Shakespeare's History Plays

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Chapter 6

Shakespeare’s Historical and Political Thought in Context

The Bishop’s Prophecy

The Bishop of Carlisle’s prophecy, spoken shortly before Richard’s deposition in Richard II, has long served as the skeleton key to unlock Shakespeare’s tetralogies.

My lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford’s king;
And, if you crown him, let me prophesy
The blood of English shall manure the ground
And future ages groan for this foul act.
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be called
The field of Golgotha and dead men’s skulls.
O, if you rear this house against this house
It will the woefullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursèd earth!
Prevent, resist it; let it not be so,
Lest child, child’s children, cry against you woe.

(Richard II, 4.1.125–40)

As Nicholas Grene summarises,

for those who see the eight history plays as a single cycle, this provides a master plan for the whole, looking forward from the moment of the usurpa-
tion of Richard’s throne by Henry IV in 1399 to the dynastic wars that tore
England apart in the century following.¹

In E. M. W. Tillyard’s providential view of Tudor history, the Bishop’s prophecy is taken at face value. For Tillyard, Shakespeare’s history plays perpetuate ‘the Tudor myth’, which viewed the Wars of the Roses as a
punishment from God for the murder of a divinely ordained monarch.²

The historian Nigel Saul puts forward a recent version of this argument:

To Shakespeare and his contemporaries the history of fifteenth-century
England was a commentary on the bishop’s prophetic utterance. All the ills
that were to afflict the realm . . . flowed from Hereford’s (Bolingbroke’s) rebel-
lion against Richard . . . [Henry Tudor] providentially healed the divisions by
marrying Elizabeth of York . . . Underlying Shakespeare’s preoccupation with
civil strife was a deeper concern for social order. In the Elizabethan’s world
view civil discord imperilled the very existence of society. This was essentially
the medieval view of the world. Everyone and everything was held to have its
allotted place. From the bottom of society to the top, people were linked in a
‘great chain of being’, which duplicated the order of heaven.³

Like Tillyard, Saul assumes that Tudor England shared a monolithic
‘world view’ to which Shakespeare wholly subscribed.

New historicists and cultural materialists have, quite rightly, opposed
this argument. In theory at least, ‘new historicists are determinedly suspi-
cious of unified, monolithic descriptions of cultures or historical periods,
insisting that there were countless Elizabethan world views but not a
monolithic world picture’.⁴ And, as we have seen, cultural materialists
often exhume Tillyard as the archetypal bastion of ‘idealist philosophy’.⁵
They chiefly lament his political conservatism rather than his historicist
method. Sinfield, for example, disdains the old historicist ‘conservative
vision, in which disturbance of established hierarchy was bad’.⁶ However
– discussions of Tillyard aside – generally speaking, for new historicists
and cultural materialists, the second tetralogy becomes another stage on
which to rehearse their arguments about containment and subversion.

Greenblatt’s ‘Invisible Bullets’, which is about the Henriad, is the
example par excellence of the new historicist case for ‘the produc-
tion and containment of subversion and disorder . . . in . . . plays that
mediate on the consolidation of state power’.⁷ Naturally, Greenblatt’s
essay has produced a range of cultural materialist responses that give
the plays greater scope for resistance. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and
Margaret Iversen’s introduction to Belsey’s essay on the second tetra-
logy, ‘Making Histories Then and Now: Shakespeare from Richard II to
Henry V’, might serve equally to summarise the responses of Dollimore
and Sinfield:

Greenblatt’s model of subversion and containment is seen as inadequate to the
complexities of the plays and ungrounded in what we know of Elizabethan
history. In its place Belsey offers a reading that gives more credence to resist-
cences within Shakespearean texts, resistances that are inseparable from the
‘poetics of Elizabethan power’ of which Greenblatt speaks, but which are not
always ‘contained’ by the reaffirmation of that power.⁸
In these new historicist and cultural materialist readings of the second tetralogy questions of history are subordinated to questions of power. This is reflected in Phyllis Rackin’s summary of the main differences between the new historicist and cultural materialist objections to Tillyard:

For many new historicists [Tudor discourse] was finally univocal, a discourse of the elite, shaped by the interests of the dominant classes, whose definitive speaker and audience and ultimate source of authority was always the sovereign. Cultural materialists, on the other hand, have discovered a polyphonic discourse, where even the voices of the illiterate can never be fully silenced. They have emphasised the role of popular transgression and subversion, while new historicists have tended to construe subversion as always already contained – by the dominant discourse.

Rackin wrote this summary in 1990. Since then both schools have developed their thought. As I have shown in previous chapters, new historicists now have a greater interest in multivocality and in producing counter-histories that give voice to the ‘forgotten dead’. Cultural materialism, on the other hand, has tended to place more stress on Shakespeare’s canonicity, his role in education and the scope for reading plays ‘against the grain’ in order to subvert long-established conservative readings that have helped to marginalise certain groups such as women and homosexuals. Neither of these developments does much to alter the fact that the history plays are generally read through the prism of containment and subversion.

Let us return briefly to the Bishop’s prophecy in Richard II, which, for Tillyard and others, is the paradigmatic instance of Shakespeare’s advocacy of the providential view of history. Michael Hattaway makes the simple point that ‘when the Bishop of Carlisle prophesies in 4.1 of Richard II he is giving an account of history that is his own – not one endorsed by Shakespeare – and he is promptly arrested for capital treason’. In this instance, Richard II seems to struggle between alternative views of history: the play gives the Bishop’s prophecy a voice only to censor it almost immediately – just as, earlier, John of Gaunt eulogised England, ‘this royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle’ (2.1 40), before his death, the ultimate censor. There is a neat parallel between these oft-quoted speeches. As Graham Holderness reminds us, Gaunt’s eulogy ‘functions as a diatribe of criticism against the ruling monarch’. Gaunt speaks of a lost England that ‘hath made a shameful conquest of itself’ (2.1.66); he speaks of a country that has been ruined and abused by Richard. By contrast, the Bishop’s prophecy looks forward to a future England ravaged by ‘disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny’ (4.1.133) because of Bolingbroke’s imminent usurpation of Richard’s crown.
Despite their differences, both speakers are essentially conservative voices speaking out against the unreasonable actions or planned actions of their current rulers. Furthermore, in their immediate contexts, both speakers are largely ignored and then rebuked – Gaunt by Richard and the Bishop by Northumberland and Bolingbroke – before they are finally silenced. The play briefly considers each point of view before moving swiftly on, leaving the audience in two or even several minds about the issues of history, kingship and providence.

In this chapter, I will argue that this apparent uncertainty about history more accurately reflects early modern historiography and Shakespeare’s own thoughts about history than the providential view advocated by Tillyard or Saul. In addition, I will suggest that the complexity of Tudor historiography complicates the new historicist and cultural materialist readings of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy that treat the plays primarily as exercises in nation-building. Finally, I hope to situate Shakespeare’s dramatic practice in relation to late sixteenth-century historiography in order to build a platform for my own readings of the history plays in the following chapters.

Sixteenth-century Historiography

The first thing to note when considering sixteenth-century historiography is that ‘history’ did not exist as an academic discipline as it does now. As Ivo Kamps explains, “History” could in fact refer to an impressive variety of texts. Poems, plays, memorials, biographies, narratives, annals, chronicles, surveys, antiquarian accounts – all could bear the name “history” in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. To complicate matters further, the term ‘history’ did not necessarily pertain to actual events and made no distinction between historical and mythical figures. Histories of the sixteenth century often, though not exclusively, prioritised moral instruction over historical veracity. According to Paul Budra, ‘history throughout the period [1550 to the early 1600s] was seen as a form of instruction . . . History was regarded as second only to scripture for teaching morality, and it was therefore very popular with the middle class and educators’. Budra overstates the case because he ignores the ways of thinking about history that were changing English historiography in the late sixteenth century, but it is true that many – probably most – readers of the period viewed history in terms of moral instruction.

Another peculiar feature of early modern historiography is the notion that, although it is ostensibly linear, history is also cyclical.
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According to Dominique Goy-Blanquet, ‘there is no Elizabethan theory of progress’. Both providential and humanist historians believed in the idea that history repeats itself. In Kamps’s words, the ‘shape of time [in Elizabethan England] was that of a spiral endlessly repeating the drama of rise and fall’. It is not difficult to see how such a view of history might lend itself easily to the teaching of moral lessons. As Goy-Blanquet asserts, ‘the past could be used as a mirror to project critical reflections on present realities’. The cyclical view of history was not restricted to providential historians. Machiavelli, for example, rejects the idea that history is driven by God’s will, but The Prince repeatedly draws political lessons from past rulers, which is to say that the cyclical view of history does not necessarily rely on notions of providence.

Finally, the ‘history’ produced in the sixteenth century sometimes made little distinction between national and local concerns – the latter often taking the form of anecdotes about local crimes and murders, gossip and bizarre events. As Barrett L. Beer tells us, the ‘reading public’ of Tudor chronicles ‘was predominantly lay and secular in outlook and as much interested in court politics, economics, and bizarre natural occurrences as in the progress of the Reformation’. In many ways, chronicles combined the roles of history books and modern newspapers – which goes some way towards explaining their sharp decline in popularity in the seventeenth century. Indeed, D. R. Woolf argues that the most obvious consequence of the advent of print was to rob the chronicle of its function as the recorder and communicator of recent events, that is, as a medium of what would soon become news. It is no accident at all that the virtual end of chronicle publication in England coincided with the first wave of corantos and newsbooks.

There was nothing intrinsic to Tudor historiography that made the chronicle its dominant genre.

This rather muddled picture of the status of history in Tudor England reflects what Arthur B. Ferguson has called ‘the special ambivalence discernible in much Renaissance thinking about history’. Despite this ambivalence, a few things about history in late sixteenth-century England are clear. First, although history had no dominant form in the sixteenth century, the chronicle was plainly the most popular and widely distributed. Written by and for ‘literate individuals spanning a fairly wide cross section of socio-economic groups’ that mainly comprised the middle classes, chronicles contained, reasonably handily, the latest historical research. The important thing to note here is that the writers of chronicles were not in the business of producing state propaganda. While it is true that some chroniclers were the beneficiaries...
of royal patrons, they also faced censorship. The chroniclers were not establishment figures or wealthy aristocrats but enthusiastic amateurs. According to Geoffrey Bullough, the most prolific chronicle writer of all, John Stow, ‘lived for many years on the charity of friends, and even got permission to beg for alms’. The aims and attitudes of these writers were evidently not those of the crown. As Patterson convincingly argues, the belief propagated by Tillyard and others that chroniclers ‘were engaged in legitimation of the house of Tudor simply will not stand’. To a certain extent, it is possible to speak of ‘Tudor historiography’s ideological independence’.

The second thing that is clear about history in the late sixteenth century is that the period saw some of the most radical changes in English historiography to date, which further complicates the description of the history written in the period that I have provided thus far. The emergence of new historiographical methods and ideas from Italian humanists and antiquarian classicists did not immediately displace ‘time-honoured medieval practices’. It was a moment of transition for English historiography. Disagreement is still widespread among historians about the extent of the changes that took place, about when the changes took place and about which assumptions and practices best represent the status quo. As Kamps puts it, Renaissance historiography has an ‘almost schizophrenic character’. For the purposes of the present study, I will outline the broad currents of historiographical thought that existed in the period. I will also note the major differences of opinion among literary historians where necessary and test their claims against original sixteenth-century texts.

By the 1590s, when Shakespeare staged his history plays, there were three main strains of historiography: providential, humanist and antiquarian – to which I will return later. To complicate matters further, there were differing views about the function and nature of history that were debated within and across the different types of historiography. Probably the most important of these debates was about whether history should be morally instructive above all else or simply an objective and accurate record of events. The key thing to note here is that this was truly a debate as opposed to a stable, unified position. Compare, for example, William Camden’s strong antiquarian manifesto, Annales (written between 1615 and 1617), with the note found in A Myrroure for Magistrates (1559) about the discrepancies between its sources. Camden writes:

For the study of TRVTH, as it hath been the only spur to prick me forward to this Worke; so hath it beeene mine only Scope. To detract from Historie,
is nothing else than to pluck out the eyes of a beautiful creature, and for a medicinable potion, to offer poison to the Readers understanding.\textsuperscript{32}

For Camden, moralising only distracts the reader from the chief issue at hand: ‘\textit{WHY, HOW, TO WHAT END, and WHAT IS DONE’}.\textsuperscript{33} Camden’s \textit{Annales} still starts with a dedication to God, but he insists that he is writing a \textit{history} rather than a sermon. In stark contrast, \textit{A Myrroure for Magistrates} contains the following note about its depiction of the quarrel between Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray during the reign of Richard II:

This tragicall example was of all the company well liked, how be it a doubte was founde therin, and that by meanes of the diuersity of the Chronicles for where as maister Hall whom in this storie we chiefly folowed, maketh Mowbray accuser, and Boleynbroke appellant, mayster Fabian reporteth the matter quite contrary, & that by the reporte of good authours, makynge Bokynbroke the accuser, and Mowbray the appeliant, Which matter sith it is more harde to desise, than nedefull to our purpose, which minde onely to diswade from vices and exalte vertue . . .\textsuperscript{34}

The poet acknowledges that a number of his source materials do not agree on whether it was Mowbray who started the argument or Bolingbroke, but then goes on to argue that it does not really matter. His ‘purpose’ is ‘onely to diswade from vices and exalte vertue’, so historical veracity is not at all a priority.

There are also many cases in which historians laid claim to objectivity only to produce politically biased accounts of events; Kamps even goes as far as to suggest that it was a ‘commonplace’.\textsuperscript{35} Samuel Daniel, for example, opened \textit{The Civil Wars} with this claim in 1595:

I haue carefully followed that truth which is in the Historie; without adding to, or subtracting from, the general receiued opinion of things as we finde them in our common Annalles: holding it an impietie, to violate that publike Testimonie we haue, without more euident proofe; or to introduce fictions of [our] owne imagination, in things of this nature. \textit{Famae rerum standum est.} Though I knowe, in these publike actions, there are euer popular bruite, and opinions, which run according to the time & the biass of mens affections: and it is the part of an Historian, to recite them, not to rule the[m].\textsuperscript{36}

Yet, as any reader of \textit{The Civil Wars} will attest, Daniel is far from impartial, not least in the significance he gives to the Tudors’ role in reuniting the country.

Yet now what reason haue we to complaine? Since hereby came the calme we did inioy; The blisse of thee \textit{Eliza}; happie gaine
For all our losse: when-as no other way
The Heauens could finde, but to vnite againe
The sev’red Families, that they
Might bring foorth thee: that in thy peace might growe
That glorie, which few Times could eu er shoue.37

It is worth noting that Daniel succeeded Edmund Spenser as Poet Laureate in 1599, and became Master of the Queen’s Revels in 1603, and later, groom of the chamber to the Queen Consort, Anne of Denmark.38 He plainly had his own personal interests at stake. Although James Knowles has argued persuasively to the contrary, the most obvious reading of The Civil Wars suggests that it is an attempt to rewrite history from a Tudor perspective.39 Daniel’s poem is neither as committed to historical veracity as Camden nor as didactic in its moralising as A Myrroure for Magistrates but, like many histories of the period, it occupies an indistinct middle ground. As Rackin neatly summarises the matter, many Tudor chronicles ‘conflated providential moralizing with pragmatic skepticism’.40 It was not uncommon in Renaissance historiography to find blatant theoretical and historical inconsistencies and contradictions with no attempt made to reconcile them.

The Case of Bolingbroke and Mowbray

Such inconsistencies are not difficult to demonstrate. For example, Shakespeare’s sources, like those of the author of A Myrroure for Magistrates, cannot agree on even the most rudimentary details of a seemingly straightforward event such as the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke (dramatised in 1.1. and 1.3 of Richard II). Sixteenth-century chroniclers such as Hall and the contributors to Holinshed’s Chronicle often repeated their fifteenth-century sources verbatim without sensitivity to the original author’s prejudices. In 1399, Henry IV’s usurpation of Richard II’s throne was an event that divided the population. Contemporary accounts of Richard’s reign, which were often written by eyewitnesses, were thus coloured indelibly by the personal dispositions of individual writers towards Richard. This was clear to John Capgrave in 1399:

Forasmuch as different writers have given different accounts of the deposition of King Richard and the elevation of King Henry to the throne – and no wonder, since, in so great a struggle, one took one side and one the other . . .41

It is useful to note the biases of the major contemporary sources that were used by sixteenth-century historians. Broadly speaking, the
account of Thomas Walsingham of St Albans, the chief source used by Holinshed, is pro-Lancastrian and the trio of French accounts used by Edward Hall, Samuel Daniel and others – those by Jean Creton, Jean Froissart and the author of *Traïson de Mort* – are pro-Richard. Each of these contemporary accounts can only be understood in terms of their singularity. Creton, for example, according to G. K. Martin, ‘wrote with a propagandist’s fervour in Richard’s cause’. And Froissart’s chronicles ‘provide useful information and insight on people and events . . . [but] on some points [they are] wildly and unaccountably inaccurate’. Some sixteenth-century chroniclers lacked the necessary resources and methodological principles to question their sources, so fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prejudices and inaccuracies invariably filtered down to their work.

Edward Hall’s account of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke presents Bolingbroke as ‘a prudente and politike persone, but not more politike then welbeloued, and yet not so welbeloued of all, as of some highly disdayned’. Hall is generally sympathetic to Bolingbroke and critical of Mowbray. In Hall’s account it is Bolingbroke who tells Mowbray of his heartfelt sadness about how Richard had treated the nobles:

[Bolingbroke] beganne to breake his mynde to [Mowbray] more for dolour and lamentacion, then for malice or displeasure, rehersyng howe that kyng Richarde litle estemed and lesse regarded the nobles and Princes of his realme, and as muche as laie in hym soughte occasions, inented causes and practised priuely howe to destroye the more part of them.

Hall goes on to present Mowbray as a self-seeking tell-tale and opportunist, who

was very glad (as tell tales and scicophantes bee, when thei haue any thyng to instill in to the eares and heddes of Princes) to declare to the kyng what he had heard, and to agrauate and make the offence the greater, he muche more added but nothyng diminished.

It is important to note here that Hall places great emphasis on Mowbray’s role as the accuser, using it to underline his sympathy for Bolingbroke. Later, Hall’s preference for Bolingbroke makes itself even more explicit after his banishment to France:

Wondreful it is to write, and more straunge to here, what nombre of people ranne in euery towne & strete, lamenting and bewailyng his departure: As who woulde say that whe[n] he departed, the onely sheld, defe[n]ce & comfort of the co[m]me[n] people was vadid & gone, as though [the] so[n] ne had falle[n] out of the spere, or [the] moone had lapsed fro[m] her proper epicicle.
There can be little doubt as to where Hall’s sympathies lie: firmly with the future Lancastrian king, Henry IV. It is worth remembering here that Henry VII had ‘claimed to represent the line of Lancaster [because] his mother Margaret was the last of the Beauforts, John of Gaunt’s illegitimate descendants who had been legitimated by the pope and Richard II’.

In other words, it was natural for Tudor writers to prefer the Lancastrian kings, not only because Henry VII had defeated the last Yorkist king, Richard III, but also because the current monarch’s claim to the throne was linked directly to John of Gaunt.

Holinshed’s account, which is much more detailed and adds direct quotation, contradicts Hall by making Bolingbroke the accuser: ‘Henrie duke of Hereford accused Thomas Mowbraie duke of Norfolke, of certeine words which he should vtter in talke had betwixt them.’

Holinshed’s handling of the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray is generally much more measured and diligent than Hall’s. At one point, for example, Holinshed notes: ‘writers disagrée about the daie that was appointed [for Mowbray and Bolingbroke’s duel at Coventry]: for some saie, it was vpon a mondaie in August; other vpon saint Lamberts daie, being the seuenteenth of September, other on the eleuenth of September’. Hall simply states that Richard ‘assigned the place to be at the citee of Couentree in the moneth of August’.

However, this diligence does not stop the chroniclers repeating Hall’s account of Bolingbroke’s departure from Britain almost verbatim:

A woonder it was to sée what number of people ran after him in euerie towne and streët where he came, before he tooke the sea, lamenting and bewailing his departure, as who would saie, that when he departed, the onelie shield, defense and comfort of the commonwealth was vaded and gone.

The wording of this passage is too similar to Hall’s for it to be a coincidence. Holinshed’s account repeats Hall’s not only in its details but also in the author’s subjective ‘wonder’, which is typical of the way sixteenth-century chroniclers interpolated passages from their sources into their texts. Thus, the sympathetic treatment of Bolingbroke found in Hall finds its way into Holinshed – despite the fact that Holinshed makes Bolingbroke the accuser and that much of Hall’s immediate reason for preferring Bolingbroke is based on the sycophantic opportunism of Mowbray. The compilers of Holinshed compromise their own fairly rigorous historical methods by including scarcely edited material from an ideologically motivated author like Hall, who treats Bolingbroke as Mowbray’s ‘victim’ to suit his preference for the latter.

Modern historians tend to accept Bolingbroke as the accuser and
Mowbray as the defendant following an account found in the semi-official ‘Roles of Parliament’, which states:

Henry duke of Hereford came before our lord the king in parliament carrying in his hand a schedule, and said to the king . . . that the duke of Norfolk had made a number of incriminating remarks to the slander of our lord the king’s person.\footnote{52}

There is an almost unanimous consensus that this is the correct version of events.\footnote{53} The confusion in sixteenth-century histories may have arisen from Froissart, who had written:

The Earl Marshal [i.e. Mowbray] took particular notice of a remark made with the best of intentions by the Earl of Derby [i.e. Bolingbroke], who meant it as a confidential opinion and never thought it would be repeated.\footnote{54}

Indeed, there are enough similarities between Froissart’s version of events and Hall’s to suggest that Froissart was one of Hall’s main sources. However, Froissart does not share Hall’s preference for Bolingbroke. Froissart’s chronicle also provides a detailed account of the King in private council and offers a unique insight into Richard’s thought processes. For example, at one point in Froissart, Richard’s advisors tell him:

Sire, you should not intervene too openly in this business. Say nothing and let them get on with it; they will manage all right. The Earl of Derby is extraordinarily popular in this country . . . and if they saw you taking sides with the Earl Marshal against him, you would lose their favour entirely.\footnote{55}

Such details are entirely missing in Hall, where Richard makes his decision almost immediately with no consultation. Hall appears to have handpicked from Froissart and other sources the details that presented Bolingbroke in the best possible light.

It is interesting to trace the other sixteenth-century histories that make Mowbray the accuser – the accounts read like Chinese whispers. Predictably, \textit{A Myrroure for Magistrates} follows Hall, sometimes repeating his peculiar phrasing. For example, just as in Hall, Bolingbroke ‘fully brake[s] his mynde’ to Mowbray.\footnote{56} \textit{A Myrroure} makes Mowbray the speaker and is flatly moralising in its tone:

Marke with what meede vile vyces are rewarded.  
Through pryde and envy I lose both kyth and kynne,  
And for my flattring playnte so well regarded,  
Exyle and sлаuder are iustly me awarded.\footnote{57}

There is no question here about Mowbray’s role as a sycophantic opportunist. Likewise, in the first edition of \textit{The Civil Wars} (which
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Shakespeare almost certainly read, Daniel tells us of ‘the faithless Duke [Mowbray] that presentlie takes hold / Of such advantage to insinuate / Hastes to the king, perverting what is told, / And what comes of good minde he makes it hate’.58 Daniel even insinuates that Mowbray was lying about Bolingbroke’s complaint. It is not possible to state definitively that the sixteenth-century historians who made Mowbray the accuser deliberately altered the facts – Polydore Vergil, for example, an ostensibly honest historian, also follows Froissart. However, it is possible to suggest that writers with Lancastrian sympathies made the most of the situation to vilify Mowbray as a lackey of Richard II and to make a hero of Bolingbroke. This is in stark contrast to less politically motivated historians like John Stow, the compilers of Holinshed, and indeed Shakespeare, who make Bolingbroke the accuser and take a generally more even-handed approach.59 Thus, even a seemingly incidental detail – such as the question of who started the dispute between Mowbray and Bolingbroke – can reveal in microcosm the complexities of sixteenth-century historiography.

In short, historiography was fragmented and heterogeneous in Shakespeare’s time. There was no consensus on the issue of historical accuracy or on the question of whether or not history should be morally instructive. This has led a number of prominent literary historians – wrongly, I think – to give greater weight to one side or the other. Graham Holderness, for example, claims that

sixteenth-century historians were preoccupied with the problems of truth, in senses still considered proper to modern historiography: truth in historical record and historical recollection; the avoidance of false or forged versions, or what we would now call ideological appropriations of the past.60

But, as we have seen, while these claims might hold firm for the histories of William Camden or Thomas Blundeville, they would scarcely apply to A Myrroure for Magistrates or the history of Walter Raleigh. Ivo Kamps makes the opposite claim:

it is wrong to say that early modern men and women had no conception of truth and falsehood, but it is obvious that the differences between them – especially if the problem was couched in terms of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ – was not of paramount importance when it came to the production of historical texts.61

If it is ‘obvious’ that the difference between truth and falsehood was not important to sixteenth-century historians, then what leads Holderness to draw the opposite conclusion? Annabel Patterson puts a third theory on the table by making the claim that the compilers of Holinshed’s
Chroniclers were at the cutting edge of late sixteenth-century historiography because of their ‘determination to register diversity of opinion’. Patterson argues that Raphael Holinshed, John Stow, Abraham Fleming, John Foxe and others deliberately contrasted contradictory source material, because they were ‘dedicated to the task of showing what it might mean to be “all Englishmen” in full consciousness of the fundamental differences of opinion that drove Englishmen apart’. For Patterson, then, it is not so much a question of ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’, but rather of respecting the reader’s ability to listen to myriad voices in order to reach his or her own conclusions. Holderness, Kamps and Patterson – all experienced readers of Tudor historiography – each come to different conclusions about its commitment to historical veracity. I would suggest that it is not possible to make definitive claims for late sixteenth-century historiography, because it was simply too diverse and fragmented to have a general character. Instead, I would prefer to come to an understanding of the period’s three main strains of historiography.

Three Strains of Historiography

The first and most prominent of these strains was the providential view of history inherited from the medieval period, which, as we shall see, endured well into the seventeenth century. As Budra explains, this sort of history ‘emphasised the first causes of events, the intervention of God into history’. As late as 1614, Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The History of the World*, banned by James I in that year, found ‘examples of divine providence, everywhere’. Raleigh’s preface to the volume puts forward a sustained argument for providence, insisting that God is ‘for ever a sufficient and effectual cause of the world’. In his supplement to Thomas Beard’s *The Theatre of Gods*, published in 1642, Thomas Taylor uses divine providence as the chief justification for apparent contradictions between contemporary Christian doctrines and the actions of Biblical prophets and other sainted figures. On the issue of why Abraham and others had multiple wives, Taylor argues:

Abraham was before either the Law or the Gospel, and in his time Big[om]ly was not forbidden. Now the punishment of a fault grew from the time of the Law, for it was not a crime before it was inhibited and forbid; so [Abraham] had four wives, which whilst it was a custom was no crime, who as they married not meerly for concupiscence, and to fulfill the lust full desires of the flesh, but rather instigated by providence to the propagation of issue; therefore let no man flatter himselfe by making them their president, for all adultery is damnable, &c.
The message is clear enough: multiple marriages were only customary in Abraham’s day because God permitted them and demanded ‘the propagation of issue’, whereas now God absolutely prohibits them. For our purposes, the examples of Raleigh and Taylor plainly demonstrate that ideas of providence were still fairly widely disseminated by Protestants in the seventeenth century well after Shakespeare’s death. This shows that neither the influx of humanist and classicist thought from Italy during the Renaissance, nor the religious upheavals during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth served to dislodge providential thought completely from the public consciousness.

The second major type of historiography in Elizabethan England was the Italian humanist approach inherited from Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Patrizi, Francesco Guicciardini and Polydore Vergil. Rackin identifies ‘three great innovations, all originating in Italy, [that] were changing English historiography during the second half of the sixteenth century’. She goes on to define these innovations as ‘a new interest in causation, a recognition of anachronism, and a questioning of textual authority’. Of these innovations, the most conspicuous was the shift of focus from ‘first causes’ (i.e. God’s will) to the ‘second causes’ of human action. Even if history was still framed by the theological framework of divine providence, humans were still afforded a degree of autonomy. After all, free will was always a central tenet of Christian doctrine, whatever the denomination (even in the most extreme versions of Calvinism, individuals have the free will to commit acts of evil). None the less, the shift in emphasis lent history an increasingly secular character; the lessons change from moral sermons to political analyses.

The first historian to import Italian humanist ideas and practices to Britain was Polydore Vergil, who questioned the validity of long-established claims that the Trojan leader Brutus founded Britain, which dated back to ‘Brut, the overwhelmingly popular version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historie Regum Britannie’. This legend was still widely believed in the early sixteenth century, not least because of the success of William Caxton’s The Chronicles of England, a translation of the old Brut chronicle, which was published in 1482 and was one of Britain’s first printed books. The Chronicles of England tell of how Brutus ‘conquered Albyn / that after he named Brytayn after his owne name / that now is called Englond after the name of Engyst of Saxon’. Vergil could not corroborate these claims with his own knowledge of Roman history. Goy-Blanquet claims that ‘Vergil was a genuine historian, probably the best of the century, the first to use critical judgement, compare sources, and check the veracity of facts’. Kamps, however, argues that Vergil’s ‘advance [in the procedures of history writing] went unheeded’. It
is also important to remember that there is still a strong providential slant in much of Vergil’s work. For example, he still recounts the story of Genesis at the start of his histories, maintaining that man ‘should be subject in obedience bycause he was fashioned after [God’s] owne lykenes’. Furthermore, there remains a distinct moral dimension to Vergil’s work. For example, he finds:

_Hystories_ of all other writynges be mooste commendable, because it infourmeth all sorts of people with notable examples of liuyng, and doth excite noble men to ensue suche actiuite in enterprises as they reade to haue bene doone by their auncestours, and also discorageth & dehorteth wicked persons from attemptyng of any haynouse deedee or cryme, knowyng that suche actes shalbe regestred in perpetual memory to the praise or reproche of the doers, accordyng to the deserte of their endeououres.

For Vergil, then, history is as much a deterrent with which to discourage ‘wicked persons’ as it is a source of information and interest. Vergil’s chief contribution to the development of English historiography restricts itself to his refusal to accept sources at face value.

Notwithstanding the general impact of Machiavelli’s political thought – in which ‘worldly politics were shaped not by the City of God but by the will, desire, cunning, virtue, and energy of man’ – probably the most important text for the transmission of Italian humanist ideas in English historiography was Thomas Blundeville’s *The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Histories*, published in 1574. In this work, as Kamps explains, Blundeville ‘yokes together an abridged translation of Francesco Patrizi’s distinctly humanist political text _Della Historia Diece Dialogue_ (1560) and Giancomo Concio’s much more traditional, and medieval treatise’ with no apparent attempt to reconcile their obvious differences. Kamps has a point: Concio’s section of Blundeville text starts by stating that we should ‘acknowledge the proui-dence of God’ and ‘be stirred by example of good to followe the good, and by example of the euill to fl ee the euill’. The extent of Concio’s medievalism demonstrates just how progressive Patrizi’s humanism was. Patrizi commits himself ‘to tell things as they were done, without either augmenting or diminishing them, or swaruing one iote from the truth’. Patrizi appears to break with the fundamental notion of providence:

_Hystories bee made of deedes done by a publique weale, and such deedes, be eyther deedes of wayre, of peace, or else of seduction and conspiracie. Agayne, every deedee, be it priuate, or publique must needs be done by some person, for some occasion, in sometyme, and place, with means & order, and with instruments, all which are not to be forgotten of the writer, and specially those that haue accompanied and brought deedee to effect._
This might seem like common sense to modern minds, but to sixteenth-century readers, God would have been conspicuous by His divine absence. To underline his point, Patrizi goes on to make a still stronger humanist statement of what he takes to be the case from the historian’s point of view: ‘power consisteth chiefl ye in three things, that is, in riches, in publique authoritie, and in pryuate estimacion’. Such sentiments were not only blasphemous in sixteenth-century England; after the Reformation they would have also constituted treason, because the monarch’s power was seen as second only to God’s – even more so in the early seventeenth century, when James I invoked the divine right of kings. Patrizi’s history makes no mention of providence and omits God from the network of power structures it considers. Patrizi is also surprisingly interested in bibliographical and cultural contexts. ‘In wr[ir]iting the lyfe of anye man’, he says, ‘you ought first to shew his proper name, the name of his familie, and of what country he is, and then to declare his actes and deedes.’81 Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Patrizi considers the political and psychological motives of the key players in history: ‘sith in every action there must needs be a dooer, a worker, the hystorie must first make mention of hym, and then shewe the cause that mooued him to doe, to what intent and ende, in what place, and with what means and instruments’.82 It is difficult to find a direct inheritor of Patrizi in the mainstream sixteenth-century chronicles, which – as Patterson points out so convincingly – mix so many conflicting attitudes and materials that it is impossible to ascribe their practice to any single type of historiography.

At this juncture, I would like to suggest that Shakespeare is the true inheritor of Patrizi’s form of historiography. The history plays most closely resemble the humanism of Patrizi in three ways. First, in their commitment to context; second, in the way they show that the true nature of power resides ‘in riches, in publique authoritie, and in pryuate estimacion’; and finally, in their exploration of the psychological and political motivations of their characters. Although humanist ideas would later merge with antiquarian practices to form the basis of the modern discipline of history in Britain, in the 1590s (with the possible exception of Marlowe), Shakespeare was alone in tapping into the distinctly human course of history by showing the kings of England as what they were: flawed men who made politically and emotionally motivated decisions.

Late sixteenth-century England also saw the rise of a third type of historiography called antiquarianism. As Kamps says, the antiquarians ‘desired to reconstruct, through study of both textual and physical remnants of the past, an “exact memory” of the objects of antiquity’.83 This
is what Holderness has in mind when he argues that the Elizabethans were concerned above all else with historical veracity: ‘the emphasis’, he acknowledges, ‘of course goes back to antiquity’. As we have seen, the pioneer who led the first antiquarians in Britain was William Camden. Camden was committed to the pursuit of truth for its own sake; knowledge and understanding, rather than moral lessons or the reiteration of divine providence, become history’s ultimate aims. For Camden, ‘they, whose mindes doe comprehend no knowledge of former times, deserued not to be called men, in regard they exceeded not children in understanding’.

He is consistently scathing about ‘IGNORANCE & FALSHEOOD’, which are frequently equated in his writings, and about ‘PREIVDICE’, which is seen ‘as an abuser of the Judgement’. The preface to the Annales has a distinctly defensive tone; Camden seems at pains to show his impartiality, that he is not in receipt of any bribes and that he leaves no place for the ‘SVSPICION OF FAVOVR OR PRIVATE GRVDGES’. Camden seems acutely aware that he is flying in the face of convention and has few scruples about denigrating those who do not share his passion for knowledge of the past. For example, Camden prefaces another book of his, Britannia, by pre-empting his critics:

For I see judgements, prejudices, censures, reprehensions, obtrectations, detractions, affronts, and confronts, as it were, in match array to environ me on every side: some there are which wholly contenme and avile this study of Antiquitie as a back-looking curiositie; whose authority as I do not utterly vile, so I do not overprize or admire their judgement. Neither am I destitute of reasons whereby I might approve this my purpose to well bred and well meaning men which tender the glory of their native Country: and moreover could give them to understand that in the studie of Antiquity, (which is alwaies accompanied with dignity, and hath a certaine resemblance with eternity) there is a sweet food of the mind well befitting such as are of honest and noble disposition. If any there be which are desirous to be strangers in their owne soile, and forrainers in their owne City, they may so continue and therin flatter themselves.

The important thing to consider here is not that Camden dismisses the opinions of his critics, but that he addresses his study to similar-minded people, ‘well bred and well meaning men which tender to the glory of their Native country’. Crucially, Camden equates the knowledge of history with patriotism and the construction of nationhood. This has been the context in which new historicists and cultural materialists (including Holderness, Dollimore and Sinfield, and, to a lesser degree, Greenblatt) have preferred to understand late Tudor and early Stuart historiography: the attempt to foster a stable notion of English
national identity after almost a century of civil strife. According to Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, for example, ‘the interest of the sixteenth-century English in the history of their own country can be seen as one aspect of the complex process by which England was slowly emerging as a modern nation state’. According to Howard and Rackin go on to read Shakespeare’s history plays through this lens of nation-building. They tell us: ‘like their historical sources, the plays performed the necessary function of creating and disseminating myths of origin to authorize a new national identity and to deal with the anxieties and contradictions that threatened to undermine the nation-building project’. This position has become almost commonplace when reading the history plays. Derek Cohen, for example, tells us that ‘the Elizabethan preoccupation with history was . . . a matter of urgent national interest’. England unquestionably needed such redefinition at this time, but it remains unclear whether or not the works of history provided it.

The conclusions of Howard and Rackin, Cohen and others about sixteenth-century historiography, and indeed, Shakespeare’s history plays, are by no means conclusive. Earlier, Rackin herself came to a quite different conclusion in stating that Renaissance historiography was ‘driven by nostalgia’. In perhaps the most convincing case to date, D. R. Woolf argues that the production of history was driven by economic factors. ‘The Tudor chronicle’, Woolf explains, ‘was at the whim of a market that was to prove both soft and short-lived.’ There is certainly enough evidence to substantiate Woolf’s claims. The chronicles were large, unwieldy and expensive texts that ultimately proved too costly for the general public. According to Elizabeth Story Donno, the 1587 edition of Holinshed’s chronicles consisted of ‘roughly 3½ million words’, while the first edition ‘required a stock of £10,000 at least’ to print. Barrett L. Beer shows us that John Stow’s chronicles ‘reached a larger contemporary readership because of their lower cost and smaller size, and they also speak with the voice of a single scholar rather than as an editorial committee’. Woolf produces an impressive number of tables that show the popularity and prices of individual chronicles from the 1470s to the 1640s. The tables throw up a few interesting facts: first, that shorter and cheaper texts were more popular than longer, more expensive ones. For example, a copy of the 1577 edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles would cost 26s bound and 20s unbound at retail compared with only 3s for Stow’s Abridgement. Stow’s various historical works, mostly summaries and abridgements, were reissued twenty-five times between 1565 and 1631, whereas Holinshed was reissued only three times between 1577 and 1587. It is hardly surprising to find that price was such an overriding factor in determining the public’s buying habits.
during the late sixteenth century because, as Patterson notes, it ‘was a period of dramatic inflation’. Much more interesting is Woolf’s discovery of how sharply the production and sales of chronicles declined in the 1600s. He states:

whatever the intrinsic merits of [Holinshed’s] Chronicles and its clear appeal to contemporaries (Shakespeare among them), it was nevertheless part of a genre that was already on its last legs . . . peaking at mid-century, the market [for chronicles] had largely been glutted by 1600.

Woolf suggests that the downfall of the chronicle was caused by a combination of factors: market saturation, the emergence of a number of ‘parasite genres’ (including Shakespeare’s history plays), economic viability and the rise of antiquarianism.

The practice of history writing became fragmented and lost its dominant genre at the very moment when England was supposed to have been urgently reconstructing its own national myth. It seems to me altogether more accurate to describe the process in terms of transition. The late sixteenth century finds England caught in a moment of uncertainty, on the cusp of modernity, and unsure whether or not to cling on to its medieval, providential past. Rather than leading England’s efforts at nation-building, Shakespeare’s history plays feed off this climate of uncertainty. Medieval throwbacks like John of Gaunt, Joan of Arc and the Bishop of Carlisle share the stage with proto-modern Machiavellian pragmatists like Hotspur, Henry IV and Henry V. By showing the machinations of court politics – its self-serving relationships of convenience and its backstabbings – Shakespeare’s historical drama demystifies the nation-state as much as it defines it. Shakespeare’s sensitivity to human motives implicitly follows Italian humanist historiography in focusing on the ‘second causes’ of history, but at the same time the history plays give voice to popularly held beliefs about divine providence. The history plays see Shakespeare tapping into the uncertainty that surrounded him and mining it for drama. As a playwright, rather than a chronicler or polemicist, he was under no obligation to find stable conclusions or to resolve the many complexities of late-sixteenth-century historiography.

We should not forget either that these were uncertain times not only for historiographers, but also for the clergy and theologians. The issues at stake in the religious debates during Elizabeth’s reign, especially those of free will and predestination, feed directly into Shakespeare’s history plays. At this time the Church of England was still very much in its nascent state, and actively forging a doctrinal identity. Thomas Cranmer’s attempts to establish a more Lutheran form of Protestantism for England were brought to a sudden and brutal halt under the reign
of Elizabeth’s sister, Mary. Questions about the fundamental beliefs of the Church of England were still at stake. The period saw the rise of both Puritanism and the influence of John Calvin, chiefly in the form of Presbyterianism under Elizabeth’s successor, James I. Calvin’s student, John Knox, who had been banned in England under Elizabeth, profoundly influenced James during his time in Scotland. However, even during Elizabeth’s reign we can see Calvin’s influence. Two of the key ideas that gained prominence were sola fide (or justification by faith alone) common to most forms of Protestantism and Calvin’s more extreme theory of predestination derived from the idea of sola gratia (or ‘grace alone’).

It will be beyond dispute, that free will does not enable any man to perform good works, unless he is assisted by grace; indeed, the special grace which the elect alone receive through regeneration. For I stay not to consider the extravagance of those who say that grace is offered equally and promiscuously to all.98

We can see traces of Calvin in the wording of certain items in the Thirty-Nine Articles written by Protestant reformers in 1563 under Elizabeth:

X. Of Free-Will.
The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

XI. Of the Justification of Man.
We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not of our own works or devisings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.99

Calvin’s theory has serious implications for human free will and accordingly for the idea of personal agency. For Calvin, humans do not have the capacity to perform ‘good works’ by their own free will and since our ultimate fate in heaven or hell is predestined by the will of God, individuals play no part in steering the course of their own destiny.

However, England under Elizabeth stopped short of adopting these ideas wholesale. Alongside the rise of Calvinism, the period in which Shakespeare wrote the history plays also saw the rise of Anglicanism, a position much closer to Catholicism, most prominently in the work of Richard Hooker, especially Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie (1594).100 Anglicanism is characterised by the idea of via media or
‘middle way’, and it is possible to see this in the very next item of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*:

XII. Of Good Works.

ALBEIT that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our fins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; infomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.101

Although the authors of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* broadly followed Calvin in their stance on free will and the individual’s capacity to perform ‘good works’, here they appear to suggest that although good works will not help us in the Final Judgement, they are at least ‘pleasing and acceptable to God’ and, implicitly, we are able to perform them by our own free will. This would appear to contradict, or at least complicate, article X but it is a good example of *via media* because it is a concession to vestiges of the Catholic belief still popular at the time.

For the present study, there are two important items of note here: first, the fact that issues of free will and predestination were being debated actively in Shakespeare’s own time; and second, that Calvin’s ideas of predestination are in many ways a return to beliefs found in the medieval period. To borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, Calvinism was ‘residual’ in Elizabethan culture – ‘effectively formed in the past, but . . . still active in the cultural process . . . as an effective element of the present’.102 This is because, as Anthony N. S. Lane tells us, ‘Calvin clearly believed that, on a wide range of issues, he was simply restoring the teaching of Augustine.’103 Augustine believed strongly in the idea of predestination. This idea, principally through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, gained some prominence during the medieval period and Middle Ages.104 In the argument that follows, I consistently contrast the residual ideology of divine providence with the emergent humanist view of history. I argue that Shakespeare explicitly rejects divine providence; it goes without saying that this also implies a rejection of the Calvinist view of free will and predestination.

**Shakespeare’s Humanist Historiography**

In a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance.  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,  
Printing their proud hoofs i’th receiving earth;  
For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times,
Turning th’accomplishment of many years
Into an hour glass – for which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history.

(Henry V, Prologue.24–32)

Shakespeare’s history plays deal with people. This might sound like an obvious statement (who else could populate a play but people?), but the point is worth stressing – not least because, as Andy Mousley writes, ‘one effect of [cultural historicism’s anti-humanism] has been to dehumanise history, to empty history of its human interest, scope and scale’.105 We have seen that Tudor historiography was not a discretely defined practice. Controversial new foreign ideas about politics and statecraft vied with received medieval superstitions about divine providence, often within the covers of a single text. At the same time, cutting-edge antiquarian methods of scholarship competed with moral didacticism for the territory marked ‘truth’. England had cut its ties with Catholicism, provoked war with Spain and faced French intrigue in Scotland, which was a constant source of instability for the English throne; the country was moving into uncertain and isolated waters. No doubt, the need for a firm sense of national identity was strongly felt – especially by its government. History is the bedrock on which national identity is built. Thus, the process of national self-identification hinged ultimately on the writers of history.

However, England did not experience the definitive period of self-identification that its authorities sought in the late sixteenth century. History written during this time was heterogeneous. It was disseminated through a wide variety of forms and came to no stable conclusions about how best to understand England’s bloody past. As I have argued, the 1580s and 1590s are best understood as a period of transition in English historiography. To borrow a term from Michel Foucault, it was a profound moment of ‘discontinuity’.106 Epistemological breaks are rarely clean, however. It is perhaps more useful, therefore, to think of the historical texts produced in the 1590s in terms of self-reflection rather than as marking a period of self-identification. Whether implicitly or explicitly, writers and historians were asking fundamental questions about their nation and about themselves: What does it mean to be English? How have we come to the present state of affairs? Who are the people that have shaped this country? What were their successes and mistakes? What can we learn from the past today?

Shakespeare’s history plays pose these questions as strongly as any contemporary chronicle and they do so in a uniquely humanist fashion, because they reduce the broad sweep of history to the microcosm of
the stage and ‘reduce the political process down to a human scale’. Shakespeare’s history is truncated, stripped to its most essential elements: people and their actions. Shakespeare exercises poetic licence with the details of historical events. Whole decades are reduced to a few minutes on stage; history is triturated and poured into ‘an hourglass’ (Henry V, Prologue.31), making the significance of human action available for all to see. As Jan Kott notes, Shakespeare’s history is ‘cleared . . . of all descriptive elements, of anecdotes, almost of story. It is history distilled of irrelevances’. As individual characters negotiate their way around the poisoned chalice of kingship – scheming, praying, wooing, betraying, squabbling, kissing and killing their way through history – audiences are left to fill in the blanks. We remind ourselves how each action has the potential to affect thousands of people: ‘In a thousand parts divide one man’ (Henry V, Prologue.24). Shakespeare’s treatment of history draws our attention to just how much has been determined by the actions and choices of a few men and women, and reminds us of how precarious their privileged positions can be. To quote Annabel Patterson: ‘it mattered to Shakespeare . . . who works and who speaks’. But it also draws us into the interpretative process of history: ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings’ (Henry V, Prologue.28). This line may be read as a superficial appeal to the audience to imagine the magnificent robes and gold crowns of bygone kings, but it can also be read another way: the chorus of Henry V calls on the members of its audience to awaken from their passivity in order to judge for themselves the key figures of fifteenth-century England. We are invited not only to ‘deck our kings’ in the finest silks, but also to assess critically their performances in the ongoing pageant of history. In short, Shakespeare’s historical gaze puts the kings, queens and statesmen of England on trial and asks his audience to act as both judge and jury. When viewed in this way, Shakespeare’s history plays constitute nothing less than a radical, humanist form of historicism.

Shakespeare’s history is a genuinely human affair in which actions have consequences and personalities matter; it has winners and losers, good ideas and bad ideas, triumphs and blunders, selfish tyrants and innocent victims, ambitious nobles and escapist kings. As Moody E. Prior noted elegantly in 1973, Shakespeare’s historical insights ‘come to us clothed in their full human significance’. To conclude this chapter and in Chapter 7, I want to take the opportunity offered by the Chorus of Henry V to pay particular attention to the actions and decisions of the characters found in 2 Henry VI and 3 Henry VI. By so doing, I hope to engage in the process of interpreting history at its most fundamental
level: analysing the key choices and actions of characters in order to discern what has contributed to their accomplishments or downfalls. This is historicism as envisioned by Shakespeare: the very stuff of history brought to life, as if for the first time, in front of our eyes and held up to be considered and judged. Ronald Knowles makes a similar argument:

Shakespeare not only recreated the empirical conditions of historian as witness, but also freed the past from the fixity of the page. The resurrected personages of history now spoke for themselves and the audience, free from the directives of a didactic narrator, could bear witness to the meaning of experience, rather than accept the truism of precept, by hearing and seeing arguments and actions, words and deeds.¹¹²

To adapt Stephen Greenblatt’s famous phrase, here is a real chance ‘to speak with the dead’,¹¹³ because the figures of history are being reanimated quite literally on the stage – albeit in an anachronistic and culturally mediated form.

The anti-humanist bent of much new historicist and cultural materialist work has led recent critics to discredit the notion of character as a category for analysis and to focus attention on the extent of anachronism and cultural mediation in Shakespeare’s plays. In other words, their emphasis has been on the degree to which social and ideological pressures impinge upon and make themselves felt within Shakespeare’s plays. I am much more interested in the degree to which those plays intervene in early modern debates about history and politics in a unique and dynamic way, and in their capacity to challenge audiences to think critically about the historical process. In taking this approach, I would also like put forward the idea that anti-humanist modes of enquiry are ill equipped to deal adequately with Shakespeare’s history plays, precisely because they are opposed to the very categories on which his historical enquiry is predicated – a matter to which I will return presently.

In centring history on individuals, Shakespeare was, at least in part, opposing long-held beliefs inherited from the medieval period about the primacy of God’s will in historical events. Although Phyllis Rackin rightly argues that ‘it is impossible to derive a single, coherent theory of history from the plays’,¹¹⁴ it is equally impossible to deny that the plays, as David Scott Kastan points out, ‘all too clearly . . . deal with the fallen world of politics’.¹¹⁵ The plays cannot be made to uphold the received ideas of divine providence and retribution without the gross oversimplification found in Tillyard,¹¹⁶ not least because Shakespeare’s characters repeatedly make claims that dispute providence. In 2 Henry VI, for example, time and again York cites Henry’s personality as the cause of England’s failings and vows to take matters into his own hands:
Nor shall proud Lancaster usurp my right,
Nor hold the sceptre in his childish fist,
Nor wear the diadem upon his head,
Whose church-like humours fits not for a crown . . .
And force perforce I’ll make him yield the crown,
Whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down.

(2 Henry VI, 1.1.241–4, 255–6)

The suggestion implicit in York’s resolve to make a challenge for the crown is that if Henry VI had been of a different ‘humour’, if his rule had been less ‘bookish’ and ‘church-like’, he would not have been forced into action. York cites, as Prior argues, ‘the human causes of Henry’s failure’.117

In the very next scene, the ambitious Eleanor of Gloucester attempts to goad her husband, Duke Humphrey, into action to make a claim on the crown himself:

Follow I must: I cannot go before
While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
And smooth my way upon their headless necks.
And, being a woman, I will not slack
To play my part in fortune’s pageant.

(2 Henry VI, 1.2.62–7)

Eleanor bemoans her husband’s lack of ambition and the social restrictions placed upon her sphere of action because of her gender, but she is not content to entrust her future to providence (‘fortune’s pageant’). One is reminded of Karl Marx’s celebrated observation that ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past’.118

Eleanor, no doubt, wishes she could choose her own circumstances, but she is still going to try to play the best hand with the cards that she has been dealt. Like York, she resolves to take her destiny into her own hands in order to try to achieve her aims. In the event, by electing to dabble in witchcraft, she chooses the ‘wrong’ option and plays a significant part in her own downfall, but her concerns about Humphrey’s rivals prove to be well founded none the less. Again, the implication is that, had Humphrey been of a less ‘humble mind’, he might have survived the play; indeed, the very course of history might have been significantly altered.

Queen Margaret also takes matters into her own hands because of her dissatisfaction with Henry’s character:
When she agreed to marry Henry, Margaret fell for William de la Pole, the Earl of Suffolk – she fell for his personal qualities – his ‘courage, courtship, and proportion’. Henry, who lacks these qualities, has plainly disappointed her. To underline the point, Shakespeare, quite unhistorically, develops an explicit affair between Margaret and Suffolk. Margaret is unwilling to let circumstances get in the way of her goals and desires. If Henry is unwilling to do what is required of him, she will either do it in his place or find a suitable substitute. This becomes a keynote of Margaret’s character. She finds herself a proxy lover in Suffolk and becomes both the proxy head of state and the commander-in-chief of the royal army. All the while, she chastises and humiliates the King for his lack of gumption, brazenly kissing Suffolk in front of him and calling him names such as ‘wretched man’ and ‘timorous wretch’ (3 Henry VI, 1.1.218, 233).

The sheer dominance of Margaret over her timid husband maintains the power to shock and surprise in the twenty-first century. She brings to mind the ruthless, individualist ideology of Thatcherite Britain as much as the Elizabethan construct of feminine monstrosity. Whether or not it was Shakespeare’s intention to vilify her, as feminists argue, as a ‘sustained example of the danger which ambitious and sexual women pose to English manhood and to English monarchy’, the fact remains that she pursues her endeavours through force of personality alone. Despite her often spiteful nature, throughout the Henry VI plays she consistently makes the best of a bad situation: the daughter of a powerless king, who not only negotiates marriage above her political pulling power, but also, upon finding the King of England a weak and ineffectual man, cuckolds him to satisfy her own needs, leads his armies, successfully subdues her political rivals, and produces a legitimate heir. Without Margaret, the Lancastrian house would undoubtedly have capitulated to the House of York far sooner and more readily – indeed, she is responsible for killing the leader of the opposition, Richard of York. Again, Shakespeare is at pains to show how much depends upon the actions and characteristics of individuals – even those like Eleanor and Margaret who are, in theory, denied agency by the patriarchal status quo.
These women also serve, especially in Margaret’s case, as the antidote to the insipidly passive Henry VI, who, more than any other character, throws himself on the mercy of divine providence. If *Richard III* represents a thoroughgoing critique of Machiavellianism, then the *Henry VI* plays surely subject the providential theory of history to equal scrutiny. As Ronald Knowles has suggested:

[Henry’s] Christian faith accepts that what has taken place must be part of God’s just providential ordering of the world, however inscrutable that might appear to mere human understanding . . . The chaos which ensues when the monarch puts his complete faith and trust in the efficacy of God in human affairs [serves] ultimately [to] subvert the commonplaces of Tudor Christian ideology . . . An audience is surely left aghast at such single-minded piety which has rendered the king politically blind and lame.\(^{120}\)

In a world that is plainly governed by human action rather than providence, Henry’s court is quickly overrun with ambitious individuals who, as the makers of history, are not content to sit back and wait for things to happen. Henry’s placid inaction serves both to focus our attention sharply on the actions of others and to highlight how different things might have been if Henry had taken the decisions he needed to at vital moments. I will return to this theme later. For now it is enough to say that Shakespeare himself was keenly aware of the fact that the War of the Roses could have been averted had it not been for the King’s incompetence. However much Margaret is demonised in the plays, at least she is in the business of *steering* the wheel of history rather than letting it spin out of control or letting someone else steer it. After all, what is history but an account of people’s actions? Margaret’s attempts to steer history are, at their most basic level, attempts to exercise influence and control over other people, the practice we most commonly call *politics*. It almost goes without saying that the politics of the history plays are intensely personal, and each major player in the political game is brought under scrutiny – for examination and cross-examination – before the galleries of jurors who make up Shakespeare’s audience. Kings, queens and nobles are put on perpetual trial, much like modern politicians under the spotlight of the media. The collective gaze is brought to bear upon each action, decision and utterance; the audience apportions blame to the individuals responsible for failure and heaps praise on those who achieve success – but only after the event.

This intense focus on individual players in ‘fortune’s pageant’ also lends Shakespeare’s treatment of history a sense of contingency and immediacy that cannot be found in studies of prescribed history. We are reminded constantly of how things *might have been* were it not for
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certain people. There is an uncertainty as to how events may unfurl, despite the fact that history has already written the outcome. In *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare underlines this sense of contingency by introducing the device of Rumour, who, from the start of the play, blurs events and raises doubts in the audience about what actually happened in the previous play by spreading the lie ‘that Harry Monmouth fell / Under the wrath of noble Hotspur’s sword’ (*2 Henry IV*, Induction.29–30). We know this did not happen, but in the world of the play it remains a distinct possibility; in the same circumstances, Hotspur might have killed Prince Hal. This sense of contingency changes the dynamic of history. Blair Worden is right to assert that ‘Shakespeare’s instincts are always descriptive, never prescriptive’, but wrong to claim that ‘he provides maps of political conduct, not tests of political theory’. The image of a ‘map’ suggests a static landscape with fixed positions, but the history plays are populated by characters who change their allegiances, who adopt different political stances depending on fluctuating fortunes, and whose personalities develop as events unfold and body-counts rise. If anything, abstract political theories are put to the test in ‘real’ situations in which almost anything could happen. Without doubt, Shakespeare privileges praxis over theory. Shakespeare’s history plays are not simply an account of what happened, but dynamic and probing analyses of historical causality which place the responsibility for the outcomes of events squarely on the shoulders of men and women.

New historicists and cultural materialists would surely baulk at such conclusions, because they run the risk of affording individuals the agency to control (within boundaries) their own destinies and the course of history. After all, the ‘declared objective’ of anti-humanism is the ‘decentring of man’. The principal objection such critics would doubtless raise is that, by centring history on individuals, Shakespeare ignores the historical and social processes that produce those individuals in the first place. How can individuals truly effect change if they are caught up in the ideological thought-patterns of their particular place and moment? But Shakespeare also provides part of the answer to these questions: individuals have different personalities. There is only so much that ideology critique can account for. How can one explain the wildly dissimilar dispositions of Henry VI and his father, Henry V, or of Duke Humphrey and his wife, Eleanor? Why was it Clarence and not Richard of Gloucester who betrayed Edward IV? We may point to any number of reasons, but they will undoubtedly be specific and personal rather than general and ideological. It seems too tempting and easy to answer, as Graham Holderness does, that these differences of personality are merely reflections of ‘residual and emergent ideologies in a changing
I am not suggesting that the personalities of individuals are inherent or ‘essential’, because it is clear that most human behaviour is learned; but rather that the external impetuses which regulate human behaviour over time and which constitute ‘personality’ are far too varied and innumerable to be explained away by general principles. As readers of Pierre Bourdieu will attest, the will to abstraction can lead only to further abstraction: a kind of Russian-doll model in which structural fields merely beget and explain further structural fields. The continental model of advancing theoretical arguments *a priori* has a habit of providing anti-humanists with useful catch-all phrases that can be used to defeat almost any argument. So Jonathan Dollimore, for example, is able to dismiss the medieval theory of providentialism, Tillyard’s adoption of it in reading Shakespeare’s history plays, the liberal-humanist counter-arguments to Tillyard of the 1960s that centre history on individuals, and Jan Kott’s brand of secular existentialist despair, on the grounds that they are ideological. All of which begs the question: what is not ideological in quasi-Althusserian materialism?

A strong argument can be made in support of the view that Shakespeare’s history plays demonstrate that it is individuals and not God who drive history. Yet new historicists and cultural materialists, by recourse to the anti-humanism of Althusser, Foucault and others, would deny individuals their place in history altogether. This is hardly surprising, given that both Althusser’s and Foucault’s theoretical projects rest on static, closed, discontinuous, synchronic and essentially deterministic models of history, whereas Shakespeare’s humanist historical model, which is opposed to determinism, is dynamic, diachronic, contingent and, as Kastan argues, ‘open-ended’. In other words, cultural historicism is fundamentally opposed to Shakespeare’s own project of humanising history, so it follows that the majority of its practitioners tend to produce readings of the history plays that emphasise their supposed advocacy of the Elizabethan ideological state apparatus while neglecting Shakespeare’s close attention to individual characters.

Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield take successive generations of twentieth-century Shakespeare critics to task for making a ‘fundamental error’ in considering the roles of individuals in the process of history:

Perhaps the most fundamental error in all these accounts of the role of ideology is falsely to unify history and / or the individual human subject. In one, history is unified by a teleological principle conferring meaningful order (Tillyard), in another by the inverse of this – Kott’s ‘implacable roller’. And Sanders’s emphasis on moral or subjective integrity implies a different, though related, notion of unity: an experience of subjective autonomy, of an essential self uncontaminated by the corruption of worldly process; ‘indi-
individual integrity’ implies in the etymology of both worlds an ideal unity: the undivided, the integral.\textsuperscript{127}

When I asked the question ‘what is history but an account of people’s actions?’ above, I did so with this passage from Dollimore and Sinfield in mind, because they assume that history is something else and in doing so beg further questions. Why is the so-called unification of history and the individual necessarily ‘false’? Was it not Margaret who brought York to his knees? Was it not Richard III who killed Margaret’s son, Prince Edward, and who arranged for the death of his own brother Clarence? What would it mean exactly to separate these historical actions from the individuals who perpetrated them? Dollimore and Sinfield provide their own answer, which is:

not to become fixated on [the] negation [of the concept of unifying history and human subjects] – chaos and subjective fragmentation – but rather to understand history and the human subject in terms of social and political process. Ideology is composed of those beliefs, practices, and institutions that \textit{work} to legitimate the social order – especially by the process of representing sectional or class interests as universal ones.\textsuperscript{128}

From this perspective it was social and political process, rather than Margaret or Richard III or any other person, that was ultimately responsible for the historical events I described above. I have deliberately emphasised the word ‘work’ here; it is a verb, an action that assumes, one would think, a doer. But the concept of ‘individual human subjects’ has just been discredited; there is no single person or even group of people responsible for this process; the ‘beliefs, practices, and institutions’ just \textit{work} ‘by themselves’,\textsuperscript{129} in the abstract. Since we are dealing with Marxist ideas, let us return briefly to Marx’s famous aphorism: men make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing. What would become of this in the hands of Dollimore and Sinfield? Their version might read: ‘social and political processes make history, under conditions of their own creation’. I would suggest that, by falsely unifying the \textit{historical} process – what people say and do – and conflating it with the social and ideological processes by which individuals function in society, it is Dollimore and Sinfield who have made the ‘fundamental error’.

As Annabel Patterson argues, the cultural historicist thraldom to ‘certain fashionable forms of anti-humanism [has] seriously inhibited our capacity to talk sensibly about literature’.\textsuperscript{130} Patterson is particularly concerned that these anti-humanist ideas efface individuals from the process of history. She locates the problem in the continued influences of Lacan, Foucault and Althusser: ‘Lacan’s neo-Freudian “qui parle”
denies to the subject the oldest humanist privilege – speech as a sign of rational self-determination – and Foucault’s quotation of it extends that denial to history.’ And the problem is compounded, Patterson adds, by Althusser’s belief ‘that economies (and economic theories) can exist in abstraction from the human beings that produced them’. Patterson notes a tendency in these theorists to raise all questions to the level of abstraction; their theses advance from general principles to general principles – a move, as we have seen, repeated by cultural historicists. In the twenty-first century – an era in which politicians and national governments increasingly absolve themselves of personal responsibility by citing economic forces that are beyond their control – the issue of individual agency remains vital. In my readings of the history plays in the next two chapters of this book, I hope to show that similar issues were at stake in the 1590s and that Shakespeare was deeply aware of them. I also wish to demonstrate how, in subjecting the major players of recent English history to such concentrated scrutiny, the first and second tetralogies insist upon a political world of personal culpability that deals harshly with those who would hide behind abstractions.

Notes

4. Michael Payne, ‘Introduction: Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism’, in *The Greenblatt Reader*, ed. Michael Payne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 3. On the face of it, Payne’s assertion contradicts my critique of new historicism in Chapter 2, but this is not the case. My argument suggests that the new historicist propensity for artificially unifying culture is symptomatic of their broadly formalist method, not that any of the critics in question would consciously subscribe to the view that there was a monolithic Elizabethan culture. This is one of the chief discrepancies between new historicist theory and practice. In theory, the use of anecdotes resists the appeal to grand meta-narratives and any notion of cultural unity. However, in practice, anecdotes are mainly employed as synecdoches that often reveal ‘essential’ characteristics of Elizabethan or Jacobean state control. In this sense, new historicism offers an extremely subtle and nuanced version of Tillyard’s ‘Elizabethan age’ argument that substitutes complex structures of power for a monolithic ‘world view’.


14. Bolingbroke is the Bishop of Carlisle’s ‘current ruler’ because, by 4.1 of Richard II, he effectively controls the court – Richard’s imminent deposition is largely symbolic.


17. Dominique Goy-Blanquet, ‘Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare’s


20. For several excellent examples of anecdotes in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, see Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, pp. 42–55.


24. Patterson, *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles*, p. 16.


32. William Camden, *Annales the true and royall history of the famous empresse Elizabeth Queene of England France and Ireland &c. True faith’s defendresse of diuine renoune and happy memory. Wherein all such memorable things as happened during hir blessed raigne . . . are exactly described*. (London: Printed [by George Purslowe, Humphrey Lownes, and Miles Flesher] for Beniamin Fisher and are to be sould at the Talbott in Pater Noster Rowe, 1625, 1625), [p. 30].


34. William Baldwin (ed.), *A Myrrove For Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with howe greuous plages vices are punished: and howe frayle and vnstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those, whom Fortune seemeth most highly to fauour* (London: In aedibus Thomae Marshe, 1559), pp. xv–xvi.


36. Samuel Daniel, *The Ciuile Wars betweene the Houses of Lancaster and Yorke corrected and continued by Samuel Daniel one of the grooms*
of hir Maiesties most honorable Priuie Chamber (London: Printed by [Humphrey Lownes for] Simon Watersonne, 1609), A3, [p. iii].


40. Rackin, Stages of History, p. 25.


44. Edward Hall, The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, beeong long in continual discension for the croune of this noble realme with all the actes done in bothe the tymes of the princes, bothe of the one lineage and of the other, beginnyng at the tyme of kyng Henry the fowerth, the first auctor of this devision, and so successiuely proceadyng to the reigne of the high and prudent prince kyng Henry the eight, the undubitatae flower and very heire of both the sayd linages (London: In officina Richardi Graftoni typis impress, 1548), p. ii.

45. Ibid., p. ii.

46. Ibid., p. iii.


48. Raphael Holinshed, The Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descendeing by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions (London: Finished in Ianuarie 1587, and the 29 of the Queenes Maiesties reigne, with the full continuation of the former yeares, at the expenses of Iohn Harison, George Bishop, Rafe Newberie, Henrie Denham, and Thomas Woodcocke. At London printed [by Henry Denham] in Aldersgate street at the signe of the Starre, 1587), p. 493.

49. Ibid., p. 494.

50. Hall, The vnion of the two noble and illustre families . . . , p. ii.


55. Ibid., p. 438.

56. A Myrroure for Magistrates, p. xiii.
65. Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: Printed [by William Stansby] for Walter Burre [, and are to be sold at his Shop in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Crane, 1614 [i.e. 1617]], 1617), D2, [p. xxxi].
68. One might also include in this list the Frenchman, Jean Bodin, who ‘rejected the myth of the Golden age, arguing that humanity has changed since its primitive age: new laws and institutions, new customs, come into being every day’ (Goy-Blanquet, ‘Elizabethan Historiography and Shakespeare’s Sources’, p. 60).
70. See, for example: ‘Sinners are condemned by their own consciences’ (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), II.V.11, p. 196).
73. William Caxton, *The Cronycles of Englond* (London: Enprynted by me William Caxton in thabbeuy of Westme[n]stre by london, fynysshed, and accomplysshed the, viij, day of October, the yere of the incatnacyon of our lord God, M,CCCC,lxxxij and in the xxii yere of the regne of Kyng Edward the fourth [1482], 1482), [p. 4].
76. Polydore Vergil, *An abridgement of the notable woorke of Polidore Vergile conteignyng the deuisers and fi rste fi nders out as well of artes, ministeries, feactes & ciuill ordinaunces, as of rites, and ceremonies, commo[n]ly used in the churche; and the originall beginnyng of the same. Co[m]pendiously gathered by Thomas Langley*, ed. Thomas Langley (Imprinted at London:
Within the precinct of the late dissolved house of the Grey Friars, by Richard Grafton printer to the princes grace, the. xvi daie of Aprill, the yere of our lorde M.D.xlvi.; London: Within the precinct of the late dissolved house of the grey Friers, by Richarde Grafton printer to the Princis grace, 1546), p. 8.

77. Ibid., p. xix.
80. Ibid., p. 156.
81. Ibid., p. 159, emphasis mine.
82. Ibid., p. 164.
84. Holderness, Shakespeare: The Histories, p. 46.
85. Camden, Annales . . ., ¶2, [p. 16].
86. Ibid., [p. 19].
88. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Engendering a Nation, p. 11.
89. Ibid., p. 14.
95. See Woolf, Reading History in Early Modern England, pp. 45–6, 52.
96. Patterson, Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles, p. 74.
98. Calvin, Institutes, II.II.6, p. 164.
99. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer ([London]: John Baskerville, 1762), [pp. 5–6].
100. Hooker’s own views on predestination are difficult to discern without sustained investigation, which is beyond the remit of the present study. He is closer to Calvin than some of his contemporaries; as Nicholas Tyacke says, ‘Hooker never broke completely with Calvinism’ (Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 60). For a thoughtful and accessible approach to this topic see Egil Grislis, ‘Providence, Predestination, and Free Will in Richard Hooker’s Theology’, in Richard Hooker and the English Reformation, ed. W. J. Torrance Kirby


104. This view was by no means dominant in the Middle Ages. Aquinas’s ideas of predestination were viewed with some suspicion and were less influential in England than, for example, the ideas of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, who both defended the freedom of will. So there were two strands of thought on the subject in the Middle Ages, and Calvin was reacting strongly against what he saw as the dominant and more popular view, which was broadly Scotist, that humans have free will. For a comparison of Calvin with Scotus and Ockham see Anna Case-Winters, *God’s Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), pp. 41–6. For a view of how influential Scotus and, in particular, Ockham became in fourteenth-century England, see Michael Allen Gillespie, ‘The Nominalist Revolution and the Origin of Modernity’, in *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 19–43.


106. Foucault defines ‘discontinuity’ as follows: ‘within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way’ (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 56).


110. The term ‘humanism’ is associated with several late sixteenth-century movements and it has had a complex afterlife. My use of it with regard to Shakespeare is specifically historiographical, as outlined in Chapter 6; it should not be confused with ‘literary’ or ‘Ciceronian’ humanism, which was a related but distinct project. For a detailed account, see Mike Pincombe, *Elizabethan Humanism: Literature and Learning in the Later Sixteenth Century* (London: Pearson, 2001), pp. 37–57. For a more general overview of the myriad forms of humanism in early modern England complete with selected primary texts, see Joanna Martinade (ed.), *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley* (London: Croom Helm, 1985). In her introduction, Martinade states that in historiography humanism is marked by ‘the assumption that human nature remains the same, so that
the lessons of history are applicable to the present’ (p. 37). For my own view, see Chapter 4.


114. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 27.


119. Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 82.

120. Knowles, *Shakespeare’s Arguments with History*, pp. 27–9.


124. For his discussion of providentialism, see Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, pp. 134–38. For the dismissal of Tillyard, the liberal humanists and Jan Kott, see Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, ‘History and Ideology, Masculinity and Miscegenation’.


