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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 13

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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Cambridge University Press
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William Shakespeare
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13
William Shakespeare
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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BY

JOHN DOVER WILSON

III KING HENRY VI

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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William Shakespeare
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO <i>HENRY VI</i> , PARTS II AND III (continued)	
III. Shakespeare's early dramatic style	PAGE vii
IV. The Wars of the Roses in the Chronicles and in <i>HENRY VI</i>	xvi
THE STAGE HISTORY OF <i>HENRY VI</i> PARTS II AND III	xxxix
TO THE READER	xlvi
THE THIRD PART OF <i>KING HENRY VI</i>	i
THE COPY FOR 2 and 3 <i>HENRY VI</i> , 1623	117
NOTES	123
GLOSSARY	209

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

TO *HENRY VI* PARTS II AND III

(continued)

III. SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY DRAMATIC STYLE

While discussing the problem of the authorship of *Henry VI*, which has been the main theme of the two previous Introductions, I have made more than one passing reference to Shakespeare's early poetic style, on the one hand, and to the chronicle sources on the other. In the present Introduction I shall endeavour to gather up these threads and to say something in conclusion on the dramatic qualities of the trilogy, especially those of Part III.

Probably the most indisputably Shakespearian scene in *Henry VI* is the Temple Garden scene of Part I, 2. 4. A brief examination of that will therefore form a suitable, not to say a safe, introduction to the question of Shakespeare's early dramatic style. And it is perhaps significant of his general attitude towards the chronicles that no authority has yet been discovered in them for this incident of the plucking of the Roses which he makes the opening chapter of the Wars of the Roses. Almost without doubt the scene is entirely of his own invention. Certainly his hand is evident from the outset and there is not a hint anywhere that he is revising a previous draft. And how quickly he gets off the mark! Dramatic situation and *mise en scène* are alike evoked in the first half-dozen lines, which immediately transform six players entering a bare Elizabethan stage, or the still barer stage of the reader's mind, into a knot of hot-headed nobles who, having fallen out, we are told in the third line, on a point of

Cambridge University Press

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

II AND III HENRY VI

law in Temple Hall, are now withdrawn into the garden to quarrel in privacy together. Characteristic of him, too, is the metaphorical use of words like 'wrangling' and 'truant' to suggest a disputation of law-students and so add a touch to the inns-of-court atmosphere. Moreover, the scene thus set, what follows bears all the marks of the early Shakespeare. Suffolk, for instance, illustrates the pleasure his creator takes at this date in a curvetting Pegasus, when, after confessing to a neglect of the study of law, he remarks haughtily:

And never yet could frame my will to it;
And therefore frame the law unto my will;

while word-play becomes word-fence as Plantagenet protests:

The truth appears so naked on my side
That any purblind eye may find it out,

and Somerset catches him up with:

And on my side it is so well *apparelled*,
So clear, so shining, and so evident,
That it will glimmer through a *blind* man's eye.

Furthermore, this last line recalls both old Aegeon's

My wasting lamps some fading glimmer left,

in 5. 1. 315 of *The Comedy of Errors*, and Berowne's

A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind,

in 4. 3. 331 of *Love's Labour's Lost*. No one, I think, but Shakespeare was writing this sort of thing in the early 1590's. Less peculiar to him, but no less characteristic, is Warwick's speech. Consisting, as it does, of five lines, each beginning 'Between two... which', followed by a sixth completing all five sentences, and concluding with a couplet rounding off the whole, it gives us

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

ix

something resembling stanza form. Shakespeare learnt this, as he learnt much else, from Kyd. But to see how far he outsoared his teacher, we have only to set Warwick's gay and felicitous sally beside the heavy-footed proverbial philosophy of its more famous model in *The Spanish Tragedy*

My lord, though Belimperia seem thus coy,
 Let reason hold you in your wonted joy:
 In time the savage bull sustains the yoke,
 In time all haggard hawks will stoop to lure,
 In time small wedges cleave the hardest oak,
 In time the flint is pierced with softest shower,
 And she in time will fall from her disdain,
 And rue the sufferance of your friendly pain.¹

Verse pattern of this kind evidently appealed strongly for a time to Shakespeare—it gave him a chance of putting Pegasus through another set of paces; for what may be called rhetorical iteration is exceedingly common in his earlier plays. Parts II and III of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* are full of it; it is found in *The Two Gentlemen*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *King John*, while it attains its finest, and perhaps its final, florescence in the elaborately stylized speeches of King Richard II.² The first twenty-five lines of *1 Henry VI*, 2. 4 are therefore as indisputably Shakespeare's as any passage of like length in the canon. And that the rest are equally Shakespearian is proved by the many parallels they show with other plays of his; by the ease, flow, and pregnancy of the verse; and by the frequent resort to metaphor of a character which he alone employed at this period. The first will be most

¹ *Spanish Tragedy*, 2. 1. 1–8.

² See *Richard II*, 3. 3. 147–54; 4. 1. 203–15.

Cambridge University Press

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x II AND III HENRY VI

conveniently treated in the Notes. On the second and third a word or two must here be said.

As to the verse, the dialogue, consisting as it does of short speeches, gives little scope for enjambement and none for paragraphing, both characteristic of Shakespeare from the outset of his dramatic career. Yet, though most of the lines are end-stopped, the voice of the speaker sweeps on so naturally that we never notice the ticking of the metrical clock. Nor is our attention diverted from the sense by any of those forced constructions or tautological devices dictated by the blank verse frame, which are plentifully illustrated in other scenes of *Henry VI*, and commonly deface the verse of Kyd, Peele and Greene, and even at times of Marlowe. Furthermore, not a line, not a word, is wasted; and every line is full of meaning, even if the meaning be a quibble or a conceit that seems a little trivial to the modern sense. I stress this wealth of matter in particular, since it is here that Shakespeare most markedly shows his superiority to his early contemporaries. Marlowe himself is empty beside him. And what especially enriches Shakespeare's verse is his use of metaphor.

Many books of recent years have been published on Shakespeare's imagery and Elizabethan poetic imagery in general. I cannot profess to have read most of them; but as far as my reading goes they are mainly concerned with subject-matter and function, and seldom if ever touch upon the different modes of expressing such images and the tendency of dramatists to adopt one mode or the other.¹ It is therefore worth while pointing out here that Shakespeare is more prone to metaphor, as distinct from simile or comparison, than any of the 'university wits', and that his metaphor, although in

¹ *Shakespeares Bilder*, 1936, by Wolfgang Clemen, an English version of which will have appeared before this, is a brilliant exception.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xi

his early plays a little obtrusive, is never like theirs merely ornamental. On the contrary, it almost always springs directly from the dramatic situation or is suggested by some word natural or essential to the context: the metaphor 'apparelled' in Somerset's retort above quoted is, for example, suggested by Plantagenet's reference to the 'naked' truth. In other words, with Shakespeare imagery and verbal ambiguity are so near allied as often to be barely distinguishable,¹ though the earlier the play the easier it is to see the connexion between them. The distinction is visible enough, for instance, in the scene before us, which largely consists of a chain of quibbles, and images begotten of quibbles, as Shakespeare plays his variations on the twin theme of roses red and roses white;² variations which are as a two-finger exercise on the spinet compared with the fugue-like imagery of *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Yet elementary and obvious though it be in 1592, it is found in Shakespeare and Shakespeare alone. For Marlowe, with a poetic genius essentially epical, is all for simile and has little traffic with metaphor of any kind, and is not always happy when he has;³ while the metaphor of Kyd, Peele, or Greene is cheap, pretentious and above all extraneous, since their sense of ambiguity is childish and finds outlet in such verbal somersaults as Hieronymo's

Thus therefore will I rest me in unrest,
Dissembling quiet in unquietness,⁴

¹ Cf. my Introduction to *Hamlet*, pp. xxxv-xli.

² The theme recurs in *Lucrece*, 50-77.

³ E.g. cf. 2. 1. 68-9 below with an incongruity such as this in 1 *Tamburlaine*, 1. 1. 59-60:

'The hope of Persia, and the very legs
Whereon our state doth lean *as on a staff*.'

⁴ *Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Boas, III. xiii. 29-30.

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii II AND III HENRY VI

which seemed so brilliant to his contemporaries that it was often imitated. Here, on the other hand, apart from the word-play about the red and white roses already mentioned, are three examples of Shakespearean images in this scene:

Spring crestless yeomen from so deep a root? (l. 85)

Were growing time once ripened to my will... (l. 99)

Go forward, and be choked with thy ambition! (l. 112)

And they are interesting, not merely as illustrations of his early manner in this kind, but because they all became favourites with him and are repeated time and again in different forms and varying connexions in subsequent plays. The last and simplest reappears, for instance, in the terrible line, still actual for twentieth century Europe,

All pity choked with custom of fell deeds.¹

With the second there are so many later parallels that selection is difficult, though perhaps 'to ripe his growing fortunes' in 4. 1. 13 of *2 Henry IV* is as apt as any. But the first is the best for our present purpose, since the double meaning, absent in the last and clear to the eye in the word 'growing' of the second, is here so subtle as to be hardly perceptible. It lies in 'crest', which means not only a heraldic device but head or top. Thus 'crestless' suggests a tree of stunted growth or flowerless plant, and so gives birth to the image which finds lovelier and still subtler form in Prince Hal's threat to Hotspur,

And all the budding honours on thy crest
I'll crop to make a garland for my head.²

¹ *Julius Caesar*, 3. 1. 270. I suspect that Matt. xiii. 22 lies behind this and other images of choking.

² *1 Henry IV*, 5. 4. 72.

Cambridge University Press

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xiii

Of action in the Temple Garden scene there is little enough. The principals pick their roses; and, as the rest follow suit and tempers wax angrier and angrier, the dramatist tosses the white and red roses to and fro in quibble and word-play and metaphor, exactly as, a few months later, he amuses himself for four stanzas with a 'silent war of lilies and roses' which false Tarquin observes in the face of chaste Lucrece. Nor from first to last are we told the 'point of law' which leads to the quarrel. Greene or Peele would never have omitted a piece of information of that kind. But they were Masters of Art, who had to keep up appearances by displaying knowledge even when they lacked it, whereas the unlearned man from Stratford was an adept at concealing ignorance. For what spectator, or reader either for that matter, ever stops to wonder what the legal point may have been? Did even the students from the inns-of-court who formed part of the original audience, and for whose benefit, we may guess, the whole scene was invented?¹ They sat enchanted by the representation of men like themselves, quarrelling like themselves, in the garden they re-created at once from memory. The enchanter was not going to risk destroying the illusion by wading out of his depth into legal terminology.

The scene, then, full of life and without a wooden line, a tawdry image, or a false note of any kind, though freely proliferating into quibbles and conceits, is thoroughly characteristic of Shakespeare's early dramatic manner; the manner of a writer brimming over with energy and self-confidence, the manner above all of a poet. I would insist upon this last in reply to critics who are prepared to saddle him with any verse, however feeble or empty, provided they find it within

¹ Cf. G. M. Young, *Shakespeare and the Termers*, Annual Shakespeare Lecture, British Academy, 1947.

Cambridge University Press

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv II AND III HENRY VI

the cover of the First Folio. It is, indeed, my simple faith, a faith which has inspired me from the beginning of this edition in 1918, only to be strengthened with every fresh play taken up since, that Shakespeare was a born poet, as Mozart was a born musician. In other words, however much he may have 'played the sedulous ape' at the outset, or yielded himself to succeeding poetic fashions as time went on (and I believe he did neither of these things as much as is generally supposed); however often he showed himself the child of his age in a tendency to bombast, or in his later plays allowed his 'rapidity of imagination' to 'hurry him to a second thought before he had fully explained the first';¹ in brief, however many or great were his faults, faults due to working under pressure, to the literary conventions of his day, or to sheer bad taste (as it may appear to us),² three things he had by nature and could no more dispense with than he could dispense with breath or heart-beat: I mean the poet's tongue, the poet's ear, and the poet's eye. True, as Ben Jonson (thinking of himself) said of him, 'a good poet's made as well as born'. True, he acquired such a wealth of language, by experience in the use of it, that in the end there was nothing he could not do with it. Yet the words he needed never at any period refused to come at command; were indeed always present below the threshold of consciousness, ready to pass into the thought-stream like the blood in his veins, so that word and thought were in fact born at an instant. Thus, any note of hesitancy, any hint of verbal penury, above all any sign of effort in the filling-out of the verse line are

¹ Johnson, *Proposals*, 1756 (v. Raleigh, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 4).

² The fact that eighteenth-century critics sometimes condemned as bad taste what now appear his finest passages should give modern critics pause.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xv

to me certain indications of foreign matter when they occur in the plays of the canon, whether it be matter untouched, or merely touched up, by him.

And ear was ever fellow-minister with tongue. Since 'the numbers came', or, in the words of Heminge and Condell, 'his mind and hand went together', he was incapable of writing an unmusical or halting line, while such a rush of words and images was always pressing for utterance that his lines are not merely never empty or vapid but they flow from the beginning with a 'pomp of waters unwithstood' such as makes, as I have said, even Marlowe's verse seem thin and poor in comparison. He had no doubt the defect of this quality. The torrent gets blocked at times. For, as Johnson noted again, 'it is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it a while, and if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it'.¹ But haste, not a dull ear, exuberance rather than failure of invention, were responsible for these breakdowns.

The poet's eye brings us round again to the subject of Shakespeare's use of metaphor, on which one last word may be spoken. In nothing does his invention show itself richer or more characteristic. And though Dryden found his style 'pestered with figurative expressions' it was he who declared: 'All the images of Nature were still [i.e. ever] present to him and he drew them not laboriously but luckily [i.e. with unstudied felicity]; when he describes anything you

¹ *Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 23. He left the 'tangles', to be 'evolved', or rather cut through, by the book-holder responsible for making up the prompt-book. Cf. my *Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'*, p. 24.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi II AND III HENRY VI

more than see it, you feel it too.’¹ There it is; the hall-mark of Shakespeare’s poetic genius, defined for all time by his first great critic in a passage which, printed in gold, should hang before the eyes of every other Shakespearian critic! For it reveals the eyes of the Master himself, those all-seeing eyes, which not only saw ‘all the images of Nature’ with perfect clarity, but never lacked words to represent those images with equal clarity, so that his hearers and his readers more than see them, they *feel* them too. Imperfectly realized, muddled, incongruous or insipid imagery was in consequence quite impossible for him at any time; for such powers of vision are not to be acquired by study or application, however much they may be developed by practice.

IV. THE WARS OF THE ROSES IN THE
CHRONICLES AND IN HENRY VI

The four plays, *Henry VI* (three parts) and *Richard III*, cover the period 1422–85 of English history, i.e. from the death of Henry of Monmouth to the victory at Bosworth of Henry Tudor. Strictly speaking, the Wars of the Roses began with the first battle of St Albans, in 1455, and ended with the battle of Tewkesbury and the death of Henry VI in 1471, after which the House of York reigned securely, though hardly happily, for fourteen years. But it is the fashion, even with modern historians, to regard those last unquiet, blood-stained years as the culmination of the dynastic struggle which could find no final settlement until a new dynasty, claiming lineal descent (a little fraudulently) from the houses of both Lancaster and York, established itself firmly upon the throne of England. And with the historiographers who wrote in

¹ v. *Essays of Dryden*, ed. W. P. Ker, i. 79–80.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xvii

Tudor times this fashion was law, since Bosworth Field stood for the first chapter of their England's Genesis. Yet living as they did, especially under a virgin childless Queen, in perpetual fear that chaos might come again, they peered into 'the dark backward and abysm of time' to trace with curious, and according to their lights, truth-seeking, eyes, the causes of the fifteenth-century catastrophe and the successive steps by which this unfortunate country descended through disasters abroad, civil war and anarchy at home, to the hell of Richard Crookback's monstrous tyranny. Their political philosophy being entirely, even superstitiously, monarchical, they found in usurpation the disease or sin, which working like poison within the body politic, gave rise to all these calamities. As it was put by Samuel Daniel, who was none the less a historian because he wrote his *Civil Wars* in verse,

the deformities of Ciuile Dissension, and the miserable euent of Rebellions, Conspiracies, and bloody Reuengements... followed (as in a circle) vpon that breach of the due course of Succession, by the Vsurpation of Hen. 4.¹

Daniel speaks of the period as a circle; and Feste expresses the same notion, in other words and in very different circumstances, when he concludes the interlude of the downfall of Malvolio with 'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges'. For while we moderns think of Time moving forward in a straight line, all men till recently assumed a circular motion for it, in which the wheel of Fortune, in some way not clearly envisaged, played its part.² The tetralogy,

¹ Epistle Dedicatory to the 3rd ed. of *The Civil Wars* (1609). Cf. my Introduction to *Richard II*, p. xxvii.

² Cf. H. R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*; Raymond Chapman, 'The Wheel of Fortune in Shakespeare's Historical Plays'; *Review of English Studies*, January 1950.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii II AND III HENRY VI

Richard II to *Henry V*, shows us the House of Lancaster mounting upwards upon the wheel and reaching the top at Agincourt. But as we listen to Henry V on the eve of the battle imploring Heaven's pardon for

the fault

My father made in compassing the crown,

we are reminded of the insecurity of the dynasty and are warned that the wheel must come full circle. Its decline begins with Henry the Fifth's untimely death and the accession of an infant in arms; becomes steeper as the child proves himself a man more gifted in prayer than in statecraft; and grows precipitous when in due course the usurpation of Henry IV provokes further usurpations. For though Richard Duke of York claims descent from a branch of Edward III's stock older than that of the house of Lancaster,¹ he raises a sacrilegious hand against Henry VI, who, crowned and consecrated at Westminster, is the anointed of the Lord and both son and grandson of other anointed Kings. And so Richard's heir, Edward IV, has to wade through seas of blood to reach the throne; only retains it by still further bloodshed; and is in the end succeeded by the butcher, Richard of Gloucester, who has no right to it whatever.²

Such is the Tudor legend of the 'troublous' period which preceded the accession of Henry VII. Elizabethan readers found it all set forth in the pages of

¹ See the Genealogical Table in Part II, p. 223.

² C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the 15th century* (1913), pp. 261-5; Denys Hay, *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, 1485-1537* (1950), pp. xxxvi ff.; *King Richard II* (New Shakespeare, 1939), pp. xxii-xxx; E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944). The last-named develops the thesis at length, and, I think, over-develops it.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xix

Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, though he owed most of it in fact to the more judicial *Anglica Historia* of his predecessor Polydore Vergil. But whereas Polydore starts with ancient Britain, and treats of the Wars of the Roses towards the end of a general history, Hall's sole theme is the 'discension' between 'the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & York beginnyng at the tyme of Kyng Henry the Fowerth, the first auctor of this deuision'.

Thus it was Hall who stretched the canvas upon which Shakespeare was later to paint his two great processional pieces; the one leading from the lists at Coventry to the field of Agincourt, the other opening with the funeral of Henry V at Westminster and closing with the crowning of Henry VII at Bosworth. Yet, if the thesis of the two foregoing Introductions holds, the second was already a picture painted by other hands when he began working upon it, and I suspect the same is true of the first also. I very much doubt therefore whether Shakespeare was ever himself a deep student of Hall as some assume;¹ the Tudor legend was common property and would unquestionably have been emphasized in the basic plays upon which I claim he worked. Nor do I believe that Greene himself only followed Hall, although he probably took the main scheme of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* from him.

The problem of authorship is indeed, as was made clear in the previous Introductions, intimately bound up with the problem of sources. And though I am conscious that much still remains to do on the latter, more at any rate than a general editor has time for, I have set down my tentative findings in the notes on Material at the head of each scene, in the hope that they may prove useful to those who come after, while

¹ See Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, pp. 144 ff.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx II AND III HENRY VI

certain general conclusions which seemed to emerge from the survey may be here discussed.

The historical period dealt with in these two parts (1441–71) is covered by Holinshed, 1587 (iii. 622–91),¹ Hall (202–304), and Grafton (i. 622–ii. 81). Of these, though Holinshed was constantly consulted, the main source seems to have been Grafton for Part II and Hall for Part III. Most of what Grafton prints on Henry VI's reign is lifted verbally from Hall, but he often omits passages and occasionally incorporates material from other sources or makes an observation on his own account. His account of the sham miracle at St Albans (v. Part II, 2. 1) illustrates the last two points. He quotes it not from Hall, but from Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue of the Veneration and Worship of Images*, 1529; tacks it on to the account of Duke Humphrey's death (from Hall); and concludes it with the following words of his own:

thus farre mayster Moore. And thus much for the noble prowesse and vertue, ioyned with lyke Ornamentes of knowledge and learning in this Duke. For the which, as before appered, he was loued of the commons, and well spoken of of all men, and no lesse deseruing the same, being called the good Duke of Gloucester: so neyther yet wanted he backbiters and priuie enuyers, as before hath bene expressed.²

Now Hall³ also stresses Humphrey's popularity and says he was 'called the good Duke of Gloucester', so

¹R. B. McKerrow argues (*Review of English Studies*, ix. 157–69) that we do not need to posit any other source for Part II than Holinshed's first edition. But see *P.M.L.A.* (50) 1935, pp. 745–752 by Lucilla King, which, dealing with II and III *Henry VI*, answers McKerrow.

² Grafton, *Chronicle*, i. 630 (ed. 1809).

³ Hall, *Chronicle*, 209 (ed. 1809).

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978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxi

that Grafton's words just quoted no doubt reflect Hall. But since the latter has nothing in that context corresponding with 'loued of the commons', which is clearly echoed in *2 Henry VI*, 1. 1. 156-7:

What though the common people favour him,
Calling him 'Humphrey, the good Duke of Gloucester'—

we may take two things as likely, (i) that the episode of the miracle at St Albans was derived, not from More direct, but from Grafton, and (ii) that the author of 1. 1 had Grafton and not Hall before him as he wrote. Further, since there is nothing elsewhere in Part II which can be traced to any passage in Hall that Grafton omitted in his transcription, there is no necessity to suppose that Hall was used at all.

In Part III, on the other hand, the reverse holds true. Here we find no instances of derivation from Grafton to the exclusion of Hall and Holinshed, while my notes on 2. 2. 11-18, 112 and 5. 6. 65 indicate three passages that were clearly drawn from Hall, to the exclusion of Grafton and Holinshed. To discover Grafton at the back of one part and Hall at the back of another suggests a difference of authorship. Yet the deduction is unnecessary, since Part III was of course written after Part II, and may therefore have been composed by the same author or authors at a time when a Hall was more easy to lay hands on than a Grafton. And if both chronicles were equally accessible, the difference may have been purely accidental. In this connexion it should be noted that Fabyan was drawn upon in Part II,¹ as in Part I, while Hart suggests,²

¹ See note on Pt. II, 1. 1. 112 and *Intro.* to Pt. I, pp. xxxv-xxxviii.

² He also 'found evidences of' Grafton's 'having been consulted' for Pt. II (v. his *Introduction*, p. xliii) but did not furnish a conclusive proof.

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978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxii II AND III HENRY VI

probably rightly, that Philippe de Comines was consulted in the writing of 5. 2 in Part III.¹ It looks, in short, as if the drafter or authors of *Henry VI* had quite a little library of chronicles on the shelf.² All Greene's personal property will have been sold to buy bread long before his death on 3 September 1592. But so active and voluminous a writer must once have possessed a 'study of books'. Would we could recover a catalogue of it!

The civil war begins in the Temple Garden a little prematurely since, historically and dramatically speaking, it does not actually break out until Richard Plantagenet, now Duke of York, returns from Ireland in the opening scene of Act 5 in Part II; while, though the hostility between him and Somerset is evident throughout this second play, neither of them makes any reference to the earlier breach in Part I. On the contrary, the origin of the civil war is fully accounted for in Part II by York's lust for power and the murder of Humphrey of Gloucester, which removes the only person capable of exercising a restraining influence upon him; and this lack of correlation is itself accounted for, as we have seen, by the fact that the Temple Garden scene was written after Part II had been produced on the stage.

Turning then to Part II and its sequel, which, as we have also seen, really constitute a single two-part drama, the first thing to notice is the excellence of their simple, firmly drawn, and well-conceived plot, even though the details are often worked out in a slovenly fashion. Part II, for example, falls into two sections. In the first our interest is centred on the downfall and

¹ See below, foot of p. 197. Comines was available both in the original French and in an English translation by T. Danett, entered in the Stationers Register 3 Feb. 1566 [Tudor Translations, 1897].

² See Introduction to Part I, p. xxxii.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxiii

assassination of Duke Humphrey, while the main theme of the second is the fulfilment of York's ambitious designs in the rising of Jack Cade, who is represented as his agent, and in the open declaration of war, followed by the victory of St Albans. It is a scheme clearly inspired by the following peroration which Hall appends to his account of Humphrey's death:

If the Duke had lyued, the Duke of Yorke durst not haue made title to the crowne: if this Duke had liuyd, the nobles had not conspired against the King, nor yet the commons had not rebelled: if this Duke had lyued the house of Lancastre had not been defaced and destroyed, which thynges hapned all contrary by the destruccion of this good man.¹

You have here one of the patterns of Tudor historical thought, a tableau one may call it, from a Tudor political morality play: the good old counsellor; the weak young king, led astray by favourites, one of them in this instance being his wife, who is represented as unfaithful to him; and the unscrupulous claimant, who seizes the occasion to usurp the crown. It is a special application of the typical humanist interlude of Youth and his grey-beard Eubulus,² though Henry of Windsor was a little o'er-parted for a Lusty Iuventus.

Modern history tells us that Richard, Duke of York, was for his period a man remarkably self-restrained and upright, only pressing his claim to the throne (just before his death) when it had become clear that nothing else would save the country. On the other hand, Duke Humphrey, so far from being a wise counsellor and patriotic man, was one of the most arrogant and self-seeking of all Henry VI's court. But this would not

¹ Hall, *op. cit.* p. 210; Grafton, i. 631.

² Cf. my *Fortunes of Falstaff*, 1943, pp. 20-4.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv II AND III HENRY VI

have suited the moralizing historians at all; nor the book of the Tudor monarchs, who, picking and choosing among Yorkist and Lancastrian legends, adopted from the former the portrait of 'the good Duke Humphrey', and from the latter that of Richard Duke of York as a scheming villain.¹ Polydore Vergil, the earliest and best of the Tudor historians, was for all his impartiality the originator of this eclectic myth; ascribing to Richard 'an outrageous lust of principallitie'² and taking over the beatification of Duke Humphrey from the Yorkist chronicler Fabyan.³ Hall then adopted and developed it, while Holinshed and of course Grafton copied in turn from Hall. Cardinal Beaufort, on the other hand, who fares well in Polydore, falls a victim to Hall's unbridled Protestant bias. All the trumped-up accusations that Humphrey is recorded as bringing against him in 1426 are accepted as truths; the worst complexion is placed upon his delay in accepting the cardinal's hat; the murder of Gloucester is set down to his machinations; and a death-bed speech lamenting the failure of his ambitious schemes, and said to be derived from the report of a chaplain, is put into his mouth.

Most of this is worked up into the plot of Part II and with no little skill, a skill evident also in certain additions to, or developments of, the source material. The clash, for example, between Dame Eleanor, Gloucester's wife, and Queen Margaret, which provides most of such liveliness as the first two acts possess, is impossible historically, since, as Hall records, Eleanor was disgraced in the twentieth year of Henry's reign, whereas Margaret of Anjou did not arrive in England

¹ See Kingsford, *op. cit.* pp. 122, 248, 255, 264-5.

² See also pp. 70-3, 87 ff., *Three Books of Polydore Vergil*, ed. H. Ellis, Camden Society, 1894.

³ See Fabyan, *Chronicle* (ed. 1811), p. 619.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxv

until the twenty-third. The passion between Suffolk and Margaret, again, which is one of the main threads of Part II and lends a warm and tender humanity to what would otherwise be little other than a 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide', has nothing to justify it in the chronicles beyond a couple of phrases which refer to him as her favourite, as indeed he was. And historically the business was once more impossible, since he was thirty-four years her senior, and so far from courting her in France or running at tilt in her honour, he took his wife (Chaucer's granddaughter) with him, as Hall duly notes also, when he crossed the Channel to stand proxy for his master the King, at her betrothal. Or, to give another instance, the episode in which the armourer is accused of treason by his apprentice and the matter is decided in an ordeal by battle, a trivial affair, which Hall takes from the London chronicles, is linked up in the play with the Duke of York's claim to the throne and is thus brought within the orbit of the main plot. But the widest departure from fact is in the maturity of Richard Crookback who, actually only eight years old in 1455, is shown as the hero of the first Battle of St Albans.

That, despite all this careful contrivance, the details are often woefully lacking in care or even dramatic competence, I attribute, as set forth in the previous Introduction, to double authorship. For, though I conjecture Greene was responsible for the main outlines, which indeed he could have borrowed pretty much as they stand from Hall, Shakespeare, I assume, did a good deal to improve and tighten them up, adding some at least of the elements just noticed which do not come from the chronicles, and inevitably introducing some inconsistency and confusion in the double process.

Turning now to the Wars of the Roses proper, which extend, we saw, from the first battle of St Albans

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William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxvi II AND III HENRY VI

in 1455 to the battle of Tewkesbury in 1471, we are confronted with a period of history difficult to match for confusion, for sudden turns and overturns, or for a succession of events more baffling to follow. England indeed was 'so lated in the world' that she seemed to have lost her way. And it was just this sense of forlorn helplessness in the body politic which the plot of Part III seems framed to bring out. Twice also it is explicitly insisted upon. First Henry does so himself in the famous soliloquy as he meditates apart on Towton field:

Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea
 Forced by the tide to combat with the wind;
 Now sways it that way, like the selfsame sea
 Forced to retire by fury of the wind:
 Sometime the flood prevails, and then the wind;
 Now one the better, then another best;
 Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
 Yet neither conqueror nor conqueréd:
 So is the equal poise of this fell war.

That last line marks the horror that has come upon the land. So equally matched are the factions which tear the commonwealth asunder that a final decision seems beyond attainment, and the anarchy that ensues is symbolized in this same scene by the entry first of 'a son that has killed his father' and then of 'a father that has killed his son'.¹ Now anarchy, the Elizabethans knew, as we have come to learn in our generation, can only lead on to tyranny.

Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And, hark, what discord follows! . . .
 Then everything includes itself in power,
 Power into will, will into appetite;
 And appetite, an universal wolf,

¹ Suggested by Hall, v. below note on 2. 5. 5-10.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxvii

So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.

So Ulysses speaks in a later play. But Shakespeare at the outset of his dramatic career had been led to depict just such a 'universal wolf' in the person of Crookback, a human chaos, *rudis indigestaque moles*, born of social chaos, the crowned monster who at once symbolizes and rules a monstrous England, the inevitable term of the equally poised fell Wars of the Roses. And yet, because the commonwealth survives and the Divine Mercy is infinite, he is the black night that precedes the day. Thus, though he 'shoulders' his way to the throne by strength of will, and fancies that he does it by will alone, he is really also one of the puppets upon Fortune's wheel, turned by the hand of Providence. He even seems half conscious of this fact at the beginning, as he confesses to himself (and to us) his perplexity:

And I—like one lost in a thorny wood,
That rends the thorns and is rent with the thorns,
Seeking a way and straying from the way,
Not knowing how to find the open air,
But toiling desperately to find it out—
Torment myself to catch the English crown.¹

So Richard, 'the murderous Machiavel', from one standpoint, as saintly Henry from another, reflects the anarchy and the agony that reigned in England between the battles of St Albans and Tewkesbury. And it was this that Part III was specially designed to bring out, originally designed, I believe, by Robert Greene, but with new lines added and the whole strengthened and tightened up by the hand of the master dramatist. Certainly it succeeds to admiration; for it imposes the rhythm of art upon the ebb and flow of civil strife, and

¹ Pt. III, 3. 2. 174ff.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00585-2 - The Third Part of King Henry VI, Volume 13

William Shakespeare

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxviii II AND III HENRY VI

frames dramatic cosmos out of a chaos of historical events.

A good deal is accomplished by telescoping and cutting out. The drama, for instance, has no use for the 'phoney' peace, 1456-9, when (as modern history records) the two factions were manoeuvring for position, while York himself on one side and Henry (when in his senses) on the other did their best to prevent war, and Margaret did her best to prepare for it. Accordingly, the battle of St Albans in May 1455 at the end of Part II is followed immediately at the beginning of Part III by the Parliament of October 1460 when York openly asserts his claim to the crown and actually ascends the throne in Westminster Hall. This rids the play of all his delays and scruples; falls in with the Tudor conception of him as a determined schemer throughout; and provides a first-rate opening for a play, inasmuch as the scene at Westminster is not only full of movement and excitement but introduces us at once to all the principal characters of this last section of the trilogy. Each of the Three Parts, it may be noted, begins with such a scene, in itself a sign that they were all plotted by the same hand.

Another sign of careful plotting is the fact that before war breaks out both parties are shown guilty of perjury; the violation of York's oath, for which there is little warrant in the chronicles, being strongly emphasized at the beginning of the second scene.¹ And so from Westminster we proceed straight to the battle of Wakefield, the brutal stabbing of York's young son Rutland at the hand of Clifford, the capture of York himself, and the scene in which the dramatist, taking a hint from Holinshed,² deliberately recalls the Christian Passion by showing him crowned with a gilt paper crown and mocked at by Margaret and her followers

¹ See p. 133.² See p. 138.