

Introduction

Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* are perhaps most famous for being the source of Shakespeare's English history plays, and consequently have often been called "Shakespeare's Holinshed." While much is known about the *Chronicles*, much still remains unexplained. Stephen Booth was absolutely right: there is probably only one unassailable reason why everybody seems to know about Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but nobody wants to read them—they are immense.¹

Of course, numerous scholars have read the work, but for far too long the only published opinions about it seem to have been formulated exclusively by historians who had evaluated it with regard to the principles and demands of their own discipline.² More recently, however, Annabel Patterson's *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* has appropriated the chronicle narrative as a field of literary analysis and changed forever the way literary critics view the work that for decades (if not centuries) was considered worthy of remembrance only thanks to Shakespeare as its most famous reader. In fact, the last two decades have seen much disciplinary cross-pollination, as numerous literary scholars have peered into traditional historiographic materials through a literary lens, and studied how Renaissance men and women read historical texts.³ Numerous others have taken theories developed in historical studies and applied them to "canonical" literary texts such as Shakespeare's, Spenser's, Drayton's, and Marvell's.⁴ Still others have approached medieval historical documents as well as literary texts with an acute awareness of the theoretical concerns of contemporary literary, linguistic, and historical studies.⁵ The results of such interdisciplinary research have been immensely rewarding and have influenced my own approach in this book.

Although this intense scholarly activity announces a future that will see even more interdisciplinary research combining historiography and literary criticism, many questions about Holinshed's *Chronicles* still remain unanswered. How did Holinshed himself understand his job as a historian and what did history mean to him? What were his motives in composing his immense work? Did he intend to glorify the Tudor regime, as historians have traditionally contended, or were his intentions more liberal and democratic, as Patterson has suggested? And if Helgerson's "national project" existed at all in the early modern period—

¹ Booth, 1.

² See Levy; Ferguson, *Clio*; McKisack; and P. Burke.

³ See Helgerson, *Forms*; Jardine and Grafton; Grafton, *Commerce*, "Discitur" and "Renaissance."

⁴ See McEachern; D. Baker.

⁵ See Justice; Rollison, "Specter" and "Conceit."

whether English, British, or otherwise multicultural, yet fraught with Pocockian Archipelagic anxieties—did the *Chronicles* contribute to it?⁶ And if they did, what did they contribute and how? Although we know much about how Holinshed's contemporaries read the classics, how did the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English read the *Chronicles*, and what did they learn from the work? I intend to address these questions.

In my attempt to understand the complexity of the numerous issues involved I shall frequently cross various boundaries—between conventionally established historical and literary periods, between genres, not to mention between disciplines such as literature, history, and political theory—but I wish to make clear that I am neither a historian nor a scholar of constitutional history, even though I borrow from both disciplines and build upon their knowledge for my own purposes. Those purposes are firmly grounded in what has traditionally been called “literary studies” or “literary history.” I borrow from historians, as well as from scholars of political culture and the constitution, because the text I choose as my object of study has not been traditionally considered a “literary” text, and because as a historiographic document it has much to say to its readers about England's governance in the past and in its own time. My borrowing from other disciplines enables me to make sense of the ideology that permeates Holinshed's text, but the exegetical tools of my own field allow me to decode its rhetorical intricacies, and to identify the important effects—some intended, many not—on the articulation of ideas created by semantic shifts that occurred over two centuries.

I do not presume that my argument will fundamentally change the way in which historians conceptualize late sixteenth-century English politics and the “problem” of nationalism (or nationhood)—whether English or British. Their discipline fascinates me, but I admit it still remains for me—even after so many years of research—a vast and daunting geography. In short, they are not my intended audience, even though I hope that some of them may find a few useful nuggets in my research.

My primary audience, of course, is that of literary scholars. To them I present findings I hope they will find relevant as well as interesting, because they relate to our understanding of the history of reading. My rhetorical approach to historical narrative reconstructs how early modern English readers—including many famous authors—read historical texts, and contributes to our understanding of how various authors used their sources. This may well appeal to the historian as well, but I think literary critics will be most interested to discover how this Elizabethan text played a crucial part in the early modern period, by transmitting—and, through its imperfect rearticulation, refracting—historical memories, ideals, and images of the English national self to a broad readership up to the Caroline era. In the process

⁶ See Pocock, “British” for the seminal argument—or plea—for a new subject, “British History.” Also see Schwyzer; McCabe; Morrill; Bradshaw, “Tudor”; Murphy; McEachem; D. Baker; and Kidd for examples of historical and literary studies that explore this reproblematicized issue of early modern nationalism.

this text seems unwittingly to have helped create a political project that would, in time, be tested in the conflict between King and Commonwealth.

Though the image of the past in the chronicles has seemed historically distorted to some modern historians because of the presence of obviously fictional elements in the text, my rhetorical analysis of the narrative will show that its “poetic” truth is remarkably close to the “historical” truth about the people, events, and culture reconstructed by recent historical scholarship. These historians have suggested similar ideas to mine about English political culture in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; however, my journey to those conclusions was significantly different from theirs due to my choice of documents and the exegetical tools I applied to them. Even though I chose to study a notoriously “unreliable” historical text, somehow I still managed to get to the same destination. This should not have been possible, given what we have been taught about chronicles in general. But it *was* possible, and it was the direct result of my use of the same interpretive strategies early modern readers applied to all texts—history as well as fiction. Is it not, therefore, conceivable that others could have done so as well? Is it not possible that early modern readers read chronicles in ways we may have forgotten? Is it also not probable that sixteenth-century readers could claim to understand what came to pass in fifteenth-century English history just as well based on their interpretation of an exciting (even if sometimes digressive) chronicle narrative, as we can assert on the basis of twenty-first-century explicit, analytical, extensively footnoted texts presented by historians who studied a variety of sources the chroniclers could not even have imagined?

Metaphorically, I conceive of early modern historiography as a hall of mirrors. An object placed in front of the first mirror is reflected as many times as there are mirrors lined up until its final form, many times reflected and sometimes distorted—depending on the shape of each subsequent mirror in the series—reaches the eye of the observer on the other end who can only behold its last shape. So with Renaissance historiography, especially chronicle history. Renaissance chroniclers frequently quote verbatim the first contemporary accounts of a medieval event or the description of a person, but sometimes the English translation of a Latin original, or the more economical rephrasing of a particularly loquacious piece, introduces new language—or the new understanding of an old word that no longer means what it used to—and in the process, perhaps involuntarily, not only embellishes the narrative, but most certainly distorts the initial image in the eye of the beholder. However, this is not going to be a study of some bad historiographic game of broken telephones. Because the memory of the late Plantagenet turmoil proves to be so long-lasting in English political culture of what David Rollison has called “the age of the commonweal,”⁷ we need to follow the long line of narrative-borrowings and retellings, from the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, identifying the mirrors along the way that reflected or distorted the original—each one farther and farther removed from, yet representative of a perspective on, the historical

⁷ “Specter,” 224.

person or event—and explore the effects the additions of extraneous details, sententious commentaries, and figurative language had on each new audience.

The early modern penchant for analogical reasoning—or argument by correspondence—would probably find it quite fitting that my literary approach to historiography traces the accounts of fifteenth-century English history as a series of mirrors—both as didactic texts in the Renaissance sense of the word “mirror,” and as instruments of Newtonian optics aimed at sharpening the images of remote objects.⁸ I am interested in testing the accuracy of the various intermediary mirrors’ reflections of the original historical objects, discovering the aberrations that produced distortions, and comparing the beholders’ reactions to and their uses of the various images presented to them. To this end, I shall rely on, roughly, three groups of texts, authors, and audiences. First, there are the medieval contemporaries, chroniclers as well as poets of different sorts who recorded their views of the turmoil between the reigns of Richard II and Richard III, whom I consider a kind of control-group closest to the “truth” of the historical moment that will later be used (or abused) in different ways. Second, there are the sixteenth-century chroniclers retelling this turbulent tale to a Tudor audience of writers and politicians for their own purposes. And third, there are the early seventeenth-century historians rewriting the old story for another anxious readership at the eve of another civil war.

What unites all three groups of readers and writers of history is an adherence to what can best be called “commonwealth discourse.” However, because the term “commonwealth” experienced a significant semantic shift over two centuries—a point that will be discussed at great length in due course—we need to approach Holinshed’s articulation of this idea (and others) with an awareness of the influential hermeneutic theories of the historians J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, as well as Michel Foucault, all of whom have argued that in our study of the political cultures in the past we do not only need to look for meaning in context but also to pay attention to the fundamental importance of language.

My approach follows Pocock’s model, as it studies the conceptual vocabularies used in political discourse, explores their limitations and implications, considers how they changed over time and the possible causes of change, and suggests some of the implications and consequences of these lexical alterations.⁹ This study is concerned not only with the ideas communicated in Holinshed’s text, but also with what Skinner calls the authors’ “illocutionary acts:” their interventions in contemporary contexts of debate. If this book, therefore, seems at times to toy with the history of political thought, it should be understood that it does so primarily as it relates to the history of reading; but we should also remember that early modern historiography was indeed a part of the literature of political thought in its own time.¹⁰ A discussion of ideas cannot be separated from a study of the writers who recorded the ideas in their texts and the readers who encountered them there.

⁸ Newton introduced the “reflecting” telescope as a solution for the problems created by the older “refracting” kind.

⁹ Pocock, *Machiavellian*, 57–58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 561.

Holinshed and his associates could not have known (though I suspect they prayed) that their history of the “nations” on Pocock’s “Atlantic archipelago” would have a profound cultural role. But it is a fact we cannot ignore because so many of their readers went on to retell (and further refract) the stories they learned from the chronicles to their own audiences, thus multiplying a millionfold the anxieties and ambivalences of a single moment in time, and converting them into components of the revised (or newly conceived?) national self in later times. Indeed, in Shakespeare’s case, audiences four centuries later still ponder the problems of nationhood and its concomitant -isms (nationalism, chauvinism, jingoism, imperialism, colonialism) in *Henry V*, and even expand the temporal relevance of MacMorris’s famous question “What ish my nation?”¹¹—an anxious inquiry bred of the Elizabethan “colonial” view of the mongrel “Old English” identity in Ireland—to include us all in any time and in any place.¹² Such readings of Shakespeare’s play invite us to understand how we came to consider ourselves who we are and what we think we mean when we say we belong, even while we theorize on the meaning of Shakespeare’s lines in their temporal context. Shakespeare may be the catalyst for our postmodern, post-national meditation, but, as we shall soon see, the original question of fluid and evolving national identity came to him from Holinshed’s narrative of English medieval history that he used as his immediate source.

The textual history of the *Chronicles* is well known. In his dedicatory Epistle to Sir William Cecil, in both the 1577 and 1587 editions, Holinshed explains how he took upon himself the project of writing the work. The Queen’s printer, Reginald Wolfe,¹³ intended to publish “an universall Cosmographie of the whole worlde” containing “perticular Histories of every knowen nation,”¹⁴ and engaged Holinshed to collect those histories. When Wolfe died in 1573 and left his twenty-five-year-old project unfinished, the people disposing of Wolfe’s effects wished Holinshed to continue the work, and he apparently accepted. As the volume of materials grew, and along with it the cost of printing, Holinshed decided to confine the chronicles to England, Scotland, and Ireland. The letter to Cecil identifies only two other men as his collaborators: William Harrison, who wrote the *Description of England*, and Richard Stanyhurst, the author of the *Description of Ireland*.¹⁵

¹¹ *HV*, 3.3.66. All citations of Shakespeare’s plays refer to Wells’ and Taylor’s *Complete Works*.

¹² See McEachern; D. Baker.

¹³ His first name sometimes appears as “Reynold” or “Reyner.”

¹⁴ 1577, 1:¶2.

¹⁵ The histories of Scotland and Ireland are irrelevant to my purposes; both narratives in the 1577 edition are essentially translations of other authors with some extensions (to 1547 for Ireland and 1571 for Scotland). Stanyhurst translates Edmund Campion for the Irish history, while John Bellenden’s Scots translation of Hector Boece’s Latin *Scotorum Historia* is translated for the Scottish history either by Harrison alone, or with Holinshed’s collaboration. There are conflicting claims made in the dedicatory letters preceding the Scottish history that attribute the translation to both men.

As far as the 1577 edition is concerned, Holinshed is undoubtedly the author of the chronicle's English history; thus, this is the only version of the text that we can correctly refer to as "Holinshed's" and as reflective of his rhetorical motives.¹⁶ When Holinshed died in 1580, plans were already made to prepare an enlarged, second edition of the *Chronicles*, and the team of writers was expanded accordingly to include John Hooker (alias Vowell), Abraham Fleming, Francis Boteville (otherwise known as Francis Thynne), John Stow, William Patten, and possibly several others. Hooker was responsible for the revision and continuation of the history of Ireland (and the "table" or index for it), while Thynne revised and continued the history of Scotland. Fleming prepared the "tables" for Scotland and England, and supervised the revision and continuation of the entire history of England, with the help of Stow, Thynne, and Patten. Because Holinshed died before the edition was complete, in 1580 a new editor took control of the project.

The title-pages of the 1587 edition claim that the *Chronicles* have been "newlie augmented and continued (with manifold matters of singular note and worthie memorie) to the year 1586. by Iohn Hooker alias Vowell Gent. and others," effectively naming Hooker Holinshed's successor and editor-in-chief, but the evidence provided by the text itself, and in particular the referencing technique in the marginal notes—where Fleming identifies his additions from the texts of various authors named in the third person, including Hooker and Stow—suggest that in fact Fleming was the dominant pen in the revision of the history of England.¹⁷ Either way, because of the frequent interpolations in the narrative by Holinshed's successors, the resulting narrative can no longer be termed "his," and any original "intent" he may have had is inevitably distorted by the rhetorical motives of his colleagues. Despite the fact that Fleming, as editor for the entire second edition, was so meticulous as to reference the interpolations he made by signing his name in the margins and naming his sources, and either marking the beginning of an addition with an initial "¶" or framing it in square brackets, it is still difficult to say with certainty which of the authors is responsible for each added passage because many additions exist without any marginal signatures.

Holinshed's death complicates any quest to untangle the authorship issue because it led to many authors taking over and dividing among themselves the roles he had played alone in the composition of the 1577 text. And because the 1587 text is so notoriously multivocal, we cannot assume that the unsigned changes in the narrative—and there are many in the portion I will be discussing—were made by Holinshed himself. It is, of course, possible that some of the unsigned changes in the 1587 text were either revisions Holinshed was planning for a second edition before his death, or unused passages Fleming recovered from Holinshed's

¹⁶ I use this term in the sense developed by Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

¹⁷ See Miller; Dodson; Donno, "Abraham"; Booth, 61–65; Patterson, *Holinshed's* 7–8 and 22–31 for convincing arguments to this effect. Levy, in a passage cited later, considers Hooker the editor—a fault, I would suggest, resulting from not reading the syntax of the marginalia with a "literary" eye.

papers for the 1577 text. But we cannot assume that either is necessarily true. For this reason, whenever I cannot identify a contributor's pen in the revised 1587 text I refer to a "successor," but this appellation should not be taken to signify Holinshed, Fleming, Hooker, or anyone specific. I am not at all concerned with the question of authorship. My conclusions about the meanings of the passages and their importance for the birth and dissemination of the commonwealth ideal would not be altered if some future study discovered that these additions were penned by Fleming, Stow, Thynne, or somebody else.

If Holinshed was not the sole author of the *Chronicles*, and the collaborative work of which he was the editor had two distinct and rather different editions, it is puzzling why the opus continues to exist in the popular imagination as a single work, and frequently under the appellation "Holinshed's *Chronicles*." By the second half of the sixteenth century the chronicle had evolved into a palimpsestic form characterized by multiple revisions, corrections, and annotations, so an inherent imprecision attends the desire to affix anyone's name to a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century chronicle.¹⁸ Using the name "Holinshed" to signify at the same time the author and the source of various views and narratives presented in the volumes, regardless of the differences between the two versions of the texts, can have grave consequences.¹⁹ The case of the two texts of *King Lear* may propose a useful solution to this problem.

What began as the publication of a collection of "radical theories" by Michael Warren, Gary Taylor and others soon changed the way in which critics view all of Shakespeare's plays that survive in multiple textual versions. The group's success in effecting a "devolution" and "re-division" of the Quarto and Folio texts of *King Lear*²⁰ establishes the integrity of the two play-texts as narratives. I wish to advocate a similar integrity for each version of the *Chronicles*. It may well be true that the two editions of the *Chronicles* when considered *in toto* are not terribly different in terms of the general thrust of their ideology and the scope of their narratives. But those various constituent self-contained narratives, such as the one covering the years 1377–1485, contain crucial differences in the portrayals of characters and events that necessitate our treatment of each version separately. And since these mini-units of the vast chronicle became sources for other literary works such as Shakespeare's plays, the distinctions between the two editions are worth exploring, and prove to be critically important in establishing the exact source of certain details in the dramatic adaptations.

¹⁸ Hiatt, 55.

¹⁹ In fact, because of the castration of the second edition in 1587, there are more than two versions of the total narrative of the *Chronicles*. However, since the excised parts are not from the 1377–1485 portion of the narrative, there are only two variants of the text relevant to my purposes.

²⁰ Taylor and Warren, vi–vii.

The 1577 edition, rarely read by literary critics because Shakespeare apparently used the 1587 version,²¹ for a long time was conflated in name with its revision, cited occasionally, but for the most part ignored, even though it has a much clearer and sometimes more subversive approach to the 1377-1485 narrative than its later revision. F.J. Levy's rationale for focusing his analysis on the 1587 edition of Holinshed because it was the source for Elizabethan dramatists is paradigmatic of such approaches. Paradoxically, when Levy states that the popular reputation of "Holinshed" as a "badly articulated potpourri of diverse historical materials applies to Vowell's injudicious compilation rather than to the original,"²² it seems that the 1577 edition is excused from the key objections he has towards the chronicle genre as a whole. But the impression is deceiving. While the fault of multivocality seems more related to the larger but "much less coherent" second edition, Levy does not exonerate the 1577 version from all the "flaws" he enumerated earlier, such as the lack of a unifying principle, a grand narrative, and a fact-shaping narrator-intellect.²³ May McKisack also seems to conflate the two editions in her mind when she pronounces that a work like Holinshed's, compiled by many hands over many years, lacks "artistry."²⁴ Noting the lack of "order" and "selective principle" in the work, she characterizes Holinshed and his associates as "inferior historians" unable to "leave things out."²⁵ To his credit, Levy distinguishes between the two versions. Literary critics who adopt his views or McKisack's, however, should be aware of the key differences between the two texts when they tackle the plays based on the narrative adopted from only one version.

As a final note on the applicability of the *King Lear* case to the need for a re-evaluation and renaming of "Holinshed's *Chronicles*," we should remember Stanley Wells's appeal for collaboration between textual and literary critics in dealing with works that pose problems of equal importance to both fields. His warning to the community of Shakespeare scholars is especially relevant:

It is an amateurish critic who writes of a Shakespeare play without knowing something about the state of its text: which words are suspected of corruption, which are emendations, which stage directions are editorial, which passages differ significantly in collateral texts, or are omitted from one or the other of them.²⁶

I see no difference between the importance of a critic's awareness of the variant texts of a play and one's knowledge that the Holinshed of 1577 is not that of 1587. It seems to me that scholars cannot escape the charge of dilettantism in

²¹ The differences between the two narrative versions, discussed later, virtually guarantee that Shakespeare used the 1587 edition as his source.

²² Levy, 182.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ McKisack, 117.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wells, 2.

discussing the sources of Shakespeare's history plays unless they are aware of the characteristics of each text.

Since critics of early modern literature habitually exercise caution in dealing with questions of authorship and textual variants of certain works, it is time that the same care was applied in discussions or even casual mentions of the work that has forever become linked to Shakespeare's history plays. There is, in fact, no absolute "Holinshed" to which one can refer. A comparative, close reading of indicative examples from the seven reigns between 1377 and 1485 will illustrate differences of sufficient gravity to prove the necessity of finding a new critical vocabulary to refer to Shakespeare's source-narratives from the two versions of the *Chronicles*.

It may also be time for the community of early modern literary scholars to develop a corpus of literary evaluations of historiographic texts in the period. Patterson's and Helgerson's work on the subject is an excellent start, but much more needs to be done. This study is intended to be another contribution to this tentative project, and an attempt to formulate a model of reading the chronicle genre—in particular Holinshed's *Chronicles*—by focusing on the famous narrative source of Shakespeare's two historical tetralogies. My choice of the portion of the *Chronicles*, of course, is not arbitrary. It is, after all, "Shakespeare's *Holinshed*," the part that most critics of Shakespeare's history plays are familiar with, and therefore essential to my suggestion that literary studies can benefit from a literary approach to historical sources. This portion of the chronicle covers the period of English history that in the memory of later generations of Englishmen became the very source of their understanding of themselves as a nation, and literarily speaking, the repository of narratives and didactic exempla for the delectation and edification of a broad readership.

I will suggest that the *Chronicles* are more than a text; they are a testament. The national self-portrait the *Chronicles* offer proves to be one of the many building blocks future generations of Englishmen would use to erect the ideological fortress at the heart of a global empire, and a kind of rhetorical cradle out of which would eventually mature the idea of the modern constitutional monarchy. My nativity-maturity metaphor should not be taken to suggest a Whiggish approach to the "history of ideas" as some kind of teleological progress. I use it to connote the truth that the late seventeenth-century definitions of constitutional monarchy following the Glorious Revolution did not emerge out of nowhere; these "new" theories, in fact, echoed many formulas of commonwealth discourse that had been in use for a very long time. If a new reading of this section of the chronicles can shed new light on some issues related to early modern political culture, similar approaches to other parts of the *Chronicles* may yield equally rewarding results.

The narrative of English medieval history between 1377 and 1485 has traditionally been understood as crucial to the establishment of the Tudor claim to the throne because it portrays the story of dynastic and baronial strife, the loss of the French domains, and the ensuing civil war as a preamble to the teleological advent of Henry VII, and hence as the epitome of the propagandistic, Providential line of historiography. But this narrative also contains elements one is accustomed

to finding in fictional genres of heroic literature—especially chivalric romance—which by their very presence demand a literary reading. This kind of “new” reading—one that is alert to the rhetorical nuances of the text—is the same as the “old” early modern interpretive approach. Such a reading interrogates the evaluation of chronicle narratives as unreliable sources of a political truth, or as biased views of fifteenth-century history. This portion of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, when read in the new-old way, emerges as a kind of “Mirror of Policy” for the political class in the audience.

Holinshed’s narrative is characterized by a set of rhetorical figures and thematic paradigms that establish the national, royal, chivalrous, and heroic ideals that define a state, its monarch, its leaders, and the political role of the common people. These figures and chivalric paradigms, many borrowed from the conventions of romance narrative, are gradually introduced into Holinshed’s story of England before the death of Henry V in 1422, and create an ideal hierarchy of heroic and chivalric values that subjugates individual interest to that of the commonwealth. The turning-point of the narrative comes in the reign of Henry VI, when Holinshed depicts the violation of the ideals as the direct cause of multiple *de casibus* tragedies: for the individual characters, for the loss of France, and for the “fall” of the entire English nation. The lowest point, of course, comes in the reign of Richard III, when Richard’s grand political performance destabilizes the meaning of all truths in his world. But these tragedies and falls also serve as motives for the quest of Holinshed’s characters to redeem and revive the ideal values, a quest that ultimately leads to the collective rebirth of the nation and the final apotheosis of the ideals in a teleological flourish at the beginning of the reign of Henry VII. That the horrors of war and the tragedy of imperial territorial loss were all worthwhile is a lesson that Holinshed’s reader could not escape, and one of them, Samuel Daniel, articulates it clearly at the opening of his *Civil Wars Between the Houses of Lancaster and York* (1595–1609):

Yet now what reason have we to complaine?
 Since hereby came the calme we did injoy;
 The blisse of thee *Eliza*; happie gaine
 For all our losse....²⁷

In discussing the medieval narrative I shall try to refute the past dismissals of Holinshed’s work for being pedestrian in style, or lacking characterization and dramatic tension.²⁸ I shall approach his narrative in two fundamental ways: *stylistically*, by focusing on the author’s choices of rhetorical figures; and *analytically*, by reading the text with an awareness of the exegetical strategies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, I shall illustrate the ideological difference between the two versions of the text. Holinshed’s humanist skepticism and reluctance to moralize at length, two crucial stylistic and ideological traits

²⁷ *CW*, I.3.1–4.

²⁸ McKisack, 119.

of the 1577 edition, are subverted in the 1587 edition where Fleming inserts sententious commentary on virtually all events and emphasizes Providential causality. Whatever the motives of the two authors may have been in reality, one distinction will become clear: the unifying themes or ideological principles for the two versions of the narrative are not always the same. Consequently, literary scholars would do well to refine their use of Holinshed's name, because "Shakespeare's Holinshed" of 1587 in most cases is not Holinshed at all. More often it is Shakespeare's Fleming.

I shall approach the narrative of fifteenth-century English history in the *Chronicles* through the eyes of its early modern readers, numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors such as Shakespeare, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, Thomas Heywood, and many others. I shall respond also to Patterson's thesis about Holinshed's "protoliberalism," by positing the chronicle narrative and the author's political outlook within the context of the sixteenth-century debate between the political theories of monarchy and resistance. As the product of an interdisciplinary approach that fuses various theories of rhetoric, poetics, and reading, this study strives to recreate an early modern model for reading and understanding historical writing generally, and chronicle narratives specifically. In the process, it also identifies some principles the Elizabethans seem to have considered fundamental for their sense of nationhood: the importance of the memory of the traumatic fifteenth century (above all other periods of history) as the birthplace of English nationalism; the fundamental importance of the medieval lexicon of chivalry for the articulation of national ideals and political theories of active service and prudent governance; and consequently, the essentially medieval roots of "commonwealth discourse," which eventually becomes both the focal point of political conflict in the seventeenth century and the foundation of the modern constitutional monarchy.

If David Norbrook anticipated accusations of "Whiggism" for the "grand narrative" shaping his book *Writing the English Republic*, a study confined to the seventeenth century, I ought to be twice as worried because I begin two centuries earlier and end where he starts. What is "Whig history," exactly? Although the term is used in different ways, in most cases it involves an almost teleological view of historical continuity and progress that privileges constitutional history, and frequently vaunts English Protestantism and constitutional exceptionalism.²⁹ But not every suggestion about the existence of historical continuity in ideas is necessarily "Whiggish." Nor should a study be seen as teleological if its parameters trace the changing semantic fields and contexts of use for a crucial term over the course of two centuries. Is it necessarily "Whig" to study a group of authors belonging to a culture that endlessly trumpeted the importance of its constitution? Or to write about people who seemed to believe they were exceptional? Who believed they were chosen? Who knew in their souls that they were, indeed, God's

²⁹ Brundage and Cosgrove, 22.

Englishmen, and that it was their history that had made them so? Surely to write critically about all those things is not to be a “Whig.”

Whig history certainly existed, but mine is in many ways a study of the *roots* of what would later become Whiggism. The Great Tradition,³⁰ upon which late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historians would base their sweeping grand visions of English and British history, relies on the formulas born in the age of the chronicles. This fully developed modern “nationalism” is predicated on ideas that emerged in a time when, according to scholars like Ernst Gellner, nationalism did not even exist. The late Victorian formulas of English racial, cultural, military, legal, and other forms of superiority that resulted from centuries of “progress” merely revised the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chauvinistic formulas that permeate the chronicles. In short, Whig history could not have emerged had the foundations for it not been laid long before—had there not been a set of national values Englishmen accepted readily. The chronicles are the historiographic milk of national exceptionalism that fed the Whigs of later centuries, up to and beyond the Glorious Revolution.

My excavation of “commonwealth discourse” as a crucial component of early modern historical memory fine-tunes Norbrook’s study of republican discourse and its tenuous connection to the word “commonweal.”³¹ Having studied the shifting semantic field of this word, I agree with Norbrook’s understanding of the development of English republican rhetoric, and with Pocock’s contention that the rise of the idea of active citizenship makes the early modern period England’s “Machiavellian moment.” Rather than implying teleology or notions of unstoppable “progress,” a broad historical perspective grants a scholar both room and time to take a look at his subject from all sides.

If it seems to some in the following pages that I interact with historians more than with my fellow literary critics, let it not be taken for a fault or as an implied qualification of this study as “historical.” Truth is, I focus on a text that only historians (with a few exceptions) seem to have found interesting until quite recently, while most literary critics have studied and written about texts only *based upon* it. To engage with the myriad fascinating and important literary studies published about Shakespeare’s historical revisions of his sources would not only expand, but also unnecessarily dilute as well as distract my argument. Literary critics discussing Shakespeare’s historical plays generally present readings of *Shakespeare*; I am interested in readings of *Holinshed*. They keep their eye on the economical play texts and dynamic performances; I parse the seemingly interminable, frequently digressive, dense, black-letter, double-columned folios of the chronicle. If the authorial motives shaping the works are not the same, neither are their audience’s cognitive operations. To read or watch a play is not the same as to read a chronicle.

³⁰ See Brundage and Cosgrove.

³¹ Norbrook, 16–17.

I rely on and converse with scholars who have studied the reading practices, cultural mores, or nationalism in Elizabethan England, and am not overly concerned with the official designations of their disciplines. Shakespeare figures in the following argument only as one of many readers of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, even if *the* most famous one, so neither he nor Shakespearean scholarship are privileged. Nor do I confine my survey of Holinshed's readers only to those with famous names and extensive critical bibliographies like Shakespeare. I am interested in discovering how Holinshed and his team of historiographers read their sources and how they retold the medieval material they found. And because many people read and were influenced by the *Chronicles* in the first half of the Stuart century, I am curious if they still understood and treated the story of the turbulent fifteenth century in the way the Tudor generations did, and if not, what might have changed in their reading. Playwrights and poets both great and minor, known and unknown, pamphleteers, courtiers, historians, antiquarians, hacks, and kings all have a place in my study because they were all readers and they all had something to say about chronicle history, the medieval period, or the political theories about which Holinshed wrote and which the Tudor and early Stuart period found so terribly important. Even though Holinshed's name appears in my title, I use his name only as an adjective in a synecdochic phrase—a phrase whose accuracy I intend to refute before the book's end.