view of the horror and pathos of his suffering, and the callous indifference behind the malice of Isabella and her lover. Marlowe's most significant contribution lies in the fact that he develops the potential of Holinshed's account in the creation of individualized characters who, though hardly completely "natural", are still far removed from the political abstractions of former plays. Marlowe's King is not merely a foolish ruler on the lines of Woodstock's Richard; he is Edward Plantagenet, an individual personality whose particular suffering derives largely from qualities peculiar to him alone. Similarly, Roger Mortimer exists as an individual entity rather than a mere representative of the scheming nobility. Yet these private characteristics are still shown to be inseparable from the larger political considerations. Edward's troubles may be caused by an individual character trait, but were he n o t a King, this trait would lose all significance. The

tragedy of Edward's situation lies in the fact that he cannot seem to prevent his individual concerns from interfering with his obligations to the realm. Given this abdication of responsibility, the established order becomes a prey to disruption from other quarters. A similar case arises with the ascendancy of the ambition-dominated Mortimer, whose concern again is completely selfish. Only with the advent of a responsible monarch like Edward III is the balance fully restored. Thus the emphasis upon personality that so characterizes Marlowe's approach functions in Edward II as a means of enhancing the play's political theme by simultaneously engaging the audience's emotions and intellect to produce a far more satisfying response than the one aroused by the two anonymous dramas. This to my mind is the essence of his approach to Holinshed's Chronicles. To quote Irving Ribner:

> Marlowe approached this vast storehouse of material with a sure awareness of his purpose and perhaps a keener dramatic skill than had ever before been exercised in the history play.[5]

---

[5]Ribner, Shakespeare's Contemporaries, p. 141.

V

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has illustrated three radically different methods of dramatizing material from the Chronicles. If the many verbal echoes and exact parallels be any indication, all three dramatists clearly depended on Holinshed to the extent that they probably consulted the work directly throughout the composition of their plays. However, each went his own independent way in the selection and arrangement of the chronicle material and the dramatic presentation of the political issues he found. The author of Woodstock uses Holinshed merely as a repository of details from which he selects and rearranges certain events into a largely unhistorical dramatic exemplum of royal folly and misgovernment. Strictly speaking, his play is not dependent on the Chronicles, for he ignores Holinshed's juxtaposition of events and commentary in favour of his own concerns. By contrast, the author of The Troublesome Raigne of King John does not significantly depart from the chronicle account, save to lay an even greater stress on the role of the Pope's interference, and to compress the events into an interconnected narrative. For all his alterations, he still preserves Holinshed's picture of King John as a monarch ill-used by his subjects. Marlowe's approach involves a much more complex

manipulation of Holinshed's material to provide a dramtically satisfying interpretation which in the end turns out to be closely akin to the one presented, albeit somewhat awkwardly, in the Chronicles. Despite his changes, Marlowe follows essentially the outline that I discussed earlier for Holinshed's Edward II,[1] namely, that of a King who in the first part of his reign antagonizes everyone about him with his manifestations of folly, but who elicits the reader's sympathy in the end by the fact that he falls victim to a cruelty far beyond his merits. Marlowe's greatest achievement lay in the fact that he skilfully realized the dramatic potential of this interpretation by smoothing out the awkward gaps in Holinshed's narrative, and, more important, by transforming the wooden figures of the Chronicles into well-defined personalities.

What, then, are the primary advantages of Holinshed's work as a source for these historical dramas? First of all, Holinshed emphasizes throughout his account those political and moral issues of the greatest concern to Englishmen of the late sixteenth century. As I mentioned earlier, such issues as the relationship between King and nobility, and the role of the royal councillor, all of which receive considerable attention from Holinshed, are the very concerns that dominate all three plays. If the Chronicles had been a less "popular" work in this sense, it perhaps would not

---

[1]See pp. 16-17.

have been so desirable a source for dramatists in search of material to answer the demands of the late Elizabethan theatre audience. More important, Holinshed's very conventionality as a chronicler made his work an ideal "jumping-off point" for the dramatist, in a way that a more interpretative approach would possibly have failed. The fact that he gave every available version of an event with the minimum of stated preference allowed the playwright to choose the account that best suited his own purpose without having to struggle with rearrangements of other facts. Thus, what Tillyard has described somewhat disparagingly as an "omnibus volume"[2] became by its very nature the most valuable source for the historical drama of the 1590's.

---

2 Tillyard, p. 56.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Anon. The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England . . . Later English History Plays. Vol. IV of Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare. ed. Geoffrey Bullough. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1962.

British Museum. Egerton MS. 1994. ff. 161-185. Reprinted literaitm under the title The First Part of the Reign of King Richard the Second or Thomas of Woodstock. Oxford: Oxford University Press for The Malone Society. 1929.

Holinshed, Raphael et. al. The Third Volume of Chronicles. . . (London, 1587) Vol. II of Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland. New York: AMS Press. 1965 (A facsimile reprint of the edition printed in London for J. Johnson et. al. in 1807)

Marlowe, Christopher. The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second King of England with the Tragicall Fall of Proud Mortimer. (London, 1594). Reprinted literatim from the Zurich and Cassel copies, under the title Edward the Second: 1594. Oxford: Oxford University Press for The Malone Society. 1925.

Secondary Materials

Anon. Woodstock: A Moral History. ed. A. P. Rossiter. London: Chatto and Windus. 1946.

Bakeless, John. The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe. 2 vols. Hamden, Conn. Anchor Books. 1964.

Bevington, David. Tudor Drama and Politics. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1968.

Campbell, Lily B. Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy. London: Methuen. 1964.

Elson, John. "Studies in the King John Plays". Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies. edd. James C. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson and Edwin E. Willoughby. Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library. 1948.

Fussner, F. Smith. The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought: 1580-1640. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1962.

Levy, F. J. Tudor Historical Thought. San Marino: The Huntington Library. 1967.

Marlowe, Christopher. Edward II. edd. H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller. London: Methuen. 1933.

Petit-Doutailles, Charles. Le Roi Jean et Shakespeare. n.p.: Libraire Gallimard. 1944.

Poirier, Michel. Christopher Marlowe. London: Chatto and Windus. 1968.

Reese, M. M. The Cease of Majesty. London: Edward Arnold. 1961.

Ribner, Irving: "Marlowe's Edward II and the Tudor History Play". Shakespeare's Contemporaries. edd. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall. 1962.

Ribner, Irving. The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare. 2d. ed. London: Methuen. 1965.

Schelling, Felix E. The English Chronicle Play. New York: Macmillan. 1902.

Shakespeare, William. King John. ed. John Dover Wilson. 2d. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1954.

Talbert, Ernest William. The Problem of Order. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1962.

Tillyard, E. M. W. Shakespeare's History Plays. 2d. ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books. 1954.