
By Andrew Broertjes, B.A (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Western Australia

Humanities

History

2006
Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Introduction p. 1

Chapter One: Political Preconditions: Pretenders, Usurpation and International Relations 1398-1509. p. 19


Chapter Three: Kingship, Good Government and Nationalism: Contemporary Attitudes and Beliefs. p. 88

Chapter Four: Justifying Usurpation: Propaganda and Claiming the Throne. p. 117

Chapter Five: Promoting Kingship: State Propaganda and Royal Policy. p. 146

Chapter Six: A Public Relations War? Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda 1400-1509 p. 188

Chapter Seven: Propagandistic Messages: Themes and Critiques. p. 222
Chapter Eight: Rewriting the Fifteenth Century: English Kings and State Influenced History. p. 244

Conclusion p. 298

Bibliography p. 303
Acknowledgements

The task of writing a doctoral thesis can be at times overwhelming. The present work would not be possible without the support and assistance of the following people.

Firstly, to my primary supervisor, Professor Philippa Maddern, whose erudite commentary, willingness to listen and general support since my undergraduate days has been both welcome and beneficial to my intellectual growth. Also to my secondary supervisor, Associate Professor Ernie Jones, whose willingness to read and comment on vast quantities of work in such a short space of time has been an amazing assistance to the writing of this thesis.

Thanks are also owed to my reading group, and their incisive commentary on various chapters. Thank you to Lesley O'Brien, Kate Riley, Joanne McEwan, Karen Hall, Hugo Leith, as well as Sarah Brown for her comments on the introduction, and Dr. Graeme Miles for his assistance with the Latin translations.

The support of the U.W.A. postgraduate community in general has been wonderful, but particular thanks to Ali Marchant, Lisa Mackinney, Nicole Crawford, Marianne Hicks and David Robinson.

For various other friends in supportive roles I must thank James Dods, for providing me with a place to stay in London; Arif Munshi, for keeping me fit and healthy; Paul McWilliams, for providing both positive and negative reasons for doing a law degree instead of a PhD; Josh Pullan, for various good times and finally William Schaefer, for reasons too numerous to mention.

Thanks are owed to various bodies who provided funds and resources. Thank you to U.W.A. History department, the U.W.A. Postgraduate School, the Reid Library Scholar's Centre staff (particularly Michelle Coles and Susana Melo de Howard), James Toher for his assistance with various computer issues, and the helpful staff at both the British Library and the National Archives in London.
Finally, there are a number of people who deserve special mention. I would not have been able to write this thesis without the assistance of my long-suffering family, whose love and support has been fantastic. Also to Frank and Annie Cordingley, for their hospitality and friendship, and finally to Emma Cordingley, whose love over the last three years has been of incalculable benefit both to my intellectual, and personal growth.
Introduction

Thus, my gode lorde, wynneth your peples voice
ffor peples vois is goddes voys, menne seyne.
(Thomas Hoccleve to Henry of Monmouth, 1411, in The Regement of Princes)

I have bin informed that diverse language, hath bene sayde of me to youre
moste excellente whiche shoulde sounde to my dishonour and reproach, and
charge of my person: howe be it that, I aye have bene, and ever will be, your
ture liegeman and servaunt
(Richard duke of York to Henry VI, 1450)

In earlier books of this work we have explained at sufficient length how King
Richard II entirely lacked male heirs, and how not long after the whole
population of England was split into two factions, Lancastrian and Yorkist,
and how a bloody struggle ensued for over a hundred years, indeed until our
own day, until at last the houses of Lancaster and York were united.
(Polydore Vergil, mid-sixteenth century Anglica Historia)

The above three quotes show that there were, in fifteenth century England, a number
of different ideas and interpretations of the period written by and about the figures
involved in that century’s political landscape. In this thesis I will examine how the
events and ideas behind the fifteenth century political conflicts of England were
represented through fifteenth century texts. In order to do so, a number of questions
need to be asked. What were the political messages associated with fifteenth century
English politics, and how did these messages influence the writing of history during
and immediately after this time? Can we define these messages as propaganda, a
term not coined until the seventeenth century, in the fifteenth century context? And
is it possible to see the influence of these messages on the histories that were written
during the time? In attempting to answer these questions, I will synthesise a number
of works that have already been undertaken in examining the political messages of
this period, as well as address some of the gaps that are present in these works. As well as examining individual political messages of the period, I will draw out a broader context for the use of such pieces, outlining not just the messages contained within such propaganda, but the methods by which they were disseminated, which political groups within England carried out this dissemination and to whom, whether these people understood notions of audience and notions of propaganda, and how these factors combined to create a certain notion of fifteenth century England held by both contemporaries and future historians. The significance of such a study should be clear. The fifteenth century was a period which produced a great deal of writing about its own political history and its major political figures, writings present in chronicles, bills, proclamations, biographies and histories. We must assume, therefore, that fifteenth century politics comprised not only what was done, but what was said to be done. In understanding the dissemination and manipulation of information during the fifteenth century, we can gain an important understanding not just of the political events of fifteenth century England, but how contemporaries understood the history of that period.

The first points to be addressed are the definitional and theoretical issues of this thesis. The fifteenth century time will be the period focussed on. For the purposes of this study, I choose to adopt the approach of the “long fifteenth-century”, the years 1399-1509.¹ This period starts with a deposition, that of Richard II and ends with the death of Henry VII, who himself deposed a legitimate king. These cyclical depositions and the civil conflicts that they both caused and in some cases grew out of, were a defining feature of fifteenth century English politics.

The most important theoretical point of this thesis concerns the notion of propaganda itself. Can we use this term in the context of the fifteenth century? Many modern propaganda theorists do not acknowledge the existence of propaganda in the later medieval period. The irony of this situation is that the period in which modern

propaganda theorists would claim that propaganda is not a useful analytical tool has seen a flourishing of work on propaganda. Even those modern propaganda theorists who choose to examine pre-modern propaganda often do so in a limited way, focussing on visual media such as pageants and processions, to the exclusion of other possible forms of medieval propaganda. The argument against the use of the term is that propaganda has accompanied the rise of mass media, and therefore requires a “mass consciousness” and a mass audience. Since mass media did not come into existence until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, propaganda therefore did not exist before the nineteenth century. Such an argument provides very narrow parameters for the study of propaganda. Nevertheless, most propaganda theorists have used it until now. In a similar sense, most historians who have written on propaganda in the late medieval period rarely define what propaganda is. Some of the works so far produced, while empirically rigorous, have lacked any kind of theoretical framework. It seems that there is divergent scholarship due to the scarcity of modern propaganda theorists testing their ideas against pre-modern examples, and pre-modern historians engaging fully in modern propaganda theory. Before examining the sources that will be used for this thesis, we must first address the question of the definition of propaganda.

It is generally agreed that in order to have propaganda, two primary factors are required: political turmoil and an audience. Richard Lambert stated that one of the key preconditions for the development of propaganda is political turmoil. This turmoil represents multiple viewpoints, each vying for attention and power. The analysis of public revolts and the examination of the pretenders and dynastic disturbances that will be carried out in the next two chapters show that England at many stages of the fifteenth century was in a state of political turmoil and strife.

---

How this turmoil and strife was constructed, however, in the texts of the period, is equally significant for this thesis. This construction refers back to the notions implicit in the opening quotes, particularly that of Polydore Vergil.

Audience is often taken to be the other key part of examining propaganda, but what sort of audience is being discussed? For most propaganda theorists, the audience is “the public.” Alfred Lee argued that:

Propaganda is thus the expression of a contention overtly set forth or covertly implied in order to influence the attitudes and, through attitudes, the opinions and actions of a public.  

The “public” is the group that a propagandist wishes to target. The composition of the public is, however, rarely examined. More broadly Phillip M. Taylor defined propaganda as being “Really no more than the communication of ideas designed to persuade people to think and behave in a certain way.” Finally, the editors of Propaganda and Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia 1500 to the Present define propaganda as “The dissemination of ideas intended to convince people to think and act in a particular way and for a particular persuasive purpose.”

The most significant point to be drawn from these statements is the use of the terms “people” and “public”. As we shall see, fifteenth century texts used terms such as “the people” or “the commons” to describe their contemporary audience. Are these terms so different from modern conceptions of “people and “public”? If not, on what grounds do modern propaganda theorists claim that propaganda can exist only in the modern era? Potential audiences existed as much in the fifteenth century as in the

---

7 Taylor, Munitions of the Mind, p. 6.
9 See below, Chapter Two, pp. 72-73.
twenty-first. The idea is expanded to include a notion of not just audience, but of “public opinion”:

Propaganda is an attempt at targeted communication with an objective that has been established \textit{a priori}. Propaganda is best seen as the deliberate attempt to influence public opinion through the transmission of ideas and values for a specific purpose.\textsuperscript{10}

Propaganda theorists, therefore, acknowledge the need for audience, although their definitions of what constitutes that audience may not be specific. If students of modern propaganda see no need to define exactly the "public" addressed, it would be illogical to assume that simply because it may be difficult to identify precisely the audience of fifteenth-century political texts, those texts cannot be viewed as propaganda. Nevertheless, it is true that there are great difficulties in studying the complete range of audiences of fifteenth-century texts. For this reason “target audience” will be the term used in this study. The term is more flexible than mass audience, and reflects better the types of audiences that existed in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{11} It also reflects modern political propaganda practices, where certain elements of a mass audience, such as women, or senior citizens, may be targeted. In defining the audiences for these fifteenth-century texts, we can also examine the audience assumed by the text, and how these texts construct that audience.

The other elements that emerge from the theory of propaganda are that of the message, the intention behind that message, and the effect of that message. These three factors, according to the theorists, must be present in order to analyse propaganda. These three factors become problematic when dealing with the propaganda of the fifteenth century. The message itself is easy enough to determine: it is the propaganda document or statement itself. The intention behind the message, that is the intention of the propagandist, is less clear. Many of the propagandistic


\textsuperscript{11} Chapters two and three will establish that the nature of the audience that was present in the texts of fifteenth century England.
texts of the fifteenth century are anonymous. The historian has to rely on two things when analysing these texts for intention. The first is the internal evidence from the source itself. The second is the political and cultural context in which the message was disseminated. Under what circumstances was the message put across? Did the people to whom it was directed understand it?

The second problem is that of authorial intent in general. Even when we do know the specific authors of propagandistic texts, determining a specific intent, rather than guessing at one, is problematic. The answer lies in the specific political concerns of the uprisings and conflicts of this period. By analysing these events we can gain some measure of understanding of the probable intent behind the propagandistic messages of specific authors.

The effectiveness of these messages provides one of the biggest potential stumbling blocks for this study. Richard Lambert claims that propaganda can be measured only by its effectiveness: “whether those whom it is desired to are brought to believe in it and act upon it”\(^\text{12}\), a view that is echoed by Terence Qualter.\(^\text{13}\) It is extraordinarily difficult to measure how effective propaganda was in the fifteenth century. But it also must be noted that it is extraordinarily difficult to measure how successful propaganda is in the modern era as well. Some sense may be gained from results of polling, or elections, but such data is limited, in the sense that it may not tell us how the message worked. Basic election data will tell the analyst who won, not necessarily \textit{why} they won.

Some idea of the effectiveness of fifteenth century propaganda can, however, be measured through the analysis of chronicles and the examination of diplomatic correspondence, and can be defined in two ways. Firstly, there is the effect in influencing people to act in a particular way. While this influence is difficult to measure, it can at least be seen from certain sources, particularly proclamations.

\(^{13}\) Qualter, \textit{Propaganda and Psychological Warfare}, p. 75.
against sedition, that people at the time believed propaganda could incite action.\textsuperscript{14} The second is the longevity of the propaganda message. The effectiveness of a piece of propaganda such as Richard III’s “precontract” story concerning the legitimacy of Edward IV’s children can be measured by the fact that it appeared in chronicles sources of the fifteenth century, was recounted by contemporary, foreign writers such as Phillipe de Commynes, and was still circulating through diplomatic correspondence as late as the 1530s.\textsuperscript{15} This is only one example. The transmission of documents such as bills and the elaborate descriptions of pageants and processions in the chronicle sources indicate that at least someone felt that these pieces of propaganda were worth noting. In short, the evidence we possess shows that propaganda did exist in fifteenth-century England, and was an effective medium of political communication.

The final point that should be outlined is the methodology that will be used in analysing propaganda for this thesis. Contemporary theories have been critiqued, but what new model will be used as a replacement or a substitute when analysing the political propaganda of the fifteenth century? The propaganda model that will be used recognises “propaganda” as being defined as that information that is disseminated, through a variety of different media, in order to influence the short-term opinions or the long-term attitudes of a particular target audience. The information must address that audience’s pre-existing attitudes and beliefs for maximum effectiveness.

How have historians previously engaged with this area? The foundation piece for this study is undoubtedly Charles Ross’s “Rumour, Propaganda and Public Opinion During the Wars of the Roses.” This article argued that: “the history of England in the fifteenth century, especially in its troubled and divisive latter half is marked by a vastly increased use of propaganda of all kinds, much of it more sophisticated than

\textsuperscript{14} See below, Chapter Six, p. 203.  
\textsuperscript{15} See below, Chapter One, p. 43.
that which had gone before.”\textsuperscript{16} This statement formed an important first step in identifying the fifteenth century as a time of growing propaganda, although Ross acknowledged that examples of propagandistic documents from previous centuries did exist. The focus of the article, however, was primarily on Yorkist propaganda, with little attempt to analyse the messages themselves. Instead, Ross placed them in the context of the dangers of sedition to English kings. Alison Allan had already done some work on the period in “Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the “British History’ in the reign of Edward IV”, developing the themes and methodology of Yorkist propaganda.\textsuperscript{17} A few years later, Colin Richmond outlined similar elements in his article “Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses.”\textsuperscript{18} The problem with these works was the narrow focus on the propaganda of the Yorkists, specifically the period 1461-1471, to the exclusion of others. While they outlined some important conceptual issues, such as Richmond’s definition of different kinds of “bills” (newsbills, handbills and newsletters)\textsuperscript{19}, the focus still was on propaganda in very specific circumstances, rather than the broader processes of propaganda in the fifteenth century as a whole.

The narrow focus on the Yorkists was expanded by James Doig whose doctoral thesis and subsequent articles focussed on Lancastrian propaganda in the first half of the century.\textsuperscript{20} While demonstrating the public relations prowess of kings such as

\textsuperscript{19} Richmond, “Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses”, pp. 12-13.
Henry V, the focus was narrowed on specific propagandistic messages and events, such as Henry V’s progresses through England, and English political writings distributed in France. Like Ross and Allan, Doig grappled with the notion of public opinion, concluding that during this particular period it was possible to distinguish between government policy and a “public” that was divided over the course of the war in France.21 This examination of the English propaganda policies in France was added to by Craig Taylor, who argued that medieval monarchs were aware of some basic means of influencing the thoughts of their subjects, and that signs of that awareness could be found in the Lancastrian/English propaganda spread through France by Henry V and others.22 Further focus on the themes and messages of the Lancastrian period, albeit from a more literary viewpoint, came from Paul Strohm, whose work, particularly in England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language has proved most helpful in grappling with some of the textual issues and ideas. Strohm's recent work Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare had also provided a great number of insights into textual construction during the Lancastrian and Yorkist periods.23 Examination of the language of the period and its manipulation has been undertaken in the works of David Rollison and Jean-Philippe Genet, the latter of whom points, in much the same way that Richard Firth Green does, to an evolution of political language during this period.24 These

23 Paul Strohm, Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare, University of Notre Dame: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005.
studies contribute to the notion, central to this thesis, that the fifteenth century was a turning point in English political propaganda and attempts by the state to manipulate a public, or multiple publics. This point, and an overview of political culture across the whole period has also been provided by Michael Hicks, who argued that the period of the Wars of the Roses was "a wholly exceptional epoch" in terms of both the civil conflict and the ideas concerning good government that it generated. A new trend towards propaganda in specific locales has also been building, with J.P.D. Cooper's work *Propaganda and the Tudor State: Political Culture in the West Country*, examining the role of Tudor propaganda in Cornwall, being a prime example. Assessments of the notion of the audiences for these particular polemical works have also been undertaken. In his article "The Pressure of the Public in Later Medieval Politics", John Watts built upon the work of I.M.W. Harvey in examining the role that the "public" played during this period in regards to the political process. These works have been invaluable for this one in grappling with the notions of audience. Other recent works have also helped to expand the scope of the field, focussing on more specific messages contained within these propaganda documents, such as the use of gendered propaganda and witchcraft accusations.

---

The publication dates reflect the growth in the literature concerning this field in the last few years. It is my intention to join my work to an ongoing debate in this area, by combining these various different chronological areas with more of a focus on textual examination in order to gain a greater understanding of the trends and patterns of propaganda over the fifteenth century as a whole, and how these trends influenced the writing of history during and immediately after this period. The thesis, in many ways, will be a work of synthesis as much as anything else, and through this process I am well aware that I am "standing on the shoulders" of the giants mentioned above. The originality of my work will be seen both in the synthesis of previous material, and in the examination of factors hitherto ignored, or underplayed, such as the decline of Lancastrian populism, the textual construction of pretenders and the examination of a foreign audience.

A number of questions, partly drawn from the above works, need to be examined. What circumstances led to the need for this propaganda? Which parties within England used it? Did these parties have a notion of what they were doing and the necessity of disseminating propaganda? How was it distributed and how effective were its messages? What were those messages, and how did they relate to the beliefs of the contemporary audience? Who comprised this audience, and what did they believe? And finally, how did these various propagandist messages influence the writing of history during and immediately after the fifteenth century?

I will address these questions across eight chapters. The first chapter will deal with the political preconditions that created the need for political propaganda in fifteenth century England, focussing primarily on the pretenders to the English throne, both those who successfully claimed the throne, and those who were unsuccessful. This  

provides the model of both groups who used propaganda, and groups against whom propaganda had to be used. It will also outline the international involvement in these attempts against the state, and hence the international audiences whose opinions it was important for fifteenth-century political polemicists to influence. The second chapter will focus on the composition of the domestic audience of the fifteenth century, both in a textual sense (how they appear in the sources of the time) and who they may have been in reality. The third chapter will examine the beliefs of this audience in regards to good government and kingship. The next four chapters will look at specific examples of propaganda messages and the circumstances under which they were issued. The final chapter will examine several key histories that were written during and immediately after the period, and how these histories adapted and were influenced by the propaganda of the fifteenth century, particularly that of the state.

I have outlined the questions and how I intend to find the answers to them. But what will these answers look like? I intend to demonstrate, through the analysis of the above questions, a number of points. Firstly, that propaganda was, in fifteenth century England, an essential part of the political process, both for the state and for those who opposed the state. Secondly, that propaganda was recognised as being part of the political process by those who participated in its construction and dissemination. Thirdly, that the messages contained within the didactic texts of the period contributed to widespread beliefs concerning the nature of good government and kingship that in turn helped to influence and shape political propaganda during this period. And finally, I will demonstrate that these propaganda messages formed an important part of the state-influenced histories of the period.

The primary texts that I will focus on, in general, will be the written propaganda statements and texts from the period. What should be stressed, however, is that very few of these documents exist in their original form. Instead, the focus has to be on the forms through which they were transmitted. For the most part, these forms were the various vernacular chronicles that arose during the fifteenth century, a
phenomenon almost unique to this time. These vernacular chronicles include *The Brut* and its various textual children collected in editions such as *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI*, and the numerous London chronicles. These sources show the distribution of propaganda bills and other pieces of information such as ballads, and the textual reconstruction of propaganda devices such as processions and pageants. These sources also demonstrate signs of a potential audience for the propaganda of the fifteenth century. Mary-Rose McLaren has argued that the chronicles themselves are evidence of a rapidly growing culture amongst the merchant classes of late-medieval London based on the writing, exchange and re-writing of such texts. These texts represented a break with a past dominated by the monastic chronicles that had comprised the bulk the writing of history in England in the medieval period up to that point. Other sources that will be mainly used also include various state records such as the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*; civic records such as the *York House Books* and London letters collections; and diplomatic correspondence. These sources are important not only to show that the messages contained within political propaganda reached a wide audience, but also how those messages may have been received.

Deriving our notion of fifteenth century propaganda primarily from these texts, therefore, leaves us with one final question: what did this propaganda look like?


What methods were employed at the time? It is clear that propaganda took many different forms during this period. These included bills, poems and ballads, certain acts that I term propaganda of the deed, proclamations, genealogies, pageants and processions and various other miscellaneous methods, including coinage and political canonisation.

Bills and newsbills were one of the media that seemed to come to prominence in fifteenth century England. Containing propagandistic messages, these documents were distributed and placed in prominent places such as city gates or church doors. Newsbills and newsletters could be distributed fairly quickly, often carried through information relay networks set throughout the kingdom, and were more usually employed by those opposing government policies than those supporting them. In line with this latter point, bills were often the opening salvos of popular rebellions. The messages contained within the newsbills could also be communicated verbally. How this process occurred can be seen from the censorship measures imposed upon newsbills in the reign of Richard III in his letters to the city of York in 1484:

The furnisher, auctor and maker of the said sedicious speech and language be taken and punished according to his deserts, and that whosoever first find any sedicious bille set up in any place he take it down and without reading or showing the same to any other person bring it forth to us or some of the lords.

Various poems and ballads were also distributed through the medium of bills, again issued much along the propagandistic lines of the political demands made by anti-government bills. Often more subtle yet less complex than the demands of bills (which would often run over numerous articles) poems and ballads also recorded

certain events, such as the Loveday of 1458, or presented certain political viewpoints.

Proclamations were another method of disseminating propaganda, being a “significant medium of political communication”\textsuperscript{34} and “the king’s most direct approach to the generality of his subjects.”\textsuperscript{35} Proclamations were very much an apparatus of state-based propaganda, and could not be used by those opposing the government. They were a royal writ, issued with the order that the contents be read out loud. An example of this kind of order is provided in the examination of parliamentary documents, commanding:

\begin{quote}
That writs of proclamation be in all good haste directed to every Sheriff of every county in England, to cause this ordinance to be proclaimed in every Fair within his county, as well within Franchise as without.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

As well as using writs to have proclamations made in county fairs and town squares, the state used the church as a means through which propaganda could be disseminated. This practice had come to prominence during the Hundred Years war in the fourteenth century,\textsuperscript{37} and was revived by Henry V after the initial campaign that culminated in the battle of Agincourt in 1415. The church in many ways was an ideal venue for the dissemination of state’s propaganda. On the one hand, it was a brilliant means by which the message could be distanced from the author. On the other hand, there was a trust in the moral authority of the church. It was no accident that when Richard duke of Gloucester seized the throne in 1483, he used the preacher Ralph Shaa to promote the story that Edward IV’s children were

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{34} James Doig, “Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations”, p. 255.  
\textsuperscript{35} Alison Allan, “Royal Propaganda and the Proclamations of Edward IV”, p. 146.  
\textsuperscript{37} W.R Jones, “The English Church and Royal Propaganda During the Hundred Years War” in Journal of British Studies, 19:1, 1979. p. 9.  
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
illegitimate, through a sermon at Paul’s Cross.\textsuperscript{38} Paul’s Cross was a particularly significant example because of the size and social influence of the audiences that gathered there. To preach from Paul’s Cross, in many ways: “was to preach to England.”\textsuperscript{39}

The use of genealogies was another propagandistic method that had predated the fifteenth century but assumed new importance with the cycle of usurpations begun in 1399. New genealogies would be created to meet the political demands of the moment. These genealogies were visually elaborate, often displaying lines of descent traced from the mythical British kings of the Dark Ages and in some cases, lines of descent from the Biblical figures of Adam and Eve. Physically impressive (one genealogy still extant from Edward IV’s reign is twenty-five feet long), many were designed for display in public areas.\textsuperscript{40} They were a demonstration of a monarch’s legitimacy, of his right to rule over other contenders. With that in mind, genealogies were a very limited form of propaganda, generally only conveying one message: a monarch’s claim to the throne.

There were also a number of other forms of propaganda that existed during this time period that need to be mentioned. Coinage is an aspect of medieval propaganda that is sometimes overlooked. Certainly not much analysis can be done on a single coin itself. However, in terms of factors such as distribution, coinage could arguably be an effective form of propaganda. Some have even argued that it was the closest thing the pre-modern world could get to mass communication:

\textsuperscript{39} Horner, “Preachers at Paul’s Cross”, p. 266.
This was a form of visual propaganda one could hold in one’s hand; the leader is the embodiment of the state, and symbols of the state are embodied in the current ruler.\textsuperscript{41} When the monarchy was in doubt, minting new coins was one propagandistic avenue open to disputing claimants.

Pageants and procession are the most obvious form of medieval propaganda and have certainly been thoroughly analysed. Often visually complex and symbolically enriched, they were undertaken for a variety of purposes. Generally, they were held to mark a significant event, usually a coronation, a royal wedding, or victory in battle. Many processions and pageants were recorded in the chronicle texts of the time, meaning that even if one did not see the pageant in question, the possibility existed that it could be read about at a later date. Pageants tended to be held by civic authorities but usually reflected the imagery and views of the regime in question.\textsuperscript{42} It is possible that not everyone viewing the pageant would understand the elaborate imagery and symbolism.\textsuperscript{43} This, however, seems to raise an interesting point about the pageant as propaganda in that it could work on a variety of different levels. Such flexibility was highly desirable, granted that the audience viewing these pageants was potentially quite large (especially in London) and multifaceted. When one takes into account the regal processions that moved around England during this time period, it is probable that at certain points in the fifteenth century, tens of thousands of people may have witnessed this form of state-based propaganda.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Cull et al, Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{43} Anglo, Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Politics, p. 82.
However, while processions and pageants will be analysed in part, they will not form the primary focus of the thesis. There are several reasons for this partial omission. Firstly, unlike the vernacular bills of this period, pageants and processions were not an innovation of the fifteenth century. Secondly, thorough work has already been done in this field, in contrast to the work on textual propaganda. Thirdly, and most importantly the pageants and procession cannot be analysed in isolation, but by necessity as part of a broader narrative put forward in the chronicles of the time. The focus, therefore, will be on textual, rather than visual propaganda. It is for this reason that coinage will only be looked at in passing as well, as a visual, rather than textual medium.

The questions and areas of analysis have now been examined. The first stage of the thesis, before examining the propaganda itself, is to examine the dynastic conflict and civil disputes in England. As stated above, propaganda thrives in times of uncertainty and chaos. In examining this particular aspect of the fifteenth century, we will be able to gain a better idea of why propaganda needed to be used during this time, before moving on to the propaganda itself.

---

Chapter One

Political Preconditions: Pretenders, Usurpation and International Relations 1398-1509

Before analysing the political propaganda of fifteenth-century England, we must consider the political crises that created the environment within which propaganda was disseminated. As I have argued above, England was troubled by dynastic insecurities throughout the fifteenth century, stemming from the 1399 deposition of Richard II by a man who was not next in line to the throne. These insecurities grew, so that by the end of the period, not only were there were literally dozens of pretenders who could potentially claim the throne, but their claims were backed by a network of foreign courts. In this chapter, the various pretenders and potential claimants for the English throne will be examined. We shall review the particular points of political turmoil exploited by these pretenders, some of whom successfully claimed the throne. Many received support from foreign courts with various motives for destabilising England, overthrowing the government, or using the pretenders as leverage in diplomatic negotiations, and these parties will also be considered in this chapter.

Pretenders in part exploited England’s dynastic instabilities by utilising propaganda to promote their cause to contemporary audiences, while the state employed similar methods to denigrate the claims of these pretenders and the foreign courts who sometimes supported them.\(^1\) Propaganda was used as a short-term device to convince potential supporters of the right of a particular cause. State-influenced manipulation of past events was carried out in order to establish long-term, positive attitudes towards the ruling king. It was essential to foster these attitudes not just among the king’s subjects, but among the foreign powers who could support rival claimants for the English throne. Fundamentally, the propaganda employed by these sides grew out of the instabilities of this period, while contributing to the perception of instability that could be further exploited by those involved in these conflicts.

\(^1\) This propaganda will be the subject of chapters four to seven.
In the context of this thesis, the term "pretender" is used purely as an analytical category. There were references during the fifteenth century to pretended claims, but the term pretenders itself was not used during the period. Three categories of pretenders are considered here. Firstly, there were those figures who possessed a genuine dynastic claim to the throne, and who of their own volition pursued that claim. The majority of pretenders of the fifteenth century fell into this category, including Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV), Richard duke of York, Edward earl of March (Edward IV) and Henry Tudor (Henry VII). Secondly, there were those with a legitimate claim to the throne who were used as figureheads by others for their own political ends, such as Edmund Mortimer and Edward Plantagenet, the earl of Warwick. Thirdly, there were a number of impostors who had no connection or claim to the throne whatsoever, but posed as a person who did have a legitimate claim. Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Simnel are the most well known and well researched in this category,² but figures such as Thomas Ward of Trumpington, who impersonated Richard II and Ralph Wilford, a Cambridge student who impersonated Edward Plantagenet, are also examined. Linking these figures was the perception they were a threat to the stability of the English crown, if not the English nation itself. The textual construction of these pretenders as threats was carried out through propaganda and state-influenced histories. While significant studies have been done on those who succeeded in seizing the throne, namely Henry IV, Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII, a comparison of all of these pretenders to one another shows more clearly certain patterns emerging across the fifteenth century.

Four distinct phases of English dynastic politics can be identified, each beginning with a usurpation that led to a cycle of conflict between various factions for control

of government. The overthrow of an unpopular king, who alienated both his nobles and the commons, by a royal relation with foreign assistance, perhaps with the timely defection of a few key members of the nobility, seemed to be a pattern that was repeated in each of the four phases. The first began in the late 1390s, with the allegedly tyrannical behaviour of Richard II prompting the seizure of the throne by Henry Bolingbroke, and concluded with the unsuccessful Southampton plot of 1415 against Henry V. The second phase of the pretenders spans the early 1450s to the execution of George duke of Clarence in 1478. The third began with Edward IV’s death in 1483 and the seizure of the throne by Richard, duke of Gloucester and ended in 1485, with the fourth beginning soon after Tudor’s victory at Bosworth. The moment Tudor seized power, there were dozens of individuals with stronger claims to the throne. These phases will now be examined in greater detail.

From 1377 to 1399, Richard II ruled England as the legitimate king, the rightful heir to Edward III. He was deposed in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke, the son of John of Gaunt, who was the third son of Edward III. The seeds of this deposition can be found in 1398, with the exile of Bolingbroke after accusations had been made by Thomas Mowbray, the duke of Norfolk, concerning a court-centred plot against himself, Bolingbroke and John of Gaunt. During Bolingbroke’s ten-year exile, John

---

3 Some of whom, such as the de la Pole brothers, would become pretenders in their own right. See below, pp. 57-61.
4 This exile was the result of a dispute between the two lords growing out of a private conversation in December of 1397, in which Norfolk made the accusation that there was a court-centered plot against both himself, John of Gaunt and Bolingbroke. The problem, at least for historians, is that the details of this conversation, as preserved in the available documents, come from Bolingbroke alone. Bolingbroke took Norfolk’s accusations to John of Gaunt, who in due course took them to Richard. Both lords, Norfolk and Bolingbroke, had appeared before parliamentary committees in February and April of 1398 in order to explain themselves. The matter boiled down to one man’s word against the others, although Bolingbroke furthered the argument in the April hearings by accusing Norfolk of embezzlement and responsibility for the death of the duke of Gloucester. Richard’s attempts to reconcile the men failed and trial by arms was set. However, when the two lords and many of the leading members of the aristocracy, including some foreign nobles, met at Coventry, Richard brought the duel to a halt. See An English
of Gaunt died. Although Richard had sworn an oath that the Lancastrian inheritance would be passed to Bolingbroke, he broke his promise, declaring now that Bolingbroke was exiled for life and that the Lancastrian estates would go to the crown.

Bolingbroke was in France when this decision was made. The *Chronique de Saint-Denys* provided details of the warm support of the French king who received Bolingbroke “with all the respect due to a favoured kinsman”.\(^5\) Henry also signed a treaty of friendship and alliance with the duke of Orleans. The key part of text of the alliance was the promise that “each of us will at all times be the friend of the other’s friends and well-wishers, and the enemy of the other’s enemies, as is right and proper”\(^6\). In 1399, there was no doubt as to the identity of Henry’s primary political opponent. That the main themes of the text were also printed in the *Chronique de Saint-Denys* demonstrates that this alliance was far from secret. The *Chronique* also records that the French king knew of Richard’s intention to travel to Ireland and passed this information to Bolingbroke.\(^7\) This assistance was crucial to Bolingbroke’s decision to return to England. He landed at Ravenspur in July 1399, ostensibly only to reclaim the Lancastrian inheritance.\(^8\) However, as the events of the following weeks would show he had become a “pretender”, one who was attempting to claim the throne in his own right. The support of the French was crucial to Bolingbroke’s success, as were rumours of domestic unrest, indicating that “the people” could stand with him.\(^9\) His cause was significantly helped by the defection of key nobles such as the earl of Northumberland and the earl of Westmoreland. The surrender of Richard’s uncle Edmund Langley, duke of York,

---


\(^6\) *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 114.

\(^7\) *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 109.

\(^8\) *The Brut*, p. 357. It is difficult to determine at what point Henry had decided he could claim the throne, but he had likely made the decision before leaving France.

\(^9\) See below, Chapter Two, pp. 71-72.
saw the final pieces of his campaign fall into place. Richard had landed in Wales, where Bolingbroke confronted him at Flint Castle in September. Richard was taken back to London as Bolingbroke’s prisoner, and “voluntarily” gave up the throne to his cousin, who was crowned Henry IV on the 13th of October 1399.

Within three months of his coronation, Henry faced revolt. The so-called “Epiphany Uprising” of January 1400 involved pro-Ricardian members of the aristocracy who wanted to exterminate the Lancastrian line, Henry IV and all of his sons, and place Richard II back on the throne. Three main points can be seen in this episode that affect the establishment of the political preconditions for propaganda and manipulation of history. Firstly, the defeat of several of the lords involved, not by Henry, but by angry mobs of commoners, who arrested and executed the earls of Surrey and Salisbury in Cirencester, and the duke of Exeter in London, emphasised the potential for the commons to become crucially involved in political disputes; and hence the importance to both rulers and pretenders of establishing the loyalties of regional and urban supporters. Secondly, the Epiphany Uprising saw the first use in fifteenth-century England of an impostor. Richard Maudelyn, a former member of Richard II’s household, apparently bore a remarkable physical resemblance to him. The conspirators planned to use Maudelyn as a decoy until the real Richard II could be released. Unfortunately, the uprising led to the death of the real Richard II, who was starved to death in Pontefract Castle shortly after the uprising had been

---

10 York had been left in England to maintain the kingdom whilst Richard was in Ireland. Historians have often judged York quite harshly for his capitulation at this point, but recent research has argued that York had problems with Richard’s rule prior to the events of 1399, and had genuinely believed that Bolingbroke’s cause was just. See Douglas Biggs, “A Wrong Whom Conscience and Kindred Bid me to Right: A Reassessment of Edmund Langley, duke of York and the Usurpation of Henry IV” in Albion, 26, 1994, pp. 257-258.


12 The Brut, pp. 360-361. Also see below, Chapters Two, pp. 78-81.

crushed. The third propagandistic consequence of this uprising was the display of Richard’s body throughout the countryside to prove that he was in fact dead. Rumours, however, continued that he was still alive:

Yet moche pepil yn England and yn othir landes saide that he was alyue meny yeres aftir his deth; but whether he were alyue or ded, thei hilde hir fals opynyons and beleue that thay hadde. These persistent rumours undermined the legitimacy of the newly ruling Lancastrians. It is significant that the most detailed accounts of the conspiracy surrounding Richard’s body emerged in the account of the French chronicler Jean Creton, who wrote:

They certainly do not believe that it was the old king; I think it was Maudelyn, his chaplain, whose face, size, height and build were so exactly similar to the King’s that every one firmly believed it was good King Richard.

With the Epiphany Uprising, Henry had met the first challenge to his crown. The uprising demonstrated that there were those willing to support the imposture of a king, albeit one who had been deposed. It is difficult to determine how much of a threat Henry considered Maudelyn to be. There is little evidence from the English chronicles to show that anyone within England believed Maudelyn was the real Richard II. Significantly, it was a French chronicle that supported the theory that Maudelyn was really Richard II and that the body displayed around the countryside by Henry IV as Richard II’s corpse was, in fact, Richard Maudelyn. We cannot determine how many people would have read Jean Creton’s passage. We do know that the idea was circulated in a foreign country that had supported Henry’s claim to the throne. This was to be a dominant theme in the actions of the pretenders of fifteenth-century England: initial foreign support would later be withdrawn in order

---

14 The accounts of Richard’s death do conflict, but starvation of some kind seems to be a point on which most sources agree on.  
15 *The Brut*, p. 360.  
16 *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 244.
to support another pretender.

The early years of Henry’s reign saw the emergence of two pretenders who attracted significant levels of support: Thomas Ward of Trumpington and Edmund Mortimer, earl of March. Thomas Ward was an impostor who was able to attract both domestic and foreign support for his pretense that he was Richard II, making him appear to be a threat. Little is known about Ward outside his career as “Richard II”. Most of the information on Ward comes from the Scottish Exchequer rolls, a couple of references in the London chronicles, and a lengthy passage in the Scotichronicon, a Scottish chronicle of the early 1440s. His lineage as “the son of Edward prince of Wales son of Edward of Windsor” was outlined in this chronicle, as was the “care and respect” with which he was treated by the king of Scotland and the duke of Albany. It does not seem that anyone genuinely believed that Ward was Richard II; however, there were enough people willing to support the idea that he was Richard II. Foremost was William Serle, Richard II’s chaplain, who had stolen Richard’s seal and fled to Scotland, whence he proceeded to issue letters and proclamations in Richard’s name. According to charges brought against alleged co-conspirators William Balshaff and John Bernard in 1402, Serle had arranged “men and equipment” to assist in an uprising in Richard’s name. Balshaff had approached Bernard in an attempt to recruit men to go and meet “Richard” when he arrived in England. Balshaff denied the charges and lost a duel in an attempt to prove his innocence. He was charged with treason, and hung, drawn and quartered. Serle continued to propagate the rumour: The Brut recorded that “moche peple beleuyed and trustid to his seyng”. This statement demands the question which people believed Serle. Unfortunately, The Brut's perhaps intentionally vague terminology leaves no certainty on this point. What is important in terms of this study is that rumours were being circulated and there was a belief that an audience existed and

---

19 The Brut, p. 366.
believed them. As Henry himself would acknowledge, rumours themselves had a power that could potentially destabilise the regime.

Serle’s capture and execution did little to halt rumours concerning Richard’s survival. Ward himself continued to live at the Scottish court. Scottish parliamentary records show that grants were made to cover his living expenses in 1408, 1414, 1415 and 1417. Significantly, these payments were made to him as “Richard II”. In 1411, Henry IV proclaimed a general pardon that specifically excluded both the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower and Thomas Ward. Apparently Ward, maintained by the king of Scotland and the duke of Albany, was considered to be just as great a threat as Owen Glendower. The rumour refused to die in Henry V’s reign, with further charges being brought against Richard Woolman and John Beckeryng in 1416 for conspiring “to bring Thomas Warde, otherwise called Trumpyntone, whom they declared to be the late Richard II from Scotland into England, with the view of placing him on the throne”. Even after the triumph of Agincourt there were still those willing to propagate the notion that Henry V was not England’s rightful king and that Ward really was Richard II. Ward’s death in 1419 laid these rumours to rest, yet it is worth noting that the fiction was maintained until the very end: Ward was buried in Scotland as Richard II.

Edmund Mortimer, the earl of March was a more serious pretender to Henry’s throne. Edmund Mortimer was seen in some circles as being the rightful king, with a superior claim to Henry IV. Mortimer was, in this sense, the precursor for figures

---

20 For notions of potential audiences, see below, Chapter Two.
21 For Henry’s statements on these matters see below, Chapter Six, p. 196.
25 As outlined in the case against John Whitelock, Select Cases, pp. 212-215.
27 Scotichronicon, p. 29.
such as Richard, duke of York and Richard’s son Edward IV. Mortimer falls into the
category of pretenders who had a genuine claim to the throne, but were used as
figureheads by others. The Mortimers were descended from Edward III through his
grand-daughter Philippa, who was the daughter of Edward’s second son Lionel.
Philippa’s son was Roger Mortimer, who in 1385 had been named heir to the throne
by the childless Richard II. Roger died in battle against the Irish in 1398, leaving as
his heir the seven year old Edmund Mortimer.28 Whether Edmund was legitimately
Richard’s heir is a matter of some debate. Richard himself never stated that Edmund
would succeed him. Given Richard’s lack of children the matter of the succession
was a contentious political issue, exacerbated by the abundance of royal cousins and
nephews. Michael Bennett has argued that Edward III had actually entailed the
succession through the male line, not the senior line, in which case Henry
Bolingbroke was the rightful heir to Richard’s crown.29 Reportedly Richard did not
wish the crown to go to Henry, fearing that if Henry were to be king, he (Henry)
would destroy the church.30 After Richard’s deposition, however, the fate of
Edmund Mortimer was in the hands of Henry IV, who kept Mortimer and his brother
under close guard.

Edmund Mortimer’s role as a pretender was complex. There is little evidence to
suggest that he desired to be king, even once he attained his majority. His position as
a pretender in the first decade of the fifteenth century was to be played out across a
much broader canvas of sedition and rebellion. Henry IV had to deal with a number
of rebellions, some of which intersected with Mortimer and his potential claim to the
throne.

Owen Glendower led the first of these rebellions, which engulfed Wales, and led to

28 H.A Doubleday and Lord Howard de Walden (ed.) The Complete Peerage of
England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom: Volume III,
Alan Sutton: Gloucester, 1981 (reprinted from Volumes VII and VIII, 1929, 1932),
pp. 445-449.
29 Michael Bennett, “Edward III’s Entail and the Succession to the Crown 1376-
30 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 211.
Glendower declaring himself to be the “Prince of Wales”\textsuperscript{31}. The powerful Percy family rebelled in 1403 and 1405. Edmund Mortimer’s family was the connecting tissue, with a nexus developing between the perceived rightful heir to the English throne, the most powerful family of the northern nobility, and a Welshman who led a damaging rebellion against the English king. The connection was made through Edmund Mortimer’s uncle, also named Edmund Mortimer, who married one of Glendower’s daughters. The link to the Percy family was through the marriage of Edmund’s sister Katherine to the earl of Northumberland’s son Henry, known to his contemporaries as “Hotspur”.\textsuperscript{32}

The first Percy revolt was led by Hotspur. Exploiting the tide of rumours that had been swirling around in the first few years of Henry IV’s reign, he asserted that Richard II was still alive. So far was the fiction pushed that some of the Welsh retainers who turned up to fight for Hotspur at the battle of Shrewsbury were wearing the white hart livery of Richard II.\textsuperscript{33} While the earl of Northumberland did not take part in his son’s rebellion, which was a failure, penalties were enacted against him. All crown debt owed to the Percy family was erased, and Northumberland had to surrender his castles and the office of Constable of England.\textsuperscript{34} These measures did not prevent further conspiracies. An attempt in 1405 to prise Edmund and his brother Roger away from Henry IV’s grasp and get the boys into Wales had failed, but the aim of the conspirators was obvious: “And [th]e cause was for [th]ei seiden [tha]t [th]e elder child was trewe king”.\textsuperscript{35} In February of 1405, Northumberland entered into the “Tripartite Agreement” with Owen Glendower and Edmund Mortimer senior. The agreement outlined the division of

\textsuperscript{31} Contained in a letter from Owen Glendower to Charles VI in T. Matthews (ed.) Welsh Records in Paris, Spurrell and Son: Carmathen, 1910, p. 75
\textsuperscript{32} Kirby, Henry IV, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{34} Kirby, Henry IV, p. 158
England between Glendower, Northumberland and the younger Edmund Mortimer, who would be crowned king.36 Richard Scrope, the Archbishop of York, also lent his assistance to the cause by distributing manifestos throughout the city of York that accused Henry of poor rulership. His assistance cost him his life,37 but the execution of Scrope would prove costly to Henry IV’s reputation.38

The epilogue to Edmund Mortimer’s “career” as a pretender was the Southampton Plot of 1415. Historians disagree over the intention of the conspirators, with theories concerning the plot ranging from an attempt to start an uprising in Wales to the assassination of Henry V and all of his brothers. Yet all versions of what took place agree that the eventual goal of the plotters was to place Edmund Mortimer on the throne.39 Significantly, the plot’s instigator was Richard, the earl of Cambridge, the younger brother of the duke of York, who had been implicated in the kidnapping (or liberation) of Mortimer in 1405.40 It is also worth noting that several sources mention French involvement and financial support for the plan.41 The plot failed, due to a narrow support base, and the fact that Mortimer himself informed Henry V what was to occur.

After the Southampton Plot, Mortimer was never again involved in conspiracies against the state. For the remainder of his life he showed loyal service to the Lancastrian regime, and supported Henry V’s ambitions in France.42 These were years of dynastic stability. The pretenders of the first decade and a half of Lancastrian rule had been both a cause of, and a symptom of political instability. The cycle of pretenders begun by Henry Bolingbroke in 1399 had wound down by

37 *The Brut*, p. 366.
40 See above.
42 Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot*, pp. 82-84.
1415. A popular and strong king was on the throne, and the tensions that had supported the rise of the pretenders such as Thomas Ward and Edmund Mortimer had either gone or could be managed. Public relations and propaganda were major parts of this management, and Henry V showed himself to be effective at both. The political conditions before and during his reign meant that he needed to be. As a result of a father who was a usurper, a decade and a half of dynastic, or perceived dynastic, strife and a costly war in France, Henry V needed to build the Lancastrian regime into a legitimate, all conquering force to ensure his security and that of his line. Upon Henry V’s death in 1422, Lancastrian rule passed to his infant son Henry VI. It would be more than three decades before the next cycle of pretenders would begin.

The second cycle of pretenders originated in the 1450s. Edmund Mortimer died in 1425 without offspring, and his title was passed to his nephew Richard, the son of the earl of Cambridge. Richard also inherited the title of duke of York from his uncle, the elder, childless brother of Cambridge. These titles made Richard potentially one of the most powerful nobles in the realm. More importantly, Richard claimed two lines of descent from Edward III, through his father (the son of Edmund Langley) and his mother Anne Mortimer (the great-granddaughter of Lionel the duke of Clarence). It is possible that Richard was perceived as an heir to the throne as early as the mid 1440s. The evidence is derived from the British Library Additional Manuscript 11814, a series of translated verses dedicated to York that urged him to assume the rule of the kingdom. However, the date attributed to these verses has been disputed. Regardless, York was a potential pretender from 1447, upon the death of Humphrey, the duke of Gloucester. York’s lines of descent from

43 The Brut, p. 431.
Edward III had always cast him as a dynastic threat to the usurping Lancastrians, a threat that separated him from other members of the nobility. As one modern biographer stated “[f]or Henry VI, York could never be just another critic, and those other critics knew it”.46

York, with his dual lines of descent, was the obvious candidate for Henry’s heir up until 1453, although there were other potential claimants.47 York, as heir presumptive after the death of Gloucester, should have been at the centre of court. Instead he was inched out, first by the Beauforts then, after the birth of Henry’s son Edward in 1453, by the queen, Margaret of Anjou. Other family lines had been promoted during the 1440s to ducal positions48, but it was York’s Mortimer descent that made, or should have made him, pre-eminent amongst the English nobility.

The notion that York could claim the throne had emerged during the Jack Cade rebellion of 1450, the most significant popular uprising since the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381. The significance of Cade’s rebellion lay partly in the well-articulated demands of the rebels, expressed through bills circulated through London and other parts of England. Cade’s use of the Mortimer name reflected the power that it held, as stated

47 None of these can be described as “pretenders”, but they are worth mentioning in order to illustrate the dynastic problems that were at the heart of the Wars of the Roses. The Hollands, the dukes of Exeter, were descended from the marriage of John Holland to Elizabeth, the daughter of John of Gaunt by his first wife Blanche. The Beauforts were the illegitimate descendants of John of Gaunt through his mistress and eventual third wife Catherine Swynford. While technically barred from the succession, the Beauforts had prospered under Lancastrian rule. As the dukes of Somerset, they would become the foremost rivals of the Yorkists, from the fallout between York and Somerset in the late 1440s, to the final extermination of the line after the battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. See Hammond, The Complete Peerage, Vol. 2, p. 196; G.L Harriss, Cardinal Beaufort: A Study of Lancastrian Ascendancy and Decline, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988, pp. 20-22; The Complete Peerage, Vol. V, p. 58.
in *An English Chronicle*: “John Cade, the whiche atte begynning took on him the name of a gentilmanne, and callid himself Mortymir forto haue the more fauor of the peple ...” 49 This was an early precursor to the success of the Yorkist cause amongst “the people” or “the commons” rather than the nobility. When the Wars of the Roses began in earnest, it was to these groups that the Yorkists would appeal. 50

The most important part of the Cade rebellion was that it established the notion that York should be the heir, if not the king. It was clear from contemporary accounts that the notion of York as king had been discussed. Cade denied it, yet was very specific in terms of what had actually been said:

They [the evil counselors surrounding the king] sey that the commons of Inglond wolde fyrst dystroye the kynges fryndes and aftarwarde hym selff, and then brynge the Duke of York to be kynge, so that by ther false menys and lyes they make hym to hate and distroy his frendys and chersytbe his fals traytors. 51

In letters sent to Henry later that year, York was also keen to counter rumours of his disloyalty:

I have been informed that diverse language hathe bene sayde of me to your moste excellente estate whiche sounde to my dishonour and reproch, and charge of my person: howe be it that I aye have bene, and ever will be, your true liegeman and servaunt. 52

It is noteworthy that York was being discussed as a potential king, but this gives no real insight into his own intentions towards the throne. The first solid piece of evidence in this regard stems from the parliament that ran from November 1450 to

---

49 *An English Chronicle*, p. 64.
50 See below, Chapter Three.
51 *Three Fifteenth Century English Chronicles*, p. 95.
March 1451. Thomas Yonge, who had been the duke of York’s attorney when York was in Ireland\textsuperscript{53} presented a petition that York should be made Henry’s heir to “promote the security of the kingdom”\textsuperscript{54}. One of the few sources we have for the petition is William of Worcester’s *Annales*, which stated that Yonge was committed to the Tower for this action.\textsuperscript{55} The petition itself was:

> taken and put in oblivion oute of rememberance, undone, voided, adnulled and destroyed forever, as a thing purposed against God and conscience and against his royal estate and pre-eminence, and also dishonourable and unreasonable.\textsuperscript{56}

The Cade rebellion and the attendant disorders had frightened the Lancastrian government, so much so that they were willing to imprison an MP without any specific charges being laid against him. Recognising York as heir at this point would have been disastrous, arguably leading to further destabilising of the regime.

York’s chance for power came in 1453, when Henry VI lapsed into serious mental illness.\textsuperscript{57} With the king incapacitated, York assumed the title of protector and defender of the realm.\textsuperscript{58} He remained in this position until Henry’s recovery some months later. He would assume the position again after the first battle of St Albans in 1455. The birth of Henry’s son Edward in 1453 saw a significant blow to York’s

\textsuperscript{53} Calendar of Patent Rolls 1446-1452, Kraus Reprint: Nendeln, 1971, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{55} Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of England*, p. 91
\textsuperscript{56} *The Statutes of the Realm, Vol. II*, p. 361
pretensions to the crown. The Lancastrian regime now had a direct heir. In another sense, nothing changed. Henry had lapsed into an illness, with no certainty of recovery. If Henry died and Edward succeeded, who would be Edward’s heir? Matters were complicated by rumours that Edward was not Henry’s legitimate son. Given the increasing animosity between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians, and the shift from political maneuvering to armed conflict, these rumours were not surprising. Questioning legitimacy was a key way of undermining one’s dynastic opponents. The pro-Yorkist *An English Chronicle* records that rumours had spread domestically. Equally significant was that these tales had also started overseas. There is little to indicate that foreign diplomats were being deliberately targeted by propaganda efforts, however these pieces of diplomatic correspondence demonstrated that a foreign audience interested in the dynastic struggle in England existed, and would repeat certain propagandist statements.

York moved from the centre of power to the outer within a few years. After the confrontation between the Yorkist and Lancastrian forces at Ludford Bridge in 1459, York and leading members of his faction fled overseas and were attainted in the parliament that followed. York and his second eldest son Edmund, the earl of Rutland, fled to Ireland. His eldest son and heir Edward went to Calais with the earl of Salisbury and Salisbury’s son the earl of Warwick. In October 1460, York returned and in parliament finally and unequivocally claimed the English throne. The argument he presented was blunt; the Lancastrians had unlawfully seized the throne from the Mortimers, the rightful heirs of Richard II. York was king by lineal right.

---

60 See below, Chapter Seven, pp. 222-224.
61 *An English Chronicle*, p. 79.
Henry, however, was still the lawful king and York had previously sworn oaths to that effect. A compromise had to be reached “to save the Kyngs honour and state and to apease the seid Due”. Edward of Lancaster was disinherited, and York was named as Henry’s heir. This compromise was deeply flawed. York was ten years older than Henry, so there was no guarantee that he would ever gain the throne. Unlike Bolingbroke, who was able to extract a statement of resignation out of Richard II, York was unable to do the same with Henry VI.

In the end, the compromise came to nothing. Henry VI may have capitulated, but Margaret of Anjou and leading Lancastrian nobles were still at large in the north. Moving north, the Yorkist contingent, led by York and Salisbury were confronted by a larger Lancastrian force at Wakefield in December 1460. York and his second son Edmund, the earl of Rutland, were killed during the battle, while Salisbury was captured and executed shortly afterwards. York had come close to claiming the throne, but it was a process that took the better part of ten years, from Thomas Yonge’s optimistic petition in the parliament of 1450-1451, to York’s own claim in October 1460. As a pretender, he must be considered a failure. Yet his pretensions to the throne laid a solid foundation for the next pretender, his son Edward, the earl of March, who would become Edward IV.

Edward was the first pretender to successfully gain the throne since Henry Bolingbroke. Military success set Edward apart from the other pretenders so far examined. Unlike Bolingbroke, Edward could promote genuine military victories he had achieved to get to the throne, as well as the somewhat unusual circumstances that surrounded each battle. In the case of Mortimer’s Cross in February 1461, it was

66 Although there is some evidence that an attempt to do this may have been made. See ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’, in *Historical Collections of a London Citizen*, p. 208.
the appearance of parhelia in the form of three suns.\textsuperscript{68} An \textit{English Chronicle} records the incident as follows:

And the Monday before the daye of batayle, that ys to say, in feest of Puryfycacion of oure blessed Lady abowte x atte clocke before none, were seen iij sonnys in the fyrmament shyning fulle clere, whereof the peple had grete mervayle, and therefore were agast. The noble erle Edward thaym comforted and sayde “Beethe of good comfort and dredethe not: thys ys a good sygne, for these iij sonys betokene the Fader, the Sone and the Holy Gost, and therefore let vs haue a good harte, and in the of Almyghtye God go we agayne oure enemyes.” And so by His grace, he had to vyctory of his enemyes” \textsuperscript{69}

After this occurrence, the image of the three suns would be exploited throughout Yorkist propaganda. The circumstances surrounding the victory at Towton are even more interesting for the purposes of this study. The Lancastrian forces unsuccessfully attempted to get supplies out of London. A London chronicle records: “Certain carts ere laden with victuals to have gone to St Albans by the Queen’s. But when they came to Cripilgate the commons of the city would not suffer the carts to depart”.\textsuperscript{70} This incident demonstrated again that “the commons” could influence events. The prevention of supplies getting to Margaret’s soldiers may have been a decisive factor in the Lancastrian defeat. Either way, it demonstrated yet again that “the commons” or “the people” needed to be appealed to. This was one area in which the Lancastrians clearly failed.

Edward’s ascent to the throne should have seen an end to the political turmoil of the previous decade. However, much as in the accession of Henry IV, pretender begat

\textsuperscript{68} Parhelia are frozen ice particles in the air reflecting light, creating the illusion of small suns. See Jonathan Hughes, \textit{Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV}, Alan Sutton: Stroud, 2002.p. xi.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{An English Chronicle}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{70} ‘Vitellius A XVI’ in \textit{Chronicles of London}, p. 173.
pretender. It was only seven years before the next pretender emerged to see the successful, if temporary, overthrow of Edward. The pretender in question was George, duke of Clarence, Edward’s younger brother.

George was the heir to the throne until the birth of Edward’s first son, the future Edward V, in 1470. Initially, there seemed to be no indication that George would be a threat. The main problems for Edward came from the remnant Lancastrians, who had in their hands the other main pretender of this period: Edward of Lancaster. These two pretenders can be studied in tandem. Both were rightful heirs to respective kings: Edward to Henry VI and George to Edward IV. Both became involved in what became known as the Readeption period of 1469-1471, which firstly saw an attempt to place George on the throne, then the actual replacement of Henry VI on the throne. The man who linked them was the earl of Warwick, who was described in the 1459 attainder as having: “preemynence above all Erles of youre londe, with other grete graces, makyng hym joynt in dyvers offices with his Fadre”.71 Dubbed the “Kingmaker” by later generations, it was Warwick who had been an instrumental part of the Yorkist faction during the 1450s. In addition to the lands he held, Warwick was also lieutenant of Calais. As was seen earlier in the chapter with the Percies, a figure like Warwick was an important part of the “pretender blueprint” that was being established in this century: the powerful member of the nobility who was instrumental in getting a pretender onto the throne. The perception that Warwick was the dominant figure in the political scene of the 1460s is important. If anyone could effect change, it was the man described in a letter to the papal court by Antonio de la Torre in 1461 as being “another Caesar in these parts”.72 A foreign audience was being influenced by Yorkist propaganda in general, and Warwick’s personal propaganda in particular. Warwick had an advantage when he firstly tried to control Edward, and then overthrow him in 1469: foreign audiences were aware of his grievances.

72 Calendar of State Papers: Milan, p. 46.
George of Clarence was the obvious pretender Warwick could use against Edward IV. He was the rightful heir to the throne, who believed he had genuine grievances against Edward. Warwick’s problems with Edward intertwined with those of George, centering on the rise of the queen’s Woodville kin and divergences in foreign policy. It is difficult to know at what point Warwick intended to place George on the throne. Possibly George was being used as a threat only, and Warwick had no intention of installing him as ruler. This was a common theme with pretenders of this period. Much of the time they were used for political leverage, and this is true of both domestic and foreign supporters of pretenders. Certainly this is what Warwick was doing throughout this period. However, while George may have desired to become King, the overthrow of Edward was not possible without help from the Lancastrian exiles in France. The Lancastrian cause centered not on the incompetent Henry VI, but rather Edward of Lancaster. “The Manner and Guiding of the Earl of Warwick” gave the minutes of the meeting between Warwick and Margaret of Anjou after Warwick and Clarence had fled from Edward IV. The document revealed the tension between the two sides, that were only resolved with the decision to betroth Edward of Lancaster to Warwick’s second daughter Anne, with the marriage proper to take place after Warwick had overseen the successful overthrow of Edward IV.  

George, married to Warwick’s first daughter Isabelle, was now displaced as the pretender that Warwick supported in favour of Edward of Lancaster.

We now turn to Edward of Lancaster as a pretender. That the eventual goal of the Readeption was to place Edward of Lancaster on the throne is reasonably certain. Domestic chronicles show that placing Henry VI back on the throne was not a popular move. The infamous procession of Henry through the streets of London demonstrated that he possessed saintly, rather than kingly, qualities. His son seems to have been made of different material:

This boy, though only thirteen years of age, already talks of nothing but of cutting off heads or making war, as if he had everything in his hands or was the god of battle or the peaceful occupant of that throne.\textsuperscript{75}

This view of Edward by a foreign correspondent seems to be confirmed by the opening lines of Lancastrian knight Sir John Fortescue’s \textit{On the Laws and Governance of England}, in which he gave a similar portrayal of Edward:

\begin{quote}
The Prince, as soon as he became grown up, gave himself over entirely to martial exercises; and, seated on fierce and half-tamed steeds urged on by his spurs, he often delighted in striking and assailing the young companions attending him, sometimes with a lance, sometimes with a sword, sometimes with other weapons in a warlike manner ...\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Clearly Edward was being presented as a militaristic figure in contrast to his saintly father. Fortescue’s work was addressed to Edward and sought to instruct him on the necessity of learning of laws as well as the arts of wars. While in exile, he was being trained to be a king.

This training came to naught. George switched sides yet again. In 1471 Edward IV, striking out from Burgundy, invaded England. At the battle of Barnet, the forces of the earl of Warwick were defeated, and Warwick was slain. Shortly afterwards, the battle of Tewkesbury was fought against the remaining Lancastrian forces, including Edward of Lancaster. While it is uncertain how he was killed, it is interesting that one chronicler claimed that during the battle, George slew Edward, who “cryede for socoure to his brother-in-law the Duke of Clarence”.\textsuperscript{77} If this is true, one pretender had killed another.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Calendar of State Papers: Milan}, p. 117.}
\end{footnotes}
On a political basis, the victory of Edward IV in 1471 ended the cycle of pretenders that had begun with his father's attempts to claim the throne. While Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, had made a claim to the English throne on the basis of descent, through the female line, from John of Gaunt, it is debatable how serious he was about this claim, as evidence indicates that making claims to various thrones was a strategy used by Charles on several occasions. But it is important to include Charles as part of the list of pretenders simply because his claim demonstrates the growing perception that the rule of England was plagued by instability. This perception was best exemplified by the Milanese ambassador who wrote: “I wish the country and the people were plunged deep in the sea, because of their lack of stability, for I feel like one going to the torture when I write about them, and no-one hears twice alike about English affairs”.

The unpleasant denouement to this cycle of pretenders was the execution of the duke of Clarence in 1478. Debate continues as to why Edward chose this particular point in time to have his brother executed. The attainder document itself provides several important clues. The execution of Clarence was the result of a number of charges, but it is those charges that concern an attempt for the crown that concern us. It was alleged that George “falsely and untruly noysed, publisshed and saide, that the Kyng oure Sovereign Lorde was a Bastard, and begottone to reigne uppon us”. This accusation demonstrates that the language of usurpation, or attempted usurpation had not changed. Lineage played a major part. With two sons now having been born to Edward IV, the only way Clarence could conceivably claim the throne would be to have Edward bastardised. The cycle of pretenders that had begun with George’s father in the 1450s ended with George himself in 1478. It was a cycle that

---

had seen the crown of England change hands twice. With Clarence’s death and two sons to follow him, Edward IV was now secure.

The third cycle of pretenders beginning in 1483 was quite different from the previous two. The usurpations of 1399 and 1461 had come at the end of long periods of discontent with government in general, and the two kings in particular. By contrast, when Richard, duke of Gloucester, seized power from the uncrowned Edward V and had himself crowned as Richard III, no such conditions existed. Despite later claims it is unlikely that Richard had any intention of seizing the throne before Edward IV’s death. However, Edward’s death while his son was a minor was a problem. The reigns of the previous child kings, Richard II and Henry VI, had been marked by civil conflict, misgovernance and finally deposition and murder. These were not precedents to make the public look forward to the minority rule of Edward V. Two other precedents would have troubled Richard; the careers of Thomas of Woodstock and Humphrey of Gloucester. Both men had been uncles to child kings. Both men had initially been declared protector, only to see that power whittled away, leading to their eventual murders by their political enemies. Richard must have been aware that this was his possible fate. The protectorship that Edward had intended for Richard had already been compromised by the creation of a regency council.

There was another factor that caused the beginnings of a new phase in 1483, and that was the Woodville faction. Edward V’s upbringing had been entrusted to his uncle, Anthony Woodville, Queen Elizabeth’s brother. In the weeks following the death of Edward IV, the Woodvilles had attempted to bring Edward V to London, only to have Richard assume control of the child at Stony Stratford. There was, arguably, a long running animosity between Richard and the Woodvilles, as he allegedly blamed them for the death of his brother Clarence. Richard engineered the arrest and eventual execution of several leading members of this faction, as well as any others

he perceived to be political threat. At the end of June, Richard declared through a series of proclamations that Edward IV’s children were illegitimate due to a prior contract of marriage that Edward had made with a woman named Eleanor Butler, the daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury.\(^83\) It was a story of both power and durability.\(^84\) Richard used a new method to address an old problem for successful pretenders: justifying the overthrow of the king, how do you justify having done it? His father and brother had provided the best examples through their treatment of Henry VI, particularly when Edward IV declared, through the instrument of parliament and on more than one occasion, that Henry was “king in deed, but not in right”. Richard took this device one step further, making sure that Edward V was king neither in deed nor right.

Like Henry IV, Richard used parliament, or to be more accurate, a pseudo-parliament, to validate his claim to the throne. On 26 June, 1483, he was crowned as Richard III. The disappearance of Edward V and his younger brother around this time became one of England’s greatest mysteries. Regardless of Richard’s motives for seizing the throne, it was obvious within the space of a few months that civil war was about to erupt. By October one, arguably two, new pretenders emerged to challenge Richard’s rule, Henry Stafford and Henry Tudor. As one of these pretenders was, on the surface, supporting the other, it is useful to look at both of them together.

Henry Stafford, the duke of Buckingham played the role previously taken by figures such as the Percy family and the earl of Warwick; the noble who was instrumental in helping a pretender to the throne, only to turn on him afterwards. In Buckingham’s

\(^{83}\) Recently fifteenth-century historians have been inclined, in the light of Edward IV’s character, to accept the story as genuine. In particular, Michael Hicks draws the conclusion that Edward IV may have conducted similar affairs with a range of women: Michael Hicks, Edward V, Tempus: Gloucester, 2003, pp. 46-47.

\(^{84}\) As late as 1533, Charles V’s ambassador wrote to him claiming Charles had a better claim to the throne of England because of the precontract. See James Gairdner (ed.) Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, Vol. VI Kraus Reprint: Vaduz, 1965, p. 618.
case however the speed with which he turned to betrayal was unusual. The time from Buckingham helping Richard gain the throne to turning against him could be measured in months, if not weeks. One explanation for the speed of events is that Buckingham was trying to claim the throne for himself.

The theory that Buckingham had regal ambitions is not new. Contemporary accounts from both domestic and foreign sources claimed that Buckingham was involved in the murder of Edward V and Richard of York. A fragment from a London Chronicle alleged that “King Edward the vth, late callyd Preince Walys, and Richard duke of Yourke hys brother, Kyng Edward the iiij sonys, wer put to deyth in the Towur of London be the vise of the duke of Buckingham”. In his Memoires, Burgundian Phillipe de Commynes mentions Buckingham’s involvement in the murders. Is it possible that Buckingham, either of his own accord or in conjunction with Richard III, had the princes murdered so as to further clear the throne for himself? Even by the standards of the time, it seems like an idea steeped in lunacy. But is it any less strange than the Glendower/ Percy/ Mortimer Tripartite agreement, which would also have seen the death of a king and the division of England into three parts? It is difficult to say what role Buckingham played in the deaths of the princes, or what his later motives were. He had openly supported the series of “mini-rebellions” that flared in the south west of England in October of 1483, collectively known as “Buckingham’s rebellion”. The rebels aimed to place Edward V back on the throne. Once rumours had spread of the young prince’s death, the support of the rebellion shifted to Henry Tudor, whose potential claim was through his descent from the illegitimate Beaufort line. Tudor’s claim to the throne was flawed, as the Beauforts had been barred from the succession in 1406. Buckingham, however, was legitimately descended from Thomas of Woodstock, Edward III’s fifth son. It makes little sense that Buckingham would betray a king who had given him so much support for a man who had a weaker claim to the throne than Buckingham himself.

---

Yet this is precisely what he did. The rebellion failed, and Buckingham was executed.

Foreign powers were willing to sponsor Henry Tudor’s pretensions. Without it, these pretensions would have come to nothing. The force with which he invaded England on August 1485 was comprised primarily of Frenchmen, with arguably some Scottish soldiers as well. His victory over Richard III at Bosworth was achieved primarily through the betrayal of Richard’s own supporters, the Stanleys, and the inaction of the earl of Northumberland.

Henry’s victory in 1485 brought the third phase of pretenders to a close. But his victory started a fourth phase of pretenders, a period that saw more people trying to claim the throne than in any other. The start of this phase was 1487 and the battle of Stoke. The main problem with analysing this period is that, with Tudor influence over the writing of history, there are virtually no independent accounts for what occurred. However, this critique can be made of the fifteenth century as a whole, and all sources from this period have their problems. The difference with the Tudor documents is how influential these have become when analysing the reign of Henry VII. While the reign was presented as a time of peace and unification, when one reads between the lines, the opposite becomes apparent.

The key for those wishing to overthrow Henry was to find a candidate to support. The obvious pretender was Edward, the earl of Warwick, the son of George duke of Clarence. Once Edward V and Richard duke of York had been bastardised, Warwick was the next male in the line of succession. The act of attainder against his father in 1478 could have been reversed. However, putting a child on the throne did not seem an option. This gives the Lambert Simnel revolt its significance. To modern audiences, the facts seem clear. A rebellion was raised on behalf of Lambert Simnel, a young boy who had been trained by an Oxford priest, Richard Simonds, to pretend to be the earl of Warwick. Foreign support was provided by Margaret of Burgundy, who provided money for German mercenaries led by Martin Schwarz; and the
Anglo-Irish lords who had been pro-York since the 1450s, and were not keen on a new monarch who might strip them of the semi-independence they had enjoyed under the Yorkist kings. It is telling that Lambert Simnel was crowned as “Edward VI” in Ireland, not in England, in May 1487. John de la Pole, the earl of Lincoln, who had visited Burgundy in the previous months, supported the invasion that followed. Henry’s forces met the rebels at Stoke, after Henry had paraded the real Warwick through the streets of London to stem the tide of rumours swirling around the imposter. The day turned against the rebels at Stoke. John de la Pole was killed in battle, and Francis Lovell disappeared. Simnel himself was captured, and after being paraded through London again with the real earl of Warwick by his side, he was sent to work in the royal kitchens as a turnspit.

Superficially, the rebellion was focussed around an impostor without any genuine claim. As such, the Lambert Simnel revolt begins to look somewhat dubious, at least in terms of calling it “the Lambert Simnel revolt”. Firstly, the question must be asked, why use an impostor at all? The two significant examples of impostors in the fifteenth century are Thomas Ward and Perkin Warbeck, who both pretended to be people who were dead. Warbeck had an enormous advantage in that a corpse could not be produced to contradict his story. With Simnel, it was easy for Henry to produce the real earl of Warwick. The counter claim was that this Warwick was the fake, but it seems that no-one accepted this story. Furthermore, the attainder of 1478 meant that Warwick could not claim the throne. Lambert Simnel begins to look slightly ridiculous: he was pretending to be someone who could not legally claim the throne. As a pretender, he certainly comes across as a weak example compared to others of this period.

Another figure involved, who may actually have been the serious contender for the throne was John de la Pole. The Chronicle of Calais is one source that makes the

---

direct connection between de la Pole and a claim to the throne in a short passage:

Battayle at Stooke, anno 1487-Ther was slain the erle of Lyncoln, syr Martyn Swarte, a Fleminge that came into England with the forsayde erle out of Flaunders from the dutches of Burgoyne kyng Edward the fourth’s systar, for she was the earle’s aunte, and she would have made hym kynge of England, but the erle was slayne and many other that bare armes that day, and the lorde Lovell was nevar sene aftar.⁸⁹

It is noteworthy that Lambert Simnel was not mentioned at all. Simnel’s absence from other texts, such as The Great Chronicle of London and Vitellius A XVI is suggestive. In addition to these silences, it must be stressed that after the death of Richard III’s son Edward of Middleham in 1484, de la Pole was made Richard’s heir. He was the most likely figure for the remnants of the Yorkist cause to rally around. His death at Stoke would not end the de la Pole claim to the throne, but it would be more than a decade before another de la Pole pretender would emerge. The Lambert Simnel case provides us with the first piece of evidence to show how propaganda might be used to reinterpret a certain event. The possibility that Simnel was used as a figurehead for the real ambitions of the earl of Lincoln cannot be discounted. Upon Tudor’s triumph, it would be much more to the state’s advantage to portray the rebellion as a “spurious cause”⁹⁰ promoting a “false boy king”⁹¹, rather than an earl with a stronger claim to the throne than the king himself.

The second part of the fourth phase began in 1491 with Perkin Warbeck, the most interesting case of an impostor for the whole period under examination. His profile as an impostor and a pretender to the English throne was higher than any others, in that he gained a wide range of foreign supporters. Furthermore, it seemed that Warbeck was able to convince people that he was genuine. Admittedly, these people

⁹⁰ Anglica Historia, p. 19.
⁹¹ Anglica Historia, p. 25.
had ulterior motives for being “convinced”. The support of the French and then the Scottish courts certainly made it seem as though Perkin’s story was believed in foreign circles. Most importantly, it formed an important precondition for Tudor propaganda. No other king from this whole period faced as many potential claimants to the throne as Henry VII did. In some cases, when pretenders resided in foreign courts, it was not possible to defeat them in battle. They had to be defeated in a public relations sense, through bills, letters and diplomatic channels.

Before dealing with Warbeck’s career in detail, it must be stressed that the perception lying over this period was that the English throne was inherently unstable. Particularly ominous were the Spanish comments concerning Henry’s kingship. The background in 1488 was the opening of negotiations for a marital alliance between Henry’s son Arthur and Katherine of Aragon. The Spanish ambassador Rodrigo de Puebla, bluntly stated:

“Bearing in mind what happens every day to the kings of England, it is surprising that Ferdinand and Isabella should dare give their daughter at all”.  

Little changed during Warbeck’s imposture. In 1497, the message remained the same in regards to Henry VII: “He knows by experience how quickly a kingdom may be won and lost”. These kinds of comments formed the international perception during Warbeck’s imposture and were, in a broader sense, the end result of the rapid turnover of rulers that had marked the Wars of the Roses.

Perkin Warbeck emerged in Ireland in 1491, having travelled there with his employer, Pregent Meno, a cloth merchant from Portugal. Upon arriving in Cork, Warbeck was promptly “recognised” as a scion of the house of York, probably on account of the expensive, well-cut clothes he was modelling on Meno’s behalf. The

---


93 Calendar of State Papers: Spain, p. 140.
notion that he looked the part of a young noble of royal blood corresponded to beliefs about nobility and kingship in medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{94} The concept that nobility was determined in part by appearance is perhaps the key to the whole Warbeck saga. If he looked the part, those who supported him could claim that he was genuine.

The proposed identity this pretender would adopt shifted at the beginning. According to Warbeck’s confession at first it was decided

that I shud be the duke of Clarence [Edward the earl of Warwick] sone that was beffore tyme at develyne, and ffor as mwch as I denied it.... And afftir this cam unto me an English man whoos name was Stephan poytron with oon John watir & said to me In sweryng grete othis that they knewe well I was kyng Richardis bastarde sone. To whom I answered with lyke othis that I was nott.... and afftir this they callid me duke of York the second sone of kyng Edward the iiiijth.\textsuperscript{95}

The confession further stated that Atwater and Poytron had taught Warbeck English and: “what I shud doo and saye”. Support also came from Irish lords the earl of Desmond and the earl of Kildare. While this confession dated from the late 1490s and was undoubtedly extracted under duress upon Warbeck’s capture, it was a rare instance in which an impostor was given a voice. From this initial incident, and the “training” that took place at the hands of Atwater and Poytron it was obvious they meant Warbeck to be seen.\textsuperscript{96}


\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Great Chronicle of London}, pp. 284-286.

\textsuperscript{96} This was in complete contrast to figures such as Thomas Ward, who was permanently ensconced in Scotland without an audience, and who was allegedly prevented from being seen by figures such as the earl of Northumberland in 1408. See \textit{Scotichronicon}, p. 65. Warbeck, on the other hand, would be presented to foreign courts, his credibility tested on centre stage. See David Dunlop, “The
After his “discovery” in Ireland, the French court expressed interest in Warbeck. This started almost a decade of being passed through foreign courts, as Warbeck became a tool of European diplomacy. A statement from the Spanish ambassador, dated the 8 September 1493, sums up the first couple of years of Warbeck’s treks through the courts of Europe:

The King of France then sent for him, promising him aid against Henry Richmond …but the promised aid was not given. Went, therefore, to the duchess of Burgundy, sister to his father who …welcomed him with open arms. The King of the Romans, his son the duke of Austria, the duke of Saxony and the kings of Denmark and Scotland received him in the same way …Many of the chief personages in England, whose indignation had been roused by the iniquitous conduct of the usurper, Henry Richmond, had done the same in secret.  

This summary contains several important details. Firstly, regardless of what these monarchs believed, the notion was disseminated, in foreign circles and through diplomatic channels, that Henry VII was a usurper with no right to the English throne. Secondly these monarchs were willing to go along with the belief that Warbeck was really the duke of York. Finally this passage is perhaps one of the best pieces of evidence that demonstrated the need for Henry VII to appeal to both a foreign audience (various European monarchs) and a domestic audience (the “many chief personages in England”).

There were two main diplomatic backdrops to the Perkin Warbeck story during the 1490s. The first of these was France’s encroachments, between 1489 and 1491, on the duchy of Brittany. Henry VII was beholden to both Brittany and France for his

---

97 Calendar of State Papers: Spain, p. 50.
survival during the reign of Edward IV and Richard III. Henry reluctantly gave support to Brittany in 1489. This in turn spurred Charles VIII into briefly supporting Warbeck, as Arthurson acutely remarks:

“The only value they [Warbeck and his followers] possessed for the French monarchy was as a bargaining counter in France’s consolidation of its hold on Brittany. Long term they had no future. Short term they could be kept on a pension ... and either used for sabre rattling against England or offered to Henry VII as an appetizing morsel for which to exchange Brittany”.

A French bargaining counter that would influence English policy on Brittany was a description that could just as easily be applied to Henry himself in 1484-1485. In 1492 Henry signed the Treaty of Etaples, neutralising France and sending Warbeck fleeing to Burgundy. Tudor’s official historian Polydore Vergil claimed that Margaret of Burgundy “welcomed him with open arms” and:

received Peter on his return as though he had been raised from the dead and as if (so she dissembled) she had never cast eyes on him before; so great was her pleasure that her happiness seems to have unbalanced her mind.

Vergil also alleged Margaret had trained Warbeck before he went to Ireland. Other sources, such as the Spanish State Papers, tell a different story.

Warbeck’s move to Burgundy began the second phase of his career. The diplomatic backdrop during the 1490s was the formation of the League of Venice against France. The League comprised, initially, the Pope, Spain, the King of the Romans

---

101 *Anglica Historia*, p. 65.
(Maximillian) and the dukes of Venice and Milan.\textsuperscript{102} Spain in particular was keen to bring England into the alliance, just as France was keen to keep England out. Perkin Warbeck was one tool by which these various powers sought to influence English foreign policy. While in Burgundy, Warbeck came into contact with Maximillian, soon to be elected as the Holy Roman Emperor, and attended state functions as the duke of York.\textsuperscript{103} As international belief in Warbeck’s identity was propagated, it was no accident that Henry VII chose, at the end of 1493, to make his second son the duke of York.\textsuperscript{104} Henry needed to undercut the identity that Warbeck had established for himself, and find out who Warbeck really was.

Maximillian, in conjunction with Margaret, prepared to sponsor a Warbeck-led invasion in 1495, the first of three invasions with which Warbeck was involved. An attempted landing at Deal failed in 1495, and Warbeck fled to Ireland, then Scotland. The possession of Warbeck led to a rise in the international prestige of James IV, who was wooed by various courts, particularly the Spanish, to yield up the pretender. Warbeck’s marriage to James IV’s kinswoman Katherine Gorden was a strategic move that bound Warbeck to the Scottish court while sending a strong message to the international audience that James believed Warbeck’s claims.\textsuperscript{105} Warbeck and James’s policies in regard to England coincided. Warbeck wanted to invade to claim the throne. While it is debatable that James wanted the pretender as king, he was keen to recover Berwick.

With James’s assistance, Warbeck invaded the north of England in September 1496. Like the attempted landing at Deal, the invasion was a fiasco. Certainly an attempt was made to influence the English hearts and minds before the invasion took place, with the newsbills that Warbeck had sent across the border promising that, in regards to the English people “far be it from us to intend their hurt or damage, or to make

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Calendar of State Papers: Spain, pp. 55-57.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Examples include the funeral of Emperor Frederick. See Arthurson, The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy, p. 71.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Chrimes, Henry VII, p. 207.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Conway, Henry VII’s Relations with Ireland and Scotland, p. 99.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
war upon them, otherwise than to deliver ourself and them from tyranny and oppression”. ¹⁰⁶
While Warbeck’s intentions may have been good, invading the north of England with an army of marauding Scots was hardly a good public relations strategy. He retreated once again to Scotland. A further invasion in 1497 through Cornwall led to Warbeck’s final capture by Henry VII.

The Perkin Warbeck story had important repercussions. His activities throughout the 1490s provided preconditions for state propaganda and the need to appeal to an international audience. Warbeck’s capture had important consequences for how the next generation of pretenders, impostors or otherwise, would be dealt with by both Henry VII and Henry VIII. Warbeck was kept at court until an escape attempt in 1498, in which the earl of Warwick was implicated. The brutal measures enacted against them were a forerunner for the treatment of Yorkist claimants in the last years of Henry VII’s reign and throughout the reign of Henry VIII. But before the final parts of the story of Warbeck and Warwick can be told, attention must be turned to another pretender who emerged in the late 1490s, whose brief career impacted on Henry’s decision to have Warbeck and Warwick executed.

The story of Ralph Wilford was a strange denouement to the 1490s. The fullest account is told in the *Great Chronicle of London:*

> In this passyng of tyme In the borders of Norffolk and Suffolk was a newe maumet arerid which namyd hym sylf to be the fförenamed erle of warwyk, The which by sly &covert meanys essaied to wyn to hym soom adherentis, But all in Vayn, In conclucion he was browgth beffore therle of Oxynford, to whom at length he confessid that he was born in London, and that he was sone unto a cordyner... he confessid that beyng at Cambridge at scole he was sundry tymys styird In his slepe that he shud name

Wilford was hanged for treason. It is possible that Wilford’s imposture was the final straw for Henry in regards to impostors and pretenders. That year Perkin Warbeck and Edward, the earl of Warwick were put to death. The Spanish court placed enormous pressure on Henry to get rid of both Warbeck and Warwick. Katherine of Aragon was married to Henry’s son Arthur, and the Spanish monarchs were keen to see England rid of any other potential claimants to the throne. The Spanish ambassador de Puebla wrote to his rulers in 1500 claiming

there were always brambles and thorns of such a kind that the English had occasion not to remain peacefully in obedience to their king, their being divers heirs of the kingdom and such a quality that the matter could be disputed between the two sides. Now it has pleased God that all should be thoroughly and duly purged and cleansed, so that not a doubtful drop of royal blood remains in this kingdom, except the true blood of the king and queen, and above all that of the lord prince Arthur.\(^\text{108}\)

He echoed the Tudor line when he talked about the notion of “true blood”. Both the Spanish and the international community had to be presented with a new version of England, one that was free and secure from civil strife and “doubtful blood”.

The executions of Wilford, Warbeck and Warwick started a new phase of the political relationship between potential pretenders and the crown. Potential pretenders now spent their lives in the climate of fear that the Tudor monarchs instilled. While many historians of the later fifteenth century focus on political murders of figures such as George of Clarence and the Princes in the Tower, it must be remembered when contrasting these monarchs, that far more pretenders and


potential pretenders died under the Tudors than under the Yorkists. As S.B. Chrimes observed: “Tudor reason of state demanded and obtained far more numerous blood sacrifices than the Yorkist version did”.109

The actions of Warbeck set a second dangerous precedent for the Tudor dynasty.110 His actions were indicative of the precarious position that Tudor held on the throne.

In addition to the increasing international threat posed by foreign powers supporting pretenders, by the early 1500s a crisis had arisen for the Tudor dynasty. Arthur died in 1502, two years after the death of Henry’s infant son Edmund. With the only male heir being the future Henry VIII there was discussion, both domestically and internationally, as to who would succeed Henry VII if young Henry died. The pretenders and those who supported them during the early 1500s exploited these problems.

The situation confronting Henry can be seen by a meeting that was held in Calais in 1503, at the height of Henry’s problems with Edmund de la Pole.111 John Flamank sent the details of this meeting to Henry VII, quoting remarks made by Calais treasurer Sir Hugh Conway, in conversations with English conspirators concerning who would succeed the king, whose health was failing. Flamank reported that he said that some of them spake of my lorde of Buckyngham, sayng that he was a noble man and wold be a ryall ruler. Other ther were that spake, he said, in lykwyse of your troytour Edmund de la Pole, but none of them, he said, that spake of my lord pryntce.112

Such information would have further increased Henry’s fears about the future of his dynasty. The threat in the final years of his reign came not from the “fayned

109 Chrimes, Lancastrians, Yorkists and Henry VII, p. 163.
110 The first precedent was Henry VII’s seizure of power in 1485.
111 The year 1503 is Gairdner’s estimate. It is clear from internal evidence that the conversation must have taken place after Arthur’s death in 1502.
type of pretender Henry had dealt with in the 1490s but from distant cousins who had a stronger claim to the throne than he did.

Edmund and Richard de la Pole were the younger brothers of John de la Pole. Until the late 1490s, it seemed that unlike John, they would make peace with the new regime. Tensions began as early as 1492 with the death of their father the duke of Suffolk. Rather than allowing Edmund to inherit the duchy, Henry downgraded the title, stating that Edmund would not be allowed to reclaim lands lost to the family through the attainder of John de la Pole unless the sum of five thousand pounds was paid to the crown. As Henry no doubt intended, this payment impoverished Edmund during the 1490s. Edmund fled to the continent in 1498, after having been indicted for the murder of Thomas Crue, returning shortly afterwards. However the executions of Warbeck, Wilford and especially Warwick in 1499 may have played upon his mind. The most concerning would have been the execution of the earl of Warwick, a legitimate Yorkist prince, who had spent his entire adult life imprisoned in the Tower. It is possible that Edmund recognized that Henry was determined to eliminate anyone with a blood relationship to the Yorkist kingship. This is one possible factor in Edmund’s decision to leave England again with his brother Richard in 1501. But this is a speculative point. A far more convincing motive for leaving England can be discerned in statements attributed to Maximilian I:

Furst when my lord Corson in his going to Turkey declared to the king [Maximilian I] the murdres and tyrannyes of H[enry], with the propos of my lord of Suff. ayecinst H. to recover his right &c, the kinges majestie aunswerde to my lord Corson, that if his majestie mighte have oon of king Edwardis blode in his handis, he wolde helpe him to recover the coroune of England and bee

---


114 See above.
Maximilian had been involved in the Warbeck conspiracy. That such a figure could be excellent leverage against the English crown had been demonstrated in the 1490s. The de la Pole brothers were potentially even more useful as, unlike Warbeck, they were genuine Yorkist heirs.

Maximilian’s support led to plans for an invasion of England in 1502. The plan was to strike out from Denmark, while conspirators in England would cause dissent, allowing de la Pole to land. The plot failed when Henry learnt of the details through his network of spies. A number of de la Pole’s supporters were imprisoned, including his brother William. Most importantly, Sir James Tyrell, who had been a supporter of Richard III, and had been on the continent with de la Pole was also imprisoned and then executed. It is also possible that Henry VII ensured that Tyrell confessed to killing the princes in the Tower as well.116

The crushing of the conspiracy ended de la Pole’s career as an effective pretender, but this is a judgement made in hindsight. At the time, Henry VII remained concerned about the potential for de la Pole to invade, and this concern was reflected in the pressure that Henry placed first on Maximilian and on the duke of Gueldres, who sheltered the exiled de la Pole from 1504 onwards.117 Domestically, Henry had arranged for Edmund de la Pole and his supporters to be excommunicated,118 followed by an attainder in the parliament of 1503/1504. De La Pole was charged with “falsly and traiterously ymagynynge and conspyryng the deth and destruccion of

\[116\] A number of near contemporary sources blame Tyrell for the murder. See *Great Chronicle of London*, pp. 237, 318. Vergil blames Tyrell for the murders (*Anglica Historia*, p. 126) and later Tudor writers such as Thomas More claim that a confession was produced. While Chrimes has noted that such a straightforward confession is unlikely, as it would have been widely distributed, he acknowledges the possibility that Henry may have allowed the information to spread informally. See Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p. 93, fn 1.
\[117\] *Calendar of State Papers: Spain*, p. 396
\[118\] *Vitellius A XVI*, p. 396
the Kinge our Sovereign Lord and the subversion of this his Realme”. The final blow for Edmund de la Pole came when Archduke Philip of Austria was shipwrecked on the English coast. Henry VII was hospitable, but would not allow Philip to leave England until the duke of Gueldres had yielded up de la Pole. Edmund, by now heavily in debt, made overtures to Henry in early 1506, expressing a desire to return to Henry’s service, with a number of conditions, foremost of which was the restoration of Edmund’s lands. The only condition kept was that Henry would spare his life. After being transferred to English forces at Calais in March, Edmund was imprisoned in the Tower of London in April, 1506. Henry VII kept his promise and spared de la Pole. Edmund outlived Henry VII, only to be executed by Henry VIII in 1513.

The coda to the de la Pole story was the fate of his younger brother, Richard de la Pole. Richard had been left behind in Aachen as collateral for Edmund’s debts, unsurprisingly causing strain between the two brothers. Richard was able to leave Aachen after Edmund’s capture, and travelled through eastern Europe before returning to France. He claimed to be the rightful duke of Suffolk and the rightful king of England, and Louis XII, then Francis I welcomed Richard and supported his pretensions. It is clear from diplomatic correspondence why Richard was there. A letter dated June 8, 1512 discussed the

Current rumour that the king of France had exalted a certain individual, son of the deceased sister of the King

119 *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, Vol. VI, p. 545
120 For the desire to return to Henry’s service see BL Add. MS 18738. For the details of the deal that Edmund was trying to make see *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, Vol. I, pp. 280-285
121 Chrimes, *Henry VII*, p. 290
122 Richard’s displeasure is reflected in this letter that he sent to Edmund around 1505:

“I have no comfort, and here I ly in gret peyne and pouerte for your Grace, and no maner of comffort I have of your Grace, nor off nen other, nor non ys comyng as ffere as I can see. Wherfor I pray God sone to send me owte of thys worde ... Sir by my trowth ye dele ffery hardly with me, I beyng your brother, in many thyngs”.

See *Original Letters Illustrative of English History, Third Series, Volume I*, p. 130.
who was killed by the late king of England, it being said
that he purposes sending him to England, and helping him
to the crown.\textsuperscript{123}

These claims could be immensely concerning for the childless Henry VIII, and may well have caused the execution of Edmund de la Pole in 1513. Richard continued to live at the French court and led French troops in battle. The “White Rose”, as he became known in international diplomatic correspondence,\textsuperscript{124} was eventually killed at the battle of Pavia in 1525, still claiming to be the rightful king of England.\textsuperscript{125}

The examination of the pretenders of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century has demonstrated a number of points. Firstly, the usurpations in 1399, 1461 and 1485 led to a category of people being created that had hitherto been aberrations on the English political landscape. The notion now existed that there might be someone with a superior claim to the throne than the king. Far from being purely a domestic concern, this notion was disseminated on the international stage, leading to a growing international cynicism towards the stability of the English crown for the period from the 1460s on. Linked to this cynicism was the willingness of foreign powers to sponsor pretenders. Henry Bolingbroke’s support by the duke of Orleans was a sponsorship steeped in ambiguity. Almost a century later, this attitude had changed completely, with rulers such as Maximilian I being clear in their desire to place pretenders on the English throne. Thomas Ward’s career was conducted in an entirely different country Ward’s imposture was textual, not actual, with the notion that he was “really” Richard II disseminated for the most part by William Serle in the early 1400s. After the Wars of the Roses, the nature of impostors changed completely. Lambert Simnel was publicly crowned in Ireland and was declared to be

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
“Edward VI” in 1487. Perkin Warbeck travelled throughout Europe, making himself visible at every opportunity. This change forms part of the growth of an international audience to which both English monarchs and claimants to the throne needed to appeal. It was now clearly the case that the perception of English kingship, at least in foreign circles, had declined or was altered to such a point that Warbeck was able to successfully pretend to be the rightful claimant to the English throne for eight years.

The success of some pretenders casts light on why propaganda became a necessity for the state during this period. The examples of several of these pretenders demonstrated that with the right timing and luck, seizing power in fifteenth century England was a possibility. These precedents would hang over the reigns of those who had seized power and their successors. This is why it has been necessary to examine the pretenders as a whole: at one time or another all were seen the same way by the state, and most were perceived as active threats.

The rise of the pretenders during the fifteenth century demonstrated that propaganda needed to appeal to both domestic and foreign audiences. The kings of England needed to prove why their claims were superior to the pretenders in question, or, in the case of the outright impostors, why they were impostors. For the pretenders, the idea was reversed. They had to demonstrate why their own claims were superior to those of the monarch. What needs to be examined now is how these various claims and counter-claims were disseminated, and what they actually were.
CHAPTER TWO


Propaganda arguably became one of the defining characteristics of fifteenth-century politics. As the previous chapter contended, the rise of the phenomenon of pretenders, and the ensuing civil conflicts, meant that the need to manipulate the opinions and attitudes of a target audience became vital. An international audience had developed, one that was actively involved and interested in English politics, and therefore needed to be appealed to. The investigation now turns to how the domestic audience evolved and was constructed through contemporary texts. Some domestic preconditions for the rise of propaganda – pretenders and civil conflicts – have been covered in Chapter Two. However, attention is also due to the various public uprisings, and the development of parliament during the fifteenth century. This public interaction with the political process led to the creation and development of another kind of domestic audience, (different from the baronial classes examined in Chapter One) to be appealed to: the commons, or the people. Any study of propaganda must also look at the opinions and attitudes of the target audience. In Chapter Three these contemporary attitudes, the expectations of kingship and “good governance”, and the rise of nationalism will be examined.

The domestic preconditions for the evolution of propaganda outlined in the previous chapter were mainly the actions (and sometimes inaction) of the baronial classes. The barons were an integral part of the “pretender blueprint” and members of that class often became pretenders themselves, due to the increasingly complex nature of dynastic politics in the latter half of the fifteenth century. But the baronial classes accounted for a very small proportion of the potential domestic audience. How can we define the larger part of the domestic audience: the Commons?

1 I use the term class here not in its strict, Marxist sense, but in terms of the social orders of the later medieval period.
It must be acknowledged that this is a difficult task. The establishment of an international audience in the previous chapter was carried out primarily through the examination of diplomatic correspondence. The value of this evidence is that the opinions were expressed by people who can be clearly identified, such as the Spanish ambassador Roderigo de Puebla. Even more valuable is our ability to see to whom these opinions were being conveyed, in this case Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Examining the opinions of the English domestic audience(s), however, is less straightforward. The range of vernacular chronicles arguably provides the historian with the best avenue into the possible mindset of a domestic audience, for several reasons. Firstly, the chronicles incorporate a wide range of other media current at the time, such as bills, ballads, letters, proclamations and copies of treaties.\textsuperscript{2} In some cases only a summary of the information contained within that bill might be reproduced. Nevertheless, the key points were transmitted. Through studying the chronicles we can understand what some people at the time were seeing and reading, and thereby evaluate the possible effectiveness of these forms of propaganda. The chronicles also convey some idea of the events, incidents and information that the writers, and by extension a domestic audience, may have thought was important at the time. More significantly, the known circulation of works like the various London chronicles (forty-one copies of which are extant\textsuperscript{3}) means that we can develop an idea of what a domestic audience might have thought, but also see how writers at the time were made aware of, and may have perceived, a domestic audience. This perception becomes important for this study, as increasingly through the fifteenth century we


\textsuperscript{3} McLaren, “The Aims and Interests of the London Chronicles”, p. 159.
can see propagandists referring to “the people” or “the commons”\textsuperscript{4}. In addition to
the London chronicles, we can also use the various letter collections of families such
as the Plumptons, the Stonors and above all the Pastons which reflect some of what
English people knew of public uprisings, such as the events leading up to the
attempted impeachment, and definite murder, of the duke of Suffolk.

In the fifteenth century two different groups were called “the commons”. The
“formal” group that made up the lower house of parliament was “the Commons”.
The other notion of “the commons” or “the people” appeared as a frequently-
mentioned yet indistinct group. Who were they? What were their politics? And why
did propagandists feel the need both to mention them and to appeal to them? For the
purposes of this analysis this other “commons” group is divided into two parts:
textual and actual. The textual commons are the ones that are referred to in the texts
of the fifteenth century, particularly the vernacular chronicles. The actual commons
are the ones that were involved in the public revolts and uprisings that occurred,
particularly in the mid to late fifteenth century. These two categories overlap to a
certain extent, as the texts from which the evidence of their activities are often the
same. This means establishing this audience as an absolute is nigh impossible.
Nevertheless, it is important to draw out the distinction between the textual and the
actual, as a significant proportion of the political propaganda of this period was
either aimed at, or mentioned this particular group.

The Commons, a definable body, was the lower house of parliament. Parliament
formed part of the domestic audience, and is thus an important part of this study.
How important parliament was during the fifteenth century is a matter of some
debate. It is clear that parliament's influence grew during this period. As A.R. Myers
succinctly puts it, during the fifteenth century parliament went “from being an

\textsuperscript{4} See Chapter Four, pp. 120-121, 127-128.
occasion to being an institution.”

Political theorists at the time also acknowledged parliament’s importance. Sir John Fortescue stressed that laws were not merely the province of kings but were made with the assent of the whole realm, stating:

Sometimes also, by the negligence of such [non-English] princes and the inertia of their counsellors, those statutes are promulgated so ill-advisedly that they deserve the name of corruptions rather than laws. But the statutes of England cannot so arise, since they are made not only by the prince’s will, but also by the assent of the whole realm, so they cannot be injurious to the people, nor fail to secure their advantage.

[my italics]

Gaining parliament’s support (or being seen to have parliament’s support) was vital for the kings of the fifteenth century, particularly those who had deposed the previous monarch. The cycle of usurpations increased the importance of parliament, as it became one of the avenues by which a usurper’s seizure of power was endorsed; “reinforcing the notion of a king’s dependence on all his people.”

However, McKenna argues that the notion of “election” to the throne was a “useful myth”. It was a concept that was only worthwhile in a public relations sense. In terms of this study, middle ground can be found between these two arguments. Parliament was presented as an institution necessary for law and good government.

An early fifteenth century tract ran:

Whanne alle a kyngdom gadrid ysse
In goddis lawe, by on assent
For to amende [th]at was mysse

---

6 Fortescue, On the Laws and Governance of England, p. 27
Parliament’s importance was seen to arise from the notion that it represented England as a whole. Statements such as “all a kingdom gathered is” in the above quote or “the assent of the whole realm” in Fortescue’s work seem to reinforce the point that parliament was perceived as an inclusive, representative institution, regardless of the reality of its restricted constitution. More significantly, the quotes indicate that the institution was deemed important at the time. Some fifteenth-century texts suggest that if the institution of parliament failed, then problems would arise throughout the kingdom. An early tract, the 1401 poem “What Profits A Kingdom” makes this point clear:

To wete if parlement be wys
[th]e comoun profit wel it preues
A kyngdom in comouns lys-
Alle profytes, & alle myscheues.

All the welfare and all the evils of the kingdom are dependant on the commons. The common profit needed to be maintained and the commons had to be kept content. This text suggests that the preservation of the common profit was, at least in part, the responsibility of parliament. Keeping parliament, and in particular the commons of parliament, happy, was therefore important for any fifteenth-century king. Failure to do so could have devastating consequences. The best example comes from the parliament of 1449-1450, in which the Commons petitioned to have the duke of Suffolk impeached for mismanagement of the war in France and complicity in the death of the duke of Gloucester. Henry VI overruled this move, choosing to banish Suffolk instead. Fleeing from the angry London mobs after his blood, Suffolk attempted to leave the country, only to have his ship captured by the Nicholas of the Tower, whose sailors promptly landed and executed the duke. Parliament’s ability to grant money, more specifically taxation to the king, was also of great importance throughout the medieval period, particularly in times of war. This ability to limit the

king’s capacity to raise money is an indication of actual rather than textual power. Prior to this period, in 1386, the commons had placed limitations upon the king, setting up a committee to examine, amongst other things, the state of the king’s household and the costs of maintaining and defending the realm. This particular checking of the king’s power was a clear example of the potential for parliament’s power to grow and for the institution to influence rulers and their policies. It was a precedent that would have reminded Richard II’s successors in the fifteenth century of their potential limitations.

The actual power of parliament in controlling or curtailing the king’s power was noticed in contemporary texts. The Burgundian diplomat Phillipe de Commmynes wrote succinctly on the English parliament and its relationship with the king in his Memoirs:

“But such things [preparations for war] take time for the king cannot undertake such an important affair without convoking his parliament, which is the equivalent of our three estates; it is a just and holy institution, and the kings are stronger and better served as a result of consulting with this body on such occasions.”

There are a number of points to be drawn from this perspective. Firstly, the notion that parliament is a “holy and just” institution reflects the contemporary belief that “the voice of the people was the voice of God.” The notion that kings were better served by using parliament also corresponds with the example that would have been one of de Commmynes’ main sources of information about English government, the rule of Edward IV, who had invaded France in 1475. Edward IV’s title was said to have rested upon the notion that the various estates of parliament had endorsed his

---

11 Nigel Saul, Richard II, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997. p. 161. The importance for a king to maintain his finances and tax his subjects appropriately was emphasised throughout the contemporary didactic tracts. See below.
12 de Commmynes, Memoirs, p. 252.
13 See below.
right to rule: “the Comyns assesented”, as did “his lordys spiritual and temporal.”  

This is worded a number of different ways in the chronicle sources. ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ states that Edward “toke uppon hym the crowne of Inglond by the avysse of the lordys spyrtyual and temporalle, and by the elexyon of the comyns.”  

An English Chronicle records that “Edwarde the noble erle of Marche was chosen kynge in the cyte of London.” In ‘Vitellius A XVI’ “the people” are asked if they want Henry to be king: “and the people cryed: Nay! Nay! And then they axed if they wold have therle of March to be thir kyng and they seid Ye! Ye!” This support of the people, in addition to “thadvyse of the lordes spirituall and temporal”, saw Edward placed upon the throne. The idea of “the people” or “the commons” as well as the lords spiritual and temporal was transmitted overseas by Prospero di Camulio, who wrote that Edward “was chosen, so they say, on all sides as the new king by the princes and people in London.” What seems to be represented by the chronicles was a conflation of the ceremony of collaudatio and the meetings of the various bodies of parliament. Parliament itself did not formally meet until November of 1461 to ratify the decisions of March. Edward’s victories at the battles of Mortimer’s Cross and Towton meant that the throne was his for the taking regardless of parliament. Nevertheless, it was the endorsement of the estates as much as his military victories that was emphasised by contemporary texts. There was a clear divide between how Edward usurped the throne, and how this usurpation was presented.

While parliament in the fifteenth century may not have been as important as previous historians might have argued, it was at the same time an institution that could not be flouted. Above all, what remains vital for this study was the need during the period to present parliament as being an important political institution,

---

16 An English Chronicle, p. 110.
one that needed to be consulted and that could appear to decide the fate of kings. The actions of pretenders during this period also clearly indicate that they believed parliament to be an institution that could be used to seize power. In October of 1460 Richard duke of York, entering London after his return from Ireland, went straight to the parliament and sat upon the throne usually reserved for a king. While his bid to be crowned as a king at the time failed, he clearly recognised that parliament was one way he could seize regal power.

Parliament therefore, derived its importance in two ways: textual and actual. The textual importance was the construction of parliament through contemporary texts as a vital political institution that represented the whole realm. The actual importance of parliament lay in the fact that kings and pretenders needed, or needed to be seen to have, parliament’s endorsement. Kings had to keep the Commons on side to prevent “the people” from opening up alternative policy suggestions or taking political matters into their own hands. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, kings required the support of the Commons to authorise taxes, primarily for the purpose of war.

This meant that parliament became a crucial area for the distribution of propaganda, particularly state-based propaganda. Such propaganda could comprise justification of deposition, as used by Henry IV in 1399, Edward IV in 1461, Richard III in 1483 and Henry VII in 1485. Propaganda featured in the speeches delivered in the factionally conflicted parliaments of the 1450s. It could be used in requests for money to wage war, in the case of Henry V in 1416 and Edward IV in 1474-1475. Or it could be employed in the pursuit of enemies of the state, as in the...
parliament of 1478 and the statements against the duke of Clarence. The parliamentary propaganda was not confined to the sitting members. Important pieces of parliamentary information were also distributed across England. Documents such as the articles of deposition of Richard II were incorporated into chronicles such as *An English Chronicle* and “Julius B II”\(^{28}\), while Edward IV’s justification to parliament for war against France in 1475 found its way into the monastery of Christ Church, Canterbury.\(^{29}\) This propaganda served a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it reinforced the public perception of parliament’s importance and the perception that the will of the people was being adhered to. The second purpose was surely to influence further the domestic audience by building and sustaining attitudes of long-term support towards particular regimes.

We now turn to the informal group of “the commons”. As stated above, the commons during this period was a class established through text. Most of the chronicles mention the commons or the people, usually in regard to political opinion and, perhaps more significantly, political action. That the commons could influence the political sphere was established, textually, from the start of the period. When Richard II was deposed, it was said to be by “the comyns of his pepulle”.\(^{30}\) His replacement, Henry Bolingbroke, returned from France to find “moche pepil of the Reme”\(^{31}\) drawn towards and supporting him. The intention was simple, from a Lancastrian viewpoint: present the usurpation as a populist movement, rather than as a carefully planned coup by several members of the nobility. But whilst these


\(^{28}\) ‘Julius B II’, pp. 21-22 (Richard’s renunciation of his title) and pp. 24-41 (the articles of deposition), *An English Chronicle*, pp. 17-18 (the renunciation and a summary of the articles of deposition). Various parliamentary speeches and documents also find their way into texts such as the *Great Chronicle of London*, pp. 88-90, 128-129, 151.


\(^{31}\) *The Brut*, p. 357.
chronicles reflect certain propaganda lines, they also demonstrate why those lines
had to be taken. Through the constant references to the power of the commons the
chroniclers created through text the notion that this group’s views and opinions were
to be considered when forming policy. At the very least, the king had to make it
appear as though he had “the commons” in mind before acting.

As the texts developed through the fifteenth century, the opinions of “the commons”
often became linked to specific events and policies. ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’, when
commenting on the first battle of St Albans in 1455, stated that upon the death of the
Duke of Somerset: “The pepulle sayde th at the Duke of Somersett was worthy to
suffer that dethe.” An English Chronicle records the discontent, or perceived
discontent leveled against the unpopular duke of Suffolk in early 1450: “alle the
peple of this lond and speci alli the communes cride ayens the said duke of Suffolk,
and said he was a traitour.” Numerous other examples can be found within the
vernacular chronicles of this period. Two points are worth noting in regards to

33 An English Chronicle, p. 68.
34 While this list is by no means complete, it is important to note that references to
“the people” and “the commons” do occur frequently in the chronicles of the period
ranging from 1398 to the early 1500s. See An English Chronicle, pp. 13, 17-19, 21,
23, 30-31, 33, 55-56, 60, 62, 63-69, 71, 79, 87, 91, 95, 97, 99, 107, 109-110; ‘A
Chronicle of the First Thirteen years of the Reign of Edward IV by John
112-113, 159-160, 183, 198, 206, 214-215, 221, 228; ‘Julius B II’, pp. 19, 22, 24,
27-31, 33-36, 43-47, 49-52, 54, 56-61, 65, 67-68, 73-74, 76, 78, 82, 84; ‘Cleopatra C
162, 165-166, 173-174, 176, 181-182, 185, 190-191, 193-194, 196, 200-201, 203-
204, 209, 213-214, 216-217, 227, 254; ‘Appendix III’ (‘Julius B I’), pp. 280-281,
285, 287-288; F.C Hingeston (ed.) John Capgrave’s Chronicle of England,
Brut, pp. 355, 357-361, 364-366, 380, 382, 392, 426, 429-430, 433, 435, 438, 443,
457, 461-462, 466-467, 470, 473, 476-479, 482-483, 486-487, 499, 506-509, 512-
513, 516-519, 521, 523, 525-526, 530-531; Henry Ellis (ed.) Fabyan’s New
Chronicles of France and England, G. Woodfall: London, 1811, pp. 543, 619, 628,
638-639, 660, 678; ‘Robert Bale’s Chronicle’ in Six Town Chronicles, pp. 117, 121,
125, 130, 139-140, 145; Great Chronicle of London, pp. 84, 87-89, 94, 128-131,
133, 136-138, 156, 171-176, 181, 183-188, 192, 194-196, 199, 207-209, 211-213,
these examples. The chronicles that tend to be pro-Yorkist (An English Chronicle) seem to reference the commons or the people far more than the pro-Lancastrian chronicles (‘Gregory’s Chronicle’). An example can be found in the references to “the people” in these two chronicles in the period 1450-1461. This time frame starts with a populist revolt, the Jack Cade rebellion, and ends with the crowning of, arguably, a populist king: Edward IV. In between these events, the Yorkist opposition arose, which had, it will be argued, an overtly popular appeal. It is a period in which a reader (contemporary or otherwise) might reasonably expect to see a number of references to “the people” or “the commons”. In An English Chronicle the term is mentioned twenty three times. In ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ the number is only seven for the same period. References to the people or the commons are almost non-existent in the reign of Henry V, the only king of the period who neither deposed his predecessor, nor was deposed by his successor. The security of Henry’s rule may have been reflected in the chronicles. It could be argued that popular support was not as essential to Henry V as it may have been to the other kings of the period. Alternatively, since Henry did have popular support, it may not have been necessary to emphasise that fact.

The uses of the term “the commons” or “the people” within chronicle texts were quite vague. This ambiguity, however, may well have been deliberate. Philippa Maddern has argued that the juxtaposition of natural phenomena within these texts was used as a subtle way of critiquing events and political figures. It can be argued that the term “the people” performs much the same function for medieval, city-based...
chroniclers. Using these terms was a way to critique the ruling elites or certain acts without appearing to do so. Instead of recording that a king was incapable of ruling, the text would state that “the people” believed that the king was incapable.

Records of the opinions of “the people” or “the commons” appeared not only in these texts. Reporting on popular opinion in the crucial month of October 1460, Margaret Paston wrote to her husband: “Ther is gret talkiyng in thys contre of the desyir of my lorde of York. The pepyll reporte full worchepfully of my lord of Warwyk.” In writing this letter, Margaret assumed an understanding between herself and her husband of the term “the pepyll”. By comparing these letters to the chronicles, we can understand that the term “the people” was being used and constructed by the authors of different kinds of texts, not just vernacular chronicles.

Popular actions were also recorded in the chronicles, often specifically attributed to “the people” or “the commons”. This was demonstrated most clearly in times of crisis. One obvious example stems from the start of this period, in which the downfall of Richard II was attributed to the will of the people: “1399: A thys yere the kyng was deposyd by the comyns of his pepulle” While this chronicle was written some years after the event and demonstrates the Lancastrian interpretation of events, it also shows how a deposition had to be interpreted. The people had to be involved, and the overthrow of a legitimate ruler had to be seen as being popular. Moving forward to the end of the time period, the historian finds little change by early 1500s, as Robert Fabyan attributed the downfall of Henry VI to “the rebellion of the comynaltie agayne theyr prynce” Neither of these sources are strictly contemporaneous to the events that they are reporting. In addition, their content was often derived from propagandistic newsbills and pamphlets. However, it is clear

---

39 For the importance of the “people’s voice” see below, pp. 83-85.
that sources of the time attributed great importance to the opinions and actions of the people. Hence J.P. Genet, when discussing the public relations role of the medieval king, argues that the king had to be “a man of dialogue” when dealing with his subjects. In the turbulent world of fifteenth century English politics this statement also applied to those opposed the king. When the earl of Warwick rebelled against Edward IV in 1469, the newsbills he wrote explaining his actions were directly addressed to the “worshipful, discreet and true Commons”. In doing so, figures like the earl of Warwick were acknowledging both the existence and the importance of a domestic audience. Not everyone, however, rated the significance of the commons so highly. George Ashby’s “Active Policy of a Prince”, written in 1463, warned:

“Put no ful truste in the Comonalte
Thai be euer wauering in variance.”

Interestingly enough, Ashby dedicated his work to Edward of Lancaster, and these lines seem to be another indication that the commons were not as a prominent concern for the later Lancastrians as they were for the Yorkists. More pertinent for the present discussion is the idea, present in the line “thai be euer wauering in variance”, that the commons did not have a set political agenda. The possibility existed that someone could influence them. The question for the Lancastrians was whether or not influencing this group was worthwhile.

While references to the group known as the people or the commons occur frequently in relation to political events as constructed in contemporary sources, the question must also be raised as to who these people actually were. It has been shown how the group was constructed in a textual sense as a device employed by fifteenth-century writers to critique and comment on contemporary politics. Historians can also see

---

how the group is constructed as a political voice. Sometimes this voice ran counter to that of the “state” (the king and his supporters), and could be considered an alternative political voice. But who were “the people”? Who were “the commons”? This has proved to be one of the most difficult questions in terms of determining a domestic audience for propaganda. As has been outlined above, we can be fairly certain of a perceived audience that fifteenth century propagandists could target, but what of the actual as opposed to the perceived audience?

One of the main problems when dealing with sources from this time period is that they are all regionally based. We can determine the attitudes of certain people in certain areas, but not England as a whole. London, in particular, is an area that has been the subject of much focus, due mainly to the large number of London-based chronicle sources from the fifteenth century. Through the chronicles of the period, the commons of London have been presented as playing a key part in several episodes of political turmoil. Yet the participation of Londoners during times of political turmoil is as much a textual construction as anything else from the period. While the authorship of the chronicles is anonymous, we can be reasonably certain that Londoners wrote the chronicles.45 It is therefore possible that the actions of Londoners during political crises were heightened or given greater significance than they had in reality.

It is necessary, however, to draw the distinction between “textual” and “actual” importance. While there is some overlap, as discussed above, some sense of the actual groups can be gleaned. There was a longstanding relationship between London and the crown, based on a series of actual needs, both on the part of the crown, and that of the city. Finance was a key component of this relationship: “the king needed money and the Londoners wanted self-government which largely (albeit not completely) contributed to their ability to make money.”46 The contribution of

money from Londoners to the king’s coffers was assumed, but was not necessarily a
given. In the crucial period of 1448-1460, the crown made twenty-one demands for
money. On seven occasions, the city felt confident enough to turn them down.\(^47\) In
addition to their financial support, Londoners could also be used as a military force
by the crown. In the same way that financial support could be withheld, military aid
could also be used as a bargaining chip, something that became crucial during times
of civil conflict. At the battle of Towton, Londoners fought for Edward IV, not
Henry VI.\(^48\) In times of political crisis, the assistance of London could be crucial.

What were these points of political crisis in which Londoner were supposed to have
played a crucial part? The depositions of kings such as Richard II and Henry VI are
two examples, where certain actions taken before each deposition, such as the
barring of Cripplegate in 1461, and the approval of the Londoners was instrumental
to the successful usurpation.\(^49\) Who precisely were the Londoners involved in these
actions? Up to this point we have looked at the broad group of the commons or the
people as a textual construct of contemporary sources, and as a term of convenience
for propaganda. Caroline Barron has contended that the later medieval city was not a
politically homogenous body, despite what was presented in contemporary sources,
recently arguing that London spoke with a “plurality of voices.”\(^50\) Unsurprisingly,
she found that the unenfranchised commons tended to be Yorkist, whilst the mayor
and aldermen were Lancastrian.\(^51\) The reasons for this split may lie at the heart of
the propaganda war that was, I will argue, being waged between the Yorkists and the
Lancastrians from the mid 1450s onwards. As it progressed the Yorkists understood
the need to appeal to the commons, whereas the Lancastrians saw no need to appeal

\(^47\) London in the Later Middle Ages, p. 14.
\(^48\) London in the Later Middle Ages, pp. 17-18.
\(^49\) May McKisack, “London and Succession to the Crown during the Middle Ages"
\(^50\) London in the Later Middle Ages, p. 4.
to a group that they perceived to be powerless. It can be argued that with their narrow support base amongst the nobility, the Yorkists had to appeal to groups outside the traditional political power structure. Did the appeal to the commons make this group “Yorkist”, or was it their pro-Yorkist sympathies that made the Yorkist lords realise that “the people” could be used to shore up support for the cause?

While his argument is somewhat more speculative than Barron’s, J.L. Bolton contends that powerful merchant groups such as the Staple Company also developed Yorkist sympathies in the late 1450s as a response to the government’s granting of wool licences to non-Staple members and foreigners. The notion of economic concerns driving the start of the War of the Roses is an interesting one. While it cannot be fully examined within the scope of this thesis, it will be shown from some of the didactic texts below that economic interests formed part of the general concerns of at least some sections of the domestic audience.

Through comparing these two arguments, we can see that there were at least two separate groups, the textual and the actual, who may have been lumped under the general term of “the commons” during this period. Alternatively, what may be happening in these texts is the inflation of the interests of smaller groups into the interests of the kingdom as a whole. Small groups, such as the wealthier merchants were perhaps being presented as large groups (“the people”) in order to justify their own political ideologies and goals.

So what does this mean for the construction, and indeed the politics, of the London audience? It can be argued that some elements of the commons, alienated by Lancastrian policy, decided to side with the alternative political force in the land: the

---

52 The heart of this conflict was the Lancastrian text *Somnium Vigilantis*. See below, Chapter Six, pp. 192-194.
duke of York. The parallel argument is that the Yorkists, seeing that the Lancastrians had alienated part of the commons, decided to exploit this discontent and shape it to their own political ends. It is possible that these two arguments can intersect: that for various reasons each group recognised in the other a common goal: curtailing the power of or ousting the Lancastrian government. It is also significant that the various London chronicles tend to be pro-Yorkist.\textsuperscript{54} It seems clear that a nexus was established between the politics of the powerful London merchants, the unenfranchised London commons, the London chronicles, and the propaganda of the Yorkists, certainly from mid-1460 onwards,\textsuperscript{55} and possibly even earlier, as contended by Bolton and also McLaren, who argues:

After 1450 many, though not all, London Chroniclers also express a Yorkist bias. There are no extant London chronicles which express an explicitly Lancastrian bias after 1450.\textsuperscript{56}

It is more difficult to draw these conclusions for other areas of England. The historian can only see broad themes in terms of the attitudes and politics of the commons, such as the city of York’s support for Richard III during his reign, or the propensity of Kent to support popular revolt, most notably the Cade rebellion of 1450. What seems certain is that the fifteenth century saw a growing dialogue between those who wielded power (the kings and nobility) and those who did not. The commons were, in the words of one historian, “growing political muscle” during this period.\textsuperscript{57} What is important in terms of this study is that the period saw this political awareness acknowledged in both domestic and foreign sources. A domestic source such as \textit{The Brut} noted that ”mych of the peple of the Reeme were yn gret

\textsuperscript{54} McLaren, \textit{The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century}, p. 238.


\textsuperscript{56} McLaren, \textit{The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century}, p. 238. However, when one takes the implicit approach, it seems to be clear that texts such as ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ do offer a muted Lancastrian stance.

errore and gruching ayens the King” in the early 1400s. This echoes the Milanese ambassador’s comment decades later that Edward IV’s marriage to Elizabeth Woodville “greatly offended the people of England.” The actions of the king had provoked a reaction amongst “the people”.

The popular revolts and uprisings of the fifteenth century demonstrated why these attitudes needed to be shaped. One such incident, although it could not be termed a “revolt” has already been examined: the murder of the duke of Suffolk. Numerous similar events occur throughout the fifteenth century. The general pattern seems to be a rise in levels of frustration with the status quo, followed by outbreaks of violence. The period began with an uprising that almost immediately followed the deposition of Richard II: the Epiphany Uprising, which was briefly dealt with in Chapter Two. While the uprising itself was led by pro-Ricardian nobles who hoped to end the brief reign of Henry IV, it was halted by “the commons”: angry mobs who brutally lynched those involved. *The Brut* summarises these killings thus:

And anon [th]ese o[th]er, [th]at wolde haue do [th]e King to dethm ffleddyn yn alle [th]e haste [th]at [th]ei mighte, fo[th]ei knewen welle [th]at her counsel was bewtrayed. And [th]anne fled the Duke of Surrey, and the Erle of Salusberye with alle his meyne, vnto [th]e toun of Siscet re; an [th]e pepil of [th]toun would hade arestid ham; and [th]ey wolde not stonde to her arest, but stodyn at her defence, & faught manly; but at the laste [th]ey were overcome and take; and [th]ere [th]ei smote of [th]e Dukes hed of Su rrey, and [th]e Erles hed of Salusbury, & mony other moo...  

The account continues, also outlining the murder of the duke of Exeter in London. While this particular uprising was in support of the new king, it is nevertheless a strong example of “the people”, in an actual sense, taking part, somewhat brutally, in

---

58 *The Brut*, p. 366.
59 *Calendar of State Papers: Milan*, p. 114.
60 *The Brut*, p. 361.
the political process. Other examples abound of various uprisings as the century progressed. One of the major threats to the stability of Henry V’s reign were the various Lollard uprisings, culminating in the rebellion of Sir John Oldcastle in 1414. As late as 1431 uprisings were still occurring under the Lollard banner, with bills being distributed to “oure lege Lord the Kyng and to alle the Lordys of the reme of this present parlement”\(^{61}\) demanding reform in the church.

The potential for uprisings increased as the Lancastrian regime under Henry VI sank further into debt, and as the incompetence of Henry himself was revealed. I.M.W. Harvey has argued that there was an increase in incidences of seditious activity before more serious popular revolts arose in the late 1440s and the early 1450s\(^{62}\). The most high-profile of these revolts was that of Jack Cade, who led an uprising in Kent in 1450 and eventually “invaded” London. Even after Cade’s capture and execution, revolts and uprisings continued across the south west for the next few years.\(^{63}\) The period of the Wars of the Roses seems to have seen a dip in such revolts, as arguably the political tensions of the late Lancastrian period were absent from the rule of the Yorkist kings. Alternatively, the frustrations of local and regional areas may well have been satisfied during the civil conflicts of the period. It is not until after the death of Richard III that the modern historian can find another example of a widespread popular revolt, this time in the north of England. The Northern Uprising of 1489 had the potential to be a body-blow to the newly formed Tudor regime. A revolt against the high taxes Henry VII had levied\(^{64}\), as well as possible lingering Ricardian loyalties led to the earl of Northumberland being murdered by angry mobs:


\(^{63}\) *Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450*, p. 133.

In this yere the comons of the north made an Insurreccion and
slewe Therle of Northumbirland, of which comones and
Rebelles was Capatayne one called John a Chamber.\(^65\)

Again, it must be stressed that the murder is attributed to “the commons”. Domestic
dissatisfaction with Tudor government continued through the 1490s, the period in
which Perkin Warbeck loomed as a threat. The next major popular uprising took
place in Cornwall in 1497. The revolt was long considered to be a “peasant’s revolt”,
though Ian Arthurson has argued that most sections of the Cornish community were
involved in the rebellion.\(^66\) The disorder provided fertile political ground for Perkin
Warbeck’s attempted invasion a few months later.

These outbreaks, when they took political overtones, occurred outside the regular
modes of political dialogue such as parliament. They were an example of the
“actual” as opposed to the textual, commons. These actions though, as reported in
the contemporary texts show that there was some overlap between the actual and the
textual. Through the various chronicle sources these uprisings are generally ascribed
to “the commons” or “the people”. An example can be found in the Croyland
Chronicle, whose writer attributes the 1450 attacks on Lancastrian government
figures Adam Moleyns, William Ayscough and James Lord Say to the will of God,
who “aroused the hearts of all people to take vengeance upon their detestable
crimes.”\(^67\) This reference is one of the best examples of the period of the principle of
*vox populi, vox Dei*: the voice of the people is the voice of God, a phrase which
occurs throughout the fifteenth century.\(^68\) As the turbulent politics of the fifteenth

\(^{65}\) ‘Vitellius A XVI’, p. 194.

\(^{66}\) Ian Arthurson, “The Rising of 1497: A Revolt of the Peasantry?” in Joel
Rosenthal and Colin Richmond (ed.) *People, Politics and the Community*, Alan

\(^{67}\) H.T Riley (ed.) *Ingulph’s Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the
continuations of Peter of Blois and anonymous writers*, H.G. Bohn: London, 1854,
p. 411.

\(^{68}\) It has been contended that pre- fifteenth examples are almost non- existent. See
Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English
Writings Mainly Before 1500*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press:
Massachusetts, 1968, p. 622.
century saw an increasing need to rely on the commons, so too did the notion of a “vox populi” crystallise. This voice seems to be present as an all-encompassing idea, including both the textual and the actual commons, reflecting a fundamental point that groups needed to appeal to this notion not only to win over "the people" but to have God on their side. In addition to the chronicle examples, ballads were used to convey this political principle. A poem directed towards the Bishop Booth in the 1440s stated:

That alle the worle crieth outhe on, sotly to say
The voyse of the pepille is clepede vox Dei.69

Didactic tracts of the fifteenth century established similar ideas. Thomas Hoccleve, writing the “Regement of Princes” for Prince Henry (the future Henry V) in 1411, offered this advice:

Thus, my gode lorde, wynneth your peples voice
ffor peples vois is goddes voys, menne seyne.70

The quote is significant for a number of reasons. It states that a popular perception of the “voice of the people” does exist, and that it is something that can be “won”, or swayed. And it establishes the notion that the people’s voice was God’s voice. In the early 1460s, the pro-Yorkist “A Political Retrospect” offered a similar idea, stating: “the voyx of the peuple, the voix of Jhesu.”71 The principle was a vital underpinning of revolts in the fifteenth century. If the king was God’s representative on earth, only God could remove him or stir action against him. Those wishing to depose a king had to represent themselves as delegates of God. The Croyland chronicle also offers the idea that God had worked through “the people” to “take vengence” on those around the king. The statement is not just the textual construction of an isolated monastic chronicler. When compared with the bills of a popular revolt such as the

Cade rebellion of 1450, it seems to reflect a genuine line taken within those bills distributed by the revolt’s leaders. The following quote is taken from the Cade bills, part II of a list of grievances against the king’s counsellors:

Item, they aske gentille mennys londys and godis in Kent, and calle us risers and treyturs and the kynges enymys, but schalle be ffound his trew lege mene and his best frendus with the help of Jesu, to whome we cr ye dayly and nyztly, with mony thousand moe, that God of his ryztwysnesse schall take vengaunce of the ffalso treyturs of his ryalle realme that have brouzt vs in this myschieff and myserie.\(^{72}\)

These uprisings employed propagandistic methods to make their political points to a domestic audience, as well as reinforcing the notion of having God on their side. Cade’s complaints against the Lancastrian government were expressed in a series of newsbills that were distributed throughout south-eastern England and eventually found their way into many of the London chronicles. As with state-sponsored propaganda, the propaganda of the commons needed to be tailored to the domestic audience. This propaganda was directed at an audience largely composed of people who were just like Cade and his followers as well as being directed towards, inevitably, the government against whom they were rebelling. These documents were bills, not letters, and their distribution indicates that they were intended to be seen by an audience larger that just the king. Propagandistic messages and statements were competing against each other in the public arena. An example of how such a competition was carried out can be found in ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’, specifically its representation of the Jack Cade rebellion. Before Cade actually invades London, but after he had released his newsbills, ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ attributes the uprising to “the comyns of Kent”. The bills released when they were outside London record that they had rebelled “for the wele of hym oure soverayne

lorde, and of alle the realme, and for to dystrye the traytours beyng a- bout hym.”

After Cade invaded London, the chronicle takes a much harder line against him and the rebels, and the language used to describe them changes dramatically. The notion that they were the “comyns of Kent” vanishes, to be replaced by the phrase “multytude of ryffe raffe.” There seems to be a notion that the “revolt” was tolerable provided the participants did not actually do anything. Writing and distributing bills of complaint was acceptable, invading London was not.

How much difference popular uprisings made in terms of political governance is a contentious matter. The fact that they happened, and continued to happen, was what was important for those in positions of power. A theme of “continuity of revolt” was established by the author of the Croyland Chronicle, who writes, “The common people of Kent, who had become quite used to attempts at change, showed much greater violence that all the rest.” [my italics] This quote demonstrates the perception not only that were revolts happening, but that they were construed as a regular occurrence, at least in this part of England. As we progress through the period, other examples emerge of areas that had a propensity towards revolt, such as the area around York, particularly after Henry VII came to the throne, and Cornwall, a troublespot in the 1490s that became linked to the ambitions of the pretender Perkin Warbeck.

I have argued that a domestic audience existed in the fifteenth century, and evolved into an audience that was not afraid to make its voice heard, through rebellion, riots or sedition. Increasingly the means by which that voice was expressed was propagandistic and textual, either in the form of ballads, newsbills or the ”propaganda of the deed”, the latter being mediated through textual means as well. Propaganda was used to shape the attitudes and opinions of the domestic audience (s). At the same time members of these domestic audiences needed to employ

75 *Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, p. 413.
propaganda in order to convey their own attitudes and opinions to other domestic audiences, or the state itself. The final elements that must be examined, before moving onto the propaganda itself, are the expectations and beliefs of the domestic audiences.
CHAPTER THREE

Kingship, Good Government and Nationalism: Contemporary Attitudes and Beliefs

Propaganda, to be effective, must mimic the culture and address the concerns of the target audience. In terms of the strong political nature of the propagandistic drives of the fifteenth century, fifteenth-century political theory and expectations of government must be examined in order to understand the propaganda of the period. In order to do so, one must examine the range of contemporary didactic texts, as well as some of the propagandistic statements of those who placed themselves in opposition to the crown: from the Percies in the early 1400s, to the duke of York in the 1450s, the earl of Warwick in the late 1460s through to Perkin Warbeck in the 1490s. The notion of a dialogue between the king and his nobles, as well as between the king and “the people” seems present in the fifteenth century. This dialogue was expressed through popular verse, sedition and newsbills, and could be easily appropriated for propagandistic purposes. Thus, throughout the fifteenth century various messages concerning kingship and good governance were transmitted through a variety of sources. As well as the examination of contemporary beliefs about kingship, contemporary views of the nation and nationalist sentiment will be considered in the second half of the chapter, as fifteenth-century propaganda increasingly appealed to the nationalist sentiments of its target audiences.

Firstly, didactic texts must be examined. Forms of literature advising kings and nobles had predated the turmoil of the fifteenth century. However, the cycle of usurpations had given these texts a new urgency. Of the seven kings who sat of the English throne between 1399 and 1485, only Henry VI was born and raised with the expectation that he would one day be king. At the age of nine months Henry was also the youngest king ever to succeed the throne. Didactic materials of the duties of kingship were required to cater for the needs of these untrained monarchs. Older sources, like the *Secretum Secretorum*, were translated and recycled for a new generation. Writers such as Thomas Hoccleve would draw upon several older
didactic texts such as the *Secretum Secretorum* and *De Regimine Principum* in order to create new works such as the “Regement of Princes”.¹ Other texts, such as the various political writings of Sir John Fortescue, were newly written to advise the potential heir of royal power. The major themes outlined in all of these works concerned the need for good governance, military prowess and the maintenance of order and justice. Other themes included the importance of good counsel, of a high standard of diet and good living (in the physical, intellectual and moral senses) and the need for a strong, kingly appearance.

Good governance and the maintenance of the “common weal” were themes heavily stressed in the texts of the period, the “Three Consideracions Right Necesserye to the Good Governaunce of a Prince” providing a perfect example. This tract dates from fourteenth-century France, but is believed to have been translated into English sometime in the mid-fifteenth century. Three copies survive, with the earliest copy containing a number of French words that have been purged or changed in later versions.² Thus, not only was the text translated, but it was thoroughly Anglicized. It is possible that the text was translated not just for a royal audience, but for a general audience more comfortable with vernacular language. Alternatively, this “Anglicization” of the text may have had a nationalistic motive. The changes may have been made to convince a target audience that the “Three Consideracions” was, in fact, an English document and therefore more authoritative than a foreign, French text. The Anglicization of “Three Consideracions” thus reflects a kind of textual patriotism.

The “Three Consideracions” provides a summary of the importance of the common weal and the need for kings and princes to maintain it. It states that one of the primary duties of a king “is that he love especially and principally the comyn profite

---

of the people and of subgites.”

This point is reinforced with a further statement that “The kynges and princes of this worlde beth ordeyned and establissht in this worlde of aunciente and principally for the comyn profite of the people and their subgites.” References to the maintenance of the common weal and the common profit abound in the chronicles, ballads and propagandistic documents of the fifteenth century. The poem “Advice to the Court”, dated from the crucial year of 1450, advises: “ffor feer or for fauour of any fals man/Loose not the loue of all [th]e commynalte.” These terms were used either to critique rulers or to praise them, as Lydgate’s “Epitaph for the Duke of Gloucester” demonstrates, speaking of Gloucester’s “merit for comvne wele.” A similar statement appears in An English Chronicle, contrasting the duke of York and the duke of Somerset: “the comones of this lande hated this duk Edmond and loued the duk of York, because he loued the communes and preserued the commune profyte of the londe.”

Rebellions against the crown, from Archbishop Scrope in 1405, to Cade in 1450, to Warbeck and Cornwall in 1497, critiqued the ruling monarchs, or their ministers, in these terms. There seemed to be a construction through the chronicle and didactic texts of a need for the commons to be “loued” and needed by those in power.

It was generally conceived in these didactic texts that there were other aspects to good kingship than the desire to preserve the common weal. Two of the most important factors were the abilities to wage war and maintain justice. Fortescue makes this point immediately in his treatise on governing England, “In Praise of the Laws of England”:

I do indeed rejoice, most fair prince, at your noble disposition, perceiving as I do with how much eagerness you embrace military exercises, which are fitting for you to delight in, not

---

3 “Three Consideraciones”, p. 197.
4 “Three Consideraciones”, p. 198.
5 Robbins, Historical Poems, p. 203 This year saw the uprisings of the commons in the Jack cade revolt and the murder of Suffolk.
6 Robbins, Historical Poems, p. 183
7 An English Chronicle, p. 71.
8 See below, Chapter Seven, pp. 227-228.
merely because you are a knight, but all the more because you are going to be king. For the office of a king is to fight the battles of his people and to judge them rightfully.\textsuperscript{9} Failure to carry out these two aspects could prove devastating. The duke of York recognized and acknowledged this fact in 1455, when the conflict between York and Lancaster escalated from being a “cold war” to a “hot war” with the battle of St Albans. In a letter to the king York reminded Henry VI that “the king is sworne to his law and to defend his people.”\textsuperscript{10}

In comparing these two quotes from Fortescue and York, it is worth noting that York’s comments predate those of Fortescue, whose work was dedicated to Edward of Lancaster. It seems just possible, therefore, that the opening lines of Fortescue’s work were more than just generic advice to a prince. They may be, in the context of the time, a warning to Edward not to make the mistakes his father, Henry VI, had made. Certainly, Henry's inability to maintain law and order was stressed through contemporary texts. The extent to which this was a construction of Yorkist propaganda rather than the truth is debatable. George Ashby’s poem “Active Policy of a Prince” suggests the latter, as he makes several points to the young Edward about the maintenance of justice:

\begin{quote}
Proude that lawe may be exercised
And executed in his formal cours
Aftur the statutes autorised
By noble Kynges youre progenitours
Yeving therto youre aide helpe & socour
So shall ye kepe folk in subieccion
Of the lawe and trewe dispocision.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The reference to “noble Kynges youre progenitours” is significant and seems to support the idea that Lancastrian texts dedicated to Edward of Lancaster did make

\textsuperscript{10} BL Add. 48031A (Yelverton 35).
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{George Ashby’s Poems}, p. 29.
subtle critiques of Henry VI’s reign. There seems to be an intentional vagueness, at least in this section of the poem, in regard to who Edward’s “progenitours” actually were. Henry VI is not mentioned, an omission that may be deliberate. It also reinforces the idea that these didactic treatises could operate as critiques of kingship and government.\(^\text{12}\)

Another political tract, *Secretum Secretorum*, makes a similar point concerning justice. *Secretum Secretorum* was an Arabic text from the ninth century, and was structured around an alleged dialogue between Aristotle and Alexander the Great. It has been estimated that around five hundred translations of this tract were made in Europe during the middle ages.\(^\text{13}\) Numerous translations were made into English in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, covering most of the main points concerning good kingship. *Secretum Secretorum* was arguably the most influential didactic tract of the period, not only in terms of the number of times it was translated and transcribed, but also in the writers that it influenced. Thomas Hoccleve in particular drew many of the ideas for his “Regement of Princes” from this text.\(^\text{14}\) The 1450 translation of the *Secretum Secretorum* by John Shirley stresses the importance of justice: “That the kynge dowe mayntene justice after the possessions and the richesses of his subgittes and that he be pitous and mercifull.”\(^\text{15}\) It is worth noting that this translation was made in the year that “the commons” particularly through the Jack Cade rebellion, began to express dissatisfaction with the rule of Henry VI.

The prevalence of military prowess and justice in fifteenth-century didactic texts requires examination. Why were these factors emphasised? To the medieval mind, carrying out these tasks not only preserved the well-being of the kingdom, but brought the ruler closer to God. The “Three Consideracions” emphasised this point: “And verily, whan a Prince loveth justice and executith it, he hath a greete

\(^{12}\) See below, fn 52.

\(^{13}\) *Secretum Secretorum*, p. ix.

\(^{14}\) Perkins, *Hoccleve’s Regement of Princes*, p. 85

\(^{15}\) *Secretum Secretorum*, p. 279.
Hoccleve made a similar point, linking justice both to God and to the king’s coronation oath:

A kyng is, by couenant
of ooth maad in his coronacioun
Bounde to iustices sauuaacion
And a kyng, in fulfilling of [th]at is
To god lik, whiche is verray rightwisenesse.\(^\text{17}\)

Military prowess and victory on the field of battle were also seen as signs of God’s favour. “Three Consideracions” summarises this belief well, stating:

A kynge or Prince in his right should have all his hope and trust in God... in war and battle the victory cometh from heaven and not of the force and strength and multitude\(^\text{18}\)

A king’s military power enabled him to keep and maintain justice. Alternatively, it was also the means by which pretenders to the throne could seize power. Right to rule by conquest was a theme that emerged in the propaganda of three of the usurpers of this period: Henry IV, Edward IV and Henry VII. For Edward IV and Henry VII, the battles of Towton and Bosworth decided the matter. For Henry IV, right by conquest without a decisive battle was more difficult to promote. Nevertheless, contemporary belief considered that a military victory was a clear sign of God’s favour. As well as God’s favour, it was vital for a king to lead his people in battle. It was part of the promise implicit in the role. Hoccleve stated:

But for to speke of corage of a kyng
he of his peple owe[th] to be so cheer
That hir profet he moot for any [th]ing
Promote with his myght and his power
And for his reme and him take so neer
That vnto [th]e periles of bataille

\(^\text{16}\) “Three Consideracions”, p. 196.
\(^\text{17}\) “Regement of Princes”, p. 91.
\(^\text{18}\) “Three Consideracions”, p. 208.
He moot him putte, and in hem travaylle.\textsuperscript{19}

Another important element of a king’s rule was to have good counsel. The issue of good counsel was a key component of the propagandistic complaints of the revolts and rebellions of the fifteenth century. The critique of those surrounding and advising the king was the only way one could rebel against the king: by framing one’s dissatisfaction in the context of the “loyalist rebellion”. It is rare to find any didactic tract from this period that does not make some reference to the need to be surrounded by good counsellors. This point was reinforced in the poem “What Profits a Kingdom”:

\begin{quote}
What kyng wol haue good name
He wol be lad by wys counsayle\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Henry VI was offered similar advice in the poem “To Henry VI on his Coronation”, with the reinforcement of the need to “eschew flattery and adulacioun”\textsuperscript{21} when choosing advisors. “Three Consideracions” also makes the point clear: “Yf the kinage of the Prince will wysely governe he most love, cherise and haue aboute him good, true, wyse counseyllours.”\textsuperscript{22} This point is expanded further:

\begin{quote}
And therfore it is greet necessite to a kinge or a Prince that he be wyse and use good purveaunce and oweth to have aboute him good counseyllours, true and wyse. And the wiser that the kynge or Prince be, the gretter peyne shuld he doo to have wyse and sage folk counseillours aboute him, for to heere and have good and just opynions and true advise upon suche thinges as he will purpose to doo.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Inability to have good counsel would have a detrimental effect not only on the king but the realm as a whole. This point was reinforced very clearly in An English Chronicle:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{19} “Regement of Princes”, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{20} Robbins, \textit{Historical Poems}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{21} Wright, \textit{Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History}, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{22} “Three Consideracions”, pp. 191-192.
\textsuperscript{23} “Three Consideracions”, p. 194.
\end{quote}
In this same tyme, the reame of Englonde was oute of alle good gouernaunce, as it had be meny dayes before, for the kyng was simple and lad by couetous counseylle, and owed more then he was worthe.  

Ashby, writing a few years after the above observation had been made, told Edward of Lancaster:

Loke that youre counseil be rather godly set
  Wele aged, of goode disposicion.  

However, it is Ashby’s instructions about what to avoid when choosing councillors that provided an interesting insight into contemporary expectations:

Be wele ware of falsehood in felawship
  And namly of corrupte bloode and suspecte
  Abidyng in power, myght and lordeship.  

This point about blood and legitimacy was an important one when choosing councillors. It was not enough that they were capable. They had to be of the right blood. Any king who broke this particular rule was assured of criticism for it. Edward IV’s elevation of the Woodvilles into his inner circle in the mid- to- late 1460s proves this point, as it not only led to criticisms from figures such as the earl of Warwick, but to the renewed outbreak of civil conflict.

Linked to the importance of good counsel was the necessity to maintain a good household. The “Three Consideracions” stated that a prince needed to ensure “that his householde, his demaynes, his meynee and servauntz and alle his othir menage ben weel rewld and governyd.” In a theoretical sense, the household assumed a place of importance in contemporary beliefs about kingship. The three aspects to this belief, as outlined in the structure of the “Three Consideracions” and, to a lesser extent, the various versions of Secretum Secretorum suggested that the king’s personal health reflected the state of his household, and that the state of his household reflected the state of the realm. All three aspects were interlinked, and if

---

24 An English Chronicle, p. 79.
25 “Active Policy of a Prince”, p. 38.
one failed, the others would decline. This meant that the importance of the household and those who served in it, as much as the king himself, was emphasised by contemporary didactic texts.

The importance for a king to “live of his own” was another crucial part of many of the didactic texts of the fifteenth century. Beyond these texts, it had been an important political issue for more than a century in England: how much financial aid could the country be expected to provide for the king and his activities? It was a delicate balancing act. Gerald Harriss summarised the potential problem that rulers of this period could face when he suggested that:

A king who failed to defend the realm or could not sustain the royal estate from his own resources had little claim upon his subjects for he was not fulfilling his own obligations, and was unfairly increasing theirs.  

This reinforces the second part of the quote from An English Chronicle, that the king “owed more than he was worth.” Didactic tracts of the period had very clear opinions on this subject. The Secretum Secretorum outlined the dilemma and possible consequences of a king taking too much from the people:

But yf he [the king] enclyne hym to largesse, he shall perpetuall ioye of his reavme. And yf the kynge dispose hym to rescure vnduewly, to take the godes of his comons with vnreisonable and to grevous imposicions, he may not longe governe, neyther by Goddes lawe ne by mannens lawe.

The consequences of these “vnreisonable and to grevous imposicions” could be dire:

For as is redde in dyuers autentike and credible cronycles, ther have been such kynges of this reavme that have done so grete and outragious dispenses, and so charged and oppressed their poure, trewe subjectes, that theire rentes and revenuz myght

---

29 See above, p. 95.
30 Secretum Secretorum, p. 287.
not souffice to bere hem, the which charges is opun iniure, that
the comvne peple cried to God, the which sende vpon the
kynges such vengeance to theire chastisement, that hi[r] peple
rebelled and aroos against hem.\textsuperscript{31}

This passage demonstrates the consequences facing a king who took too much from
his people. It also helps to convey the notion, present in extracts from sources such
as the \textit{Croyland Chronicle}, that God could work his will against a tyrannical king
through the medium of “the people”. For those opposing the king, this idea was
another way through which rebellion could be justified. The “Three Consideracions”
also highlighted the importance of responsible financial management for a king:

\begin{quote}
And to this entent shuld every Prince have covenable treasire,
nat by wey of covetise ne of avaryce, but for the saufgarde and
defence of himself, of his land and of his subgites.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Hoccleve gave similar advice to prince Henry. How much of this advice Henry, soon
to be king and waging war against France, actually absorbed is perhaps another
question. Hoccleve stated:

\begin{quote}
By wyse conseil, settith your hy estat
In swiche an ordre as ye lyue may
Of your good propre, in reule moderat
Is it knightly lyue on rapyne? Nay!
ffor Cristes sake, so yow gyeth ay
As [th]at may strecche to your peples ese
And [th]erwith- al ye schul god hily plese.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

George Ashby made a similar point to Edward of Lancaster. Financial
mismanagement, particularly in regards to the tail-end of the Hundred Years War,
was a charge that had haunted the Lancastrian regime. Ashby’s advice, like much of
his “Active Policy of a Prince”, seems to be a plea to avoid the mistakes of the past:

\begin{quote}
Take you liue of youre own properte
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Secretum Secretorum}, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{32} “Three Consideracions”, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{33} “Regement of Princes”, p. 174.
Of your revenues, lyuelode and rent
Propornauning after the quantite
Youre expenses by youre oune lugement
Paying all that is to youre estate lent
Thus yet shall oure lorde god and the worlde please
And all men foyne to leue you at youre ease.34

Failure to effect good financial management would, as the Secretum Secretorum quote on the previous page makes clear, lead only to rebellion.

Appearance was another important quality of kingship that was stressed by the didactic texts of the fifteenth century, and formed an important part of propaganda. The visual elements of propaganda were important, particularly the symbol of the king himself. Clothing, not surprisingly, formed the most important part of the appearance of a king, indeed it was a vital element in distinguishing the king from the rest of the populace. Thomas Hoccleve’s complaint about clothing in his “Regement of Princes” shows that clothing was a clear indicator of class in the fifteenth century and that to trangress these clothing boundaries was serious indeed:

Som tyme, afer men myghten lordes knowe
By there array, from o[th]er folke, but now
A man schal stody and musen a long throwe
Whiche is whiche: a lordes, it sit to yowe
Amende [th]is, for it is for youre prowe
If twixt yow and youre mene no difference
Be in array, lesse is youre reuerence.35

Failure to wear appropriate clothes would lead to, as Hoccleve pointed out, a “lessening of reverence.” It was necessary, therefore, for a king to be appropriately attired. The University College Oxford 85 version of the Secretum Secretorum makes this point very clear:

It longeth to the roiall magestee that the kinge be clothid

34 “Active Policy of a Prince”, p. 21.
35 “Regement of Princes”, p. 17.
worshipfully and shewe himself in riche and noble clothinge, passinge all othir mennys clothinge. And he aught haue good, faire, strauge clothinge whiche in prerogatyf dignitee shalle passe all othir. For the whiche his highnesse and power is the more exalted and dredde, and the more reuerence is doon to him.\textsuperscript{36}

The key to the whole exercise was reverence. John Shirley’s translation reflected this point:

\begin{quote}
Right conuenient and thynge appartenuaunt to the roiall estate of the kynges maieste, that his hie person be honnourabully clothed and that euermore he shewe hym in riche vestures and clothynges to his peple.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The last closing part of this quote demonstrates an acknowledgement of audience and the need to appeal to them. The significance of appearance was made clear in the 1460s and the early 1470s when civil conflicts focussed on two alternative kings: Henry VI and Edward IV. There was no starker contrast than between the sickly Henry VI and the dynamic Edward IV. This discrepancy can be seen in contemporary descriptions of the two kings. \textit{The Croyland Chronicle} depicts Edward IV thus:

\begin{quote}
He was now in the flower of his age, tall of stature, elegant in person, of unblemished character, valiant in arms and a lineal descendant of the illustrious line of Edward III.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Edward IV was thus seemingly handsome, with a good sense of fashion and outward appearance. Alternatively, a description of a progress of Henry VI through London in 1470 suggests the opposite:

\begin{quote}
The progress before showed, the which was more like a play then the showing of a prince to win men’s hearts, for by this mean he lost many and won none or right few, and ever he was
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Secretum Secretorum}, p. 312.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Secretum Secretorum}, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland}, p. 424.
showed in a long blue gown of velvet as though he had no more to change with.  

Henry’s limited wardrobe meant that he was unlikely to receive reverence. He would not be deemed “noble” enough by the watching crowds.

Richard III was also reportedly aware of the importance both of regal clothing and the need to show oneself to a public:

Putting on purple raiment he often rode through the capital surrounded by a thousand attendants. He publicly showed himself so as to receive the attention and applause of the people.

This example shows the relationship between good appearance and the expectation of the audience described in the previous chapter. Once again the term “the people” is used, to suggest a non-specific target audience. In stating that Richard showed himself for the benefit of this audience, Mancini seems to be suggesting that Richard was aware of three separate things. Firstly, that an audience existed. Secondly, that this audience was concerned about how their rulers dressed. And thirdly, that this audience could be influenced.

The final requirement in the image of good kingship in the late medieval period was good health. The emphasis on this particular element varies. In one sense, it can be seen that criticism of a king’s health was linked to criticism of a king’s appearance. Certainly the criticism of the two “sickly kings” of this time period (Henry IV and Henry VI) centred around their physical appearance. In the case of Henry IV it was, at least in contemporary and near-contemporary texts, his alleged leprosy. For Henry VI, his meek disposition drew initial criticism, followed by his more obvious mental breakdown. The king’s health was important as it was perceived to be tied to the well-being of the realm as a whole. If the king sickened, so did the land. This was a

---

40 Usurpation of Richard III, p. 95.
theme that could be, and was, drawn upon by fifteenth century propagandists, most notably in the pro-Yorkist tract “A Political Retrospect.” 42 The idea of the public relations damage that could be done to a king in these instances is summarised well by Perkins, referring to the Lancastrian dynasty:

The potential connections between the condition of the king’s physical body and the management of the realm were made more apparent by the dubious legitimacy of the Lancastrian kings. Without the stability of a continuous political inheritance, Lancastrian claims to rule were vested all the more in the personal qualities of its individual representatives; physical weakness became all the more significant in the sphere of political debate. 43

How significant is a question that will be dealt with in the following chapter. References to the health of the king do not seem as apparent in political propaganda as, for example, references to the king’s advisors. 44 This is not to say, however, that references to health were non-existent. Certainly, health was a focus of some Yorkist propaganda of the late 1450s and 1460s. 45 In the didactic treatises of the time particularly the Secretum Secretorum, health was emphasised very strongly: “Helthe amonge all thynges is to be goten and hath more than ony myght of rychesses.” 46

The text goes on to discuss what is required for a king in terms of diet. 47 Dietary considerations were also mentioned by Hoccleve 48 It is unlikely that such advice was followed by a king such as Edward IV who, as Dominic Mancini seems to indicate, was abusing his physical health by the end of his life. Mancini recorded that “in food and drink he was most immoderate: it was his habit, so I have learned, to take an emetic for the delight of gorging his stomach once more.” 49 George Ashby commented on the point of good living and good health in the same way, indicating the link between spiritual health and physical health:

42 Wright, Political Poems and Songs, p. 268
43 Perkins, Hoccleve’s Regiment of Princes, p. 129
44 See below, Chapter Seven, pp. 229-231.
45 See below, Chapter Five.
46 Secretum Secretorum, p. 333.
47 Secretum Secretorum, pp. 335-343.
48 “Regement of Princes”, p. 137.
49 Usurpation of Richard III, p. 67.
Prouide you sadly for youre sowles is helthe
Of a confessour in discrecion
Of a good leche for youre body is welthe.  

The good health of the king meant the good health of the land. Being healthy meant that the king could also better fulfill his other duties to his people, such as maintaining law and order and winning battles. That the king’s body, the body of his household and the body of his land were interlinked was emphasised by these didactic texts.

The didactic texts of the fifteenth century served a number of purposes. Primarily, they acted as mirrors of advice for king and princes, providing them with modes of behaviour for successful rule. These texts also acted, as Judith Ferster has argued, as subtle critiques of royal rule, during a time when overt critiques could lead to a rapid shortening of one’s life. Finally, they provided language and a discourse through which critics of the government could frame propagandistic statements. If such critics were successful in their overthrow of the ruling regime, they could use these texts to justify such an overthrow. John Trevisa’s *The Governance of Kings* was arguably used in this way when composing the articles of deposition against Richard II in 1399.

The final element of contemporary culture that needs to be addressed before moving on to the propaganda itself, is that of nationalism. Even England as a nation is not considered, at least by nationalism theorists, to have come into existence until, at the

---

50 “Active Policy of a Prince”, p. 27.
51 “Three Consideracions”, p. 181.
earliest, the sixteenth century. The extent to which the people of England thought of their country as a nation must therefore be questioned. There is certainly evidence that there was nationalism from the top exploited most successfully by Henry V, but also employed by Richard III and by members of the nobility such as Humphrey the duke of Gloucester. The question remains as to whether this nationalism was the construction of opportunistic rulers or reflected a growing national identity among the English people as a whole. In order to address this point we need to examine the contemporary chronicle texts and elements of popular culture (such as the ballads and poems) to determine whether nationalism existed as a pre-condition for propaganda, or whether the propaganda of the period engendered nationalism.

Before examining nationalism in the fifteenth-century context, the concept of nationalism generally should be reviewed, primarily through the examination of nationalism theorists such as Anthony Smith and Benedict Anderson. Nationalism is a contentious term with a variety of different definitions and meanings. Linked to nationalism too are the terms of the nation and of national identity. Anthony Smith saw “nation” as meaning:

- a named human population sharing a historic territory,
- common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture,
- a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.

Benedict Anderson took the process one step further, arguing for “an imagined political community”. Importantly, he suggests that nation and its attendant nationalism could arguably be just as much a textual construct as “the people” or “the commons” as has been outlined in the previous chapter.

However, neither Smith not Anderson see “nation” as a term that can be applied to

---

the medieval period. For Anderson the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment and its attendant revolutions, saw the birth of nations and, by extension, nationalism.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, Anderson refutes the notion that nation states even existed in the medieval period. Instead kingship, the power of the Church (sacred communities), and the dominance of “sacred languages” are all seen as being hallmarks of pre-nationalistic societies.\textsuperscript{58}

According to Anderson, kingship was a form of government that derived its legitimacy from divinity, not populations, therefore the nation state and “absolute” monarchies could not co-exist.\textsuperscript{59} This view of medieval kingship, however, is superficial. Kingship during the fifteenth century derived, or at least presented the notion that it derived, its authority from “the people” just as much as from divine authority. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the links between the “voice of the people” and the “voice of God” were very clearly established in later medieval texts. This principle underlies the \textit{collaudatio} ceremony that saw the people “elect” their new king, a process that would assume special importance for usurpers such as Edward IV. Anderson’s theory argues that such a ceremony was symbolic and therefore meaningless, but the question remains: if the kings of the fifteenth century were “absolute” monarchs, why go through the motions at all? The constant references in didactic texts for the need for good counsel and consultation also seem to undercut the idea that Anderson has presented. Finally, the very nature of dynastic politics in the fifteenth century, as outlined in Chapter Two, demonstrated that if the king was not seen to be fulfilling his kingly duties, he could be replaced, as was the case with Richard II, Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III.

Anderson argued that the dominance in Western Europe of sacred languages such as Latin were also impediments to the “nation”,\textsuperscript{60} because of the link between the formation of national identity and use of the vernacular tongue as the language of the

\textsuperscript{57} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, p. 7.  
\textsuperscript{58} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{59} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, p. 19.  
\textsuperscript{60} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, pp. 18-19.
state. Anderson claims, however, that this link was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. It is clear, however, that the connection was present in the fifteenth century. I have already noted the growth of the vernacular during this time period in media such as the various London chronicles. It is clear that from the early part of the century efforts were being made to change official forms of documentation to English. There was state pressure on the London guilds during the reign of Henry V to change their records to “our mother tongue, to wit, English”. Henry himself wrote to the mayor and the aldermen of London from the French campaign of 1417 in English. One wonders what Anderson would make of the following quote from the Croyland Chronicle, concerning an arbitration in 1447:

However, inasmuch as Latin words and expressions are often made to assume equivocal meanings, to the end that quibblers upon words might not at future times, by means of scruples arising from a sinister interpretation, render ambiguous and a cause of dissension that which was done with a pious intentions, the venerable prelate ordered the results of his arbitration to be set forth in the English language.

Although ironically written in Latin, the notion expressed that Latin could not adequately convey meaning, and so needed to be replaced by English, is a powerful challenge to theorists such as Anderson.

The power and decline of sacred communities has also contributed to the notion that nationalism is a more recent invention. This theory suggests that the “sacred community”, the Catholic Church, was an institution that superseded the institutions

---

62 See above, introduction, p. 9.
of individual states. Individuals within these particular states owed a loyalty to the “sacred community” before they owed a loyalty to the state, therefore nationalism could not exist while these powerful sacred communities were in existence. This idea also falls apart under close examination. The presence of the Catholic Church and other transnational organisations such as the United Nations has not prevented nationalism being part of the present day world. Anderson would hardly claim, for example, that the United States was not a nation in the twentieth century, though in the 1960 presidential election John F Kennedy’s Catholicism was a major issue, with questions being asked as to where his primary loyalties would lie.67

The rise of the middle class has also been used by Anderson to situate the nation in a modern setting. According to him, the powerful aristocracies of the medieval world were an impediment to the notion of “nationhood” as they formed an actual (as opposed to an “imagined”) transnational community.68 In other words, an aristocrat from medieval England had a far greater bond with an aristocrat in France than he would with a London guildsman of lower status and wealth. The concept of “nation” therefore, cannot include the medieval period, let alone England in the fifteenth century. However, it is clear that an urban-based middle class was forming in England in the later medieval period. More significantly for the terms of this study, it also seems to have been this class that was responsible for the various city-based, vernacular chronicles, many of which contained the political critiques outlined in the previous chapter.69 In addition to this, Anderson argues that the rise of print media/mass media contributed to “national consciousness” and therefore formed the “nation”.70 Smith takes a broader view, allowing for the beginnings of the “nation state” and national consciousness in England in the fourteenth century. But even these factors, Smith says, did not flower until the Tudor period.71 This is a view

68 Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 76-77.
70 Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 34-36.
71 Smith, National Identity, p. 57.
reinforced by Liah Greenfeld: “The original modern idea of the nation emerged in sixteenth century England, which was the first nation in the world”\textsuperscript{72}, further stating that “it is possible to locate the emergence of national sentiment in England in the first third of the sixteenth century.”\textsuperscript{73} Greenfeld argues that the emergence of anti-alien sentiment in the early sixteenth century,\textsuperscript{74} comparisons of England to other nations by writers such as John Bale,\textsuperscript{75} the establishment of the Tudor dynasty (and therefore the “new aristocracy”)\textsuperscript{76} and the establishment of Protestantism\textsuperscript{77}, were the contributing factors to the creation of English nationalism. The problem with these arguments is their reliance on Tudor sources. Greenfeld admits that her guide to the primary sources that she deals with is an article written by Hans Kohn five decades previously.\textsuperscript{78} This article relied heavily upon sixteenth century writers such as Polydore Vergil who, of course, was being paid by Henry VII and Henry VIII to denigrate the fifteenth century and to write the praises of the new Tudor regime. All the factors that Smith and Greenfeld mention, bar the Reformation, can be located in previous times.

The emergence of anti-alien sentiment certainly seems to have been a part of the “nationalism from below” in the fifteenth century, and found its popular expression through the various riots that occurred during this period targeting, amongst others, Italian merchants.\textsuperscript{79} These anti-alien riots were also tied to very real, domestic concerns, particularly in the rivalries between Cardinal Beaufort and Humphrey, the duke of Gloucester in the mid-1420s, and the rivalries between the Yorkists and the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, p. 42.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, p. 42.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, p. 43. On other words, the establishment of national identity through literature.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads to Modernity}, pp. 52-57.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Hans Kohn, “The Origins of English Nationalism” in \textit{Journal of History of Ideas}, 1, 1940. pp. 69-94.
\end{itemize}
Lancastrians in the late 1450s.\textsuperscript{80} The defining of oneself against the foreign “outsider” does seem to be an element of English nationalism during this period, which in turn was linked to the language of political propaganda. An anonymous Venetian writer visiting England at the end of this time period commented succinctly on this element of the English national character: “They have an antipathy to foreigners, and imagine that they are never come into their island but to make themselves master of it, and to usurp their goods.”\textsuperscript{81} It was this sort of sentiment, of the foreign invader coming in to “usurp” the rights and goods of the Englishmen that could be exploited by kings such as Richard III, who referred very specifically to the foreigners fighting for Henry Tudor in 1485.\textsuperscript{82}

Analogues of John Bale's comparisons of England to other countries can be found in the fifteenth century through the various writings of Sir John Fortescue. Usually read as legal and political tracts, the nationalism that runs through Fortescue’s writings has not always been acknowledged or appreciated. Nevertheless, his often scathing views on France provide an important part of what appears to be fifteenth century nationalism. The comparisons he makes concerning the interaction between the law and the ruler are particularly interesting:

\begin{quote}
Since our king reigns upon us by laws more favourable and good to us, than are the laws by which the French king rules his people, it stands to reason that we should do more good and be more profitable to him than the subjects of the French king are to him.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Fortescue also draws upon ancient examples to illustrate England’s pride of place as
Indeed, neither the civil laws of the Romans, so deeply rooted by the usage of so many ages, not the laws of the Venetians, which are renowned above others for their antiquity-thought their island was uninhabited and Rome unbuilt at the time of the origin of the Britons-not the laws of any Christian kingdom, are so rooted in antiquity. Hence there is no gainsaying not legitimate doubt but that the customs of the English are not only good but the best.  

Fortescue here establishes a continuity of governmental and legal institutions to reinforce the idea not just of English pride but of a long standing English nationhood. England’s nationalism, therefore, can be traced back further than the sixteenth century.

Ideas of nationhood were thus not an invention of the Enlightenment, as Anderson and others claim, but arguably started much earlier. Regino of Prum, in 900, defined nationhood as: “The various nations differ in descent, customs, language and law (diversae nationes popularum inter se discrepant genere, moribus, lingua, legibus).” The fifteenth century, however, seems to be a major turning point in the course of English nationalism, due in part to the legacy of the reign of Edward III, whose wars against France and the growth of the Commons in parliament engendered a new sense of English political identity. That this period was a turning point has been acknowledged by a few historians working in the area of medieval nationalism(s). Raphael Samuel, for example, has identified the fifteenth century as important in terms of the literature produced and the nationalistic

---

85 Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 7.
sentiments that were being expressed. The pinnacle of these expressions of nationalism emerged almost immediately after Henry V’s victory over the French at Agincourt. At the Council of Constance in 1417, the English delegation were challenged over the right to call themselves a “nation” (for the purposes of the council a voting bloc independent from Germany, the “nation” to which England had in previous papal councils been aligned). The English representative, Bishop Thomas Polton, answered the challenge so that

the right of this famous nation should not be called in doubt again, for it is perfectly familiar to the whole world both as to title and, virtually, as to possession, and especially to the Church, represented and assembled in this holy council. Parts of this answer sounded very much like definitions of nation of the modern period. Polton stated that England had all the characteristics of a nation:

Everything necessary to being a nation with an authentic voice as a fourth or fifth part of the papal obedience, just like the French nation, is there whether the nation is understood as a people (gens) distinct from another by blood relationship (cognitionem) and association (collectionem), or by a difference of language, which is the chief and surest proof of being a nation, and its very essence, either by divine or human law, as will be explained below; or whether nation is understood to connote equal provincial status with the French nation, as it deserves to be.

This statement was not a solitary case. At the end of the period, similar arguments were still being made. In the early 1480s, England and Scotland were in conflict over the border town of Berwick, which was won by the duke of Gloucester, the

90 Crowder, Unity, Heresy and Reform, p. 120.
future Richard III, in 1482.\textsuperscript{91} In writing to Pope Sixtus IV, Edward IV revealed a number of interesting points about English nationalism, stating that:

It now remains for your holiness to complete the work by monitions; for we would that these two nations should be as united in heart and soul as they are by neighbourhood, soil and language.\textsuperscript{92}

Firstly, the concept of “nation” was used by Edward IV, confirming that it did not simply come into existence in the eighteenth century. Edward IV’s reference to “heart and soul” could well fit into Benedict Anderson’s (modern) notion of “imagining” the nation. His identification of nation in terms of geographical territory (“neighbourhood” and “soil”) and language seems to fit in with the statements of both Regino of Prum in 900 and Anthony Smith over one thousand years later.

To establish a kind of “nationalism” from above is one matter, but the notion of “nationalism from below” is a much more difficult concept to tackle. How was nation “imagined” by people in England during this time period? We can trace this imagining through textual construction, in much the same way was carried with concepts of “the people”. It is clear that references to “England”, “English”, “Englishmen”, English people” and “nation” abound in the chronicle texts of the time period.\textsuperscript{93} Some of these examples prove instructive when it comes to examining


\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Venice}, p. 146.

whether there was a sense of English national identity, and more importantly an understanding of national identity. This passage from *An English Chronicle* provides an important clue as to the first notion, whether there was a sense of national identity:

The x yeer of king Harry [Henry IV], the erl of Dunbar that was swore English, and whom king Harri hadde maad erle of Richemund, as befor is said, fledde ayen into Scotland; and saide that he fayned himself an Englishmanne.\(^\text{94}\)

The first part of the quote is straightforward: the earl of Dunbar, a Scottish noble, has sworn allegiance to Henry IV. This, in itself, is not a sign of national identity, merely a reflection of political alliances. The second part of the quote, however, is significant: “He fayned himself an Englishmanne”. Here, the earl of Dunbar was said to be not just allying himself to the English cause, but pretending to be an Englishman. This point reflects a contemporary notion that there was a certain distinct way that English people acted and looked, in contrast to a foreign “other”, in this case the Scots. The idea that England was during this period labelled as a “nation” emerges in John Capgrave’s chronicle, in which he refers to England as “this nation”.\(^\text{95}\) References to England and the “English” also turn up frequently in popular poems and ballads.\(^\text{96}\)

\(^{94}\) *An English Chronicle*, p. 36

\(^{95}\) *Capgrave’s Chronicle of England*, p. 283

\(^{96}\) A few examples which mention or deal with “England” and “Englishness” include ‘God Save Henry’, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth*, p. 49; ‘The Siege of Calais’, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, p. 83; ‘Mockery of the Flemings’, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, pp. 83-86; ‘Scorn of the Duke of Burgundy’, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, pp. 86-
Nationalism must, however, exist outside of xenophobic attitudes. Were there feelings of positive pride amongst the English in “being English”? The anonymous Venetian writer seemed to think so, stating in his work that:

The English are great lovers of themselves, and of everything belonging to them; they think that there are no other men than themselves, and no other world but England; and whenever they see a handsome foreigner, they say ‘he looks like an Englishman’ and that ‘it is a great pity that he should not be an Englishman’ and when they partake of any delicacy with a foreigner, they ask him ‘whether such a thing is made in their country’.

The author also notes a common perception that England encompassed the world:

It is not unamusing to hear how the women and children lament over the misfortune of these exiles, asking: ‘how they can live so destitute out of England’ adding moreover that


‘they had better have died than go out of the world’ as if England were the whole world.98

This second passage, as well as reinforcing the notion of English nationalism and patriotic sentiment also provides the modern historian with the notion that patriotism, at least in terms of this particular text, was neither gender specific nor confined to those in authority.

In the previous two chapters, two broad audiences have been examined: the international and the domestic. It can be argued that many of the texts that have been examined in terms of establishing both an international and a domestic audience have emerged from middle and upper class circles. Diplomatic correspondence, city-based vernacular chronicles and didactic texts, it could be argued, do not actually reflect anything except the opinions and thoughts of those at the upper echelons of society. This point in regards to the possible class bias may well be true, yet what these texts reflect is a perception of the opinions of “the people” or “the commons”: of a broad mass of people. It was these attitudes and opinions that needed to be shaped by the state, or those who were seeking to overthrow the ruling elite. The domestic audience has been revealed to be a complex and multilayered group. The term “the people” and “the commons” was applied to them throughout the period, but the reality as far as can be determined has shown a number of different groups, both in terms of class and region. As a whole this domestic audience during the fifteenth century had a growing awareness and expectation of good governance, and in particular good kingship, and could increasingly make their feelings felt through sedition and public revolt. Along with these political discourses, nationalism also evolved during this period, until it became part of the “character” of the domestic audience and was another element that needed to be appealed to by propagandists of the fifteenth century. The task now is to examine how these elements and expectations were incorporated into the political propaganda of fifteenth century England.

98 A Relation or Rather a True Account of the Island of England, p. 35.
Chapter Four:
Justifying Usurpation: Propaganda and Claiming the Throne

Justifying the seizure of the throne from an anointed king was the most vital propaganda step for any pretender of this period. The aim of this chapter is to show how the successful pretenders discussed in Chapter Two justified their actions to the target audience(s) outlined in Chapters Three and Four. Two of these pretenders, Henry IV and Richard III, came to the throne in ambiguous circumstances, resembling each other in parliamentary coups and backroom murders. Edward IV was able to claim the throne after successful battles at Mortimer’s Cross and Towton, as well as a parliamentary promise guaranteeing the regal inheritance. Although Henry Tudor’s lineal claim to the throne was the most dubious out of these four kings, he was also able to seize power after a successful military victory. The focus of this chapter is the initial justifications that these usurpers made in claiming the throne. Chapter Six will focus on the longer term, positive propaganda that each of the kings of the period, including the usurpers, engaged in.

The primary goal of initial Lancastrian propaganda was to justify the seizure of the throne. Henry Bolingbroke had to account to both an international and a domestic audience for his deposition of Richard II. The centrepiece of this propagandistic discourse was the 1399 “Record and Process”, the key Lancastrian account of the deposition of Richard II. Written primarily in Latin, with a few crucial sections at the end in English, the document was the main part of the Rotuli Parliamentorum for October of that year. It was also copied and distributed to a number of monastic houses, arguably with the intention that the document would be copied into their chronicles.¹

The “Record and Process” was divided into two parts: the first was a narrative account of the deposition, the second the list of specific charges levelled against

¹ Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 167.
Richard. The narrative account follows the confrontation of Richard II by various members of the “lords spiritual and temporal” at the Westminster council chamber. The earl of Northumberland, “acting on behalf of and with the permission of all the aforesaid”, reminded Richard of his promise at Conway that he was:

willing to yield up and renounce his crowns of England and France and his royal majesty, on account of his own inability and insufficiency, which he himself admitted there; which was to be done in the best manner and form that could be devised according to the counsel of learned men. In reply to this and in the presence of the aforesaid lords and others, the king replied easily that he was willing to carry out what he had formerly promised in this regard…

The first parts of the “Lancastrian myth” were already in place in this brief passage. Firstly, there was the acknowledgement of the problems of Richard’s kingship: his “inability and insufficiency”. The second, more significant point was that Richard was allegedly willing to hand over the crown. The renunciation that he signed made this second point very clear, as well as reinforcing the first:

I confess, acknowledge, recognise and from my own certain knowledge truly admit that I have been and am entirely inadequate to the task of ruling and governing the aforesaid kingdoms and dominions and all that pertains to them, and that, on account of my notorious insufficiencies, I deserve to be deposed from them.

This statement was followed by another passage:

And immediately after the same king added this Renunciation and Cession in his own words that, were it in his power, he should like the duke of Lancaster to succeed him to the throne. Yet, since his power to decide such things, as he himself said,

---

2 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 169.  
3 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 170.  
4 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 171. It should be noted that the source of information for this signing was the “Record and Process”. Saul, Richard II, p. 414.
was now minimal, he asked the aforesaid archbishop of York and bishop of Hereford, whom he also appointed as his spokesman to convey and announce his Cession and Renunciation to the estates of the realm, that they should declare his will and intention in this matter to the people. And as a sign of his will and intention he publicly removed from his finger his gold signet ring, and placed it on the aforesaid duke’s finger, declaring that he wished this deed of his to be made known to all the estates of the realm.5

This passage completed the Lancastrian myth. Not only did Richard “cheerfully” admit to his incompetent kingship, he was also willing to offer his opinion as to who the new king should be. The line “were it in his power” is significant in this respect. The tone of the first part of this document is cheerful compliance with his political enemies. The author was keen to avoid painting a picture of an anointed king with a knife to his throat. The opinion of Richard is treated with respect, but it is made clear as well that the final decision as to who will be king will not be left to him, but to the “estates and people” of parliament. According to the “Record and Process” the Cession and Renunciation of Richard II was read “first in Latin and then in English” to the estates of parliament.6 Parliament accepted Richard’s “resignation”:

Following this acceptance it was publicly declared that, as well as accepting this Cession and Renunciation, it would be of great benefit and advantage to the realm if, in order to remove any scruple or malevolent suspicion, the many wrongs and shortcomings so frequently committed by the said king in his government of the kingdom which, as he himself confessed in his Cession, had rendered him worthy of deposition, were to be set down in writing in the form of articles, publicly read out, and announced to the people.7

---

5 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 171.
6 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 172.
7 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 172.
This passage, which immediately preceded the thirty-three articles against Richard, is significant for the notion of audience, or a perceived audience. The line about removing “any scruple or malevolent suspicion” regarding the deposition is an indication of a need to control the potential attitudes of a target audience. This process was to be achieved by reading the articles aloud to “the people”. We can see how this propagandistic document dovetails into the notions of a domestic audience defined in Chapter Two. Indeed, the phrase “the people”, as analysed above, occurs frequently throughout the “Record and Process”. This suggests an attempt by Henry Bolingbroke to influence an audience by showing a transparency in the deposition process. What was being presented, of course, was his version of events.

The thirty-three articles justifying the deposition of Richard II were a mixed bag of charges and character assassination. As stated in Chapter Three, the “Record and Process” arguably drew upon contemporary notions of kingship to frame the charges against Richard. The methods outlined in the introduction can now be seen in practice. The propaganda statement drew upon contemporary culture, in this case contemporary political culture, in order that the charges against Richard would resonate with a target audience, in this case the houses of parliament and the wider community of England as a whole: “the people”.

The most significant charge, in this sense, was contained in the first article, in which Richard was accused firstly of leading an “evil government” and secondly imposing “needlessly grievous and intolerable burdens upon the people”. As argued above, two of the requisites for “good kingship” were for the king to be surrounded by good councillors, not the “unworthy persons” of the first article, and for a king to live of his own, not to burden his people with unnecessary taxation. This second point also emerged more clearly in article fifteen:

---

8 See above, Chapter Two, pp. 72-74.
9 See above, Chapter Three, p. 103.
10 Chronicles of the Revolution, pp. 172-173.
Item: whereas the king of England used to live honestly upon the revenue of the kingdom and the patrimony belonging to the crown, without oppressing his people except at times when the realm was burdened with the expense of war; this king, despite the fact that throughout almost the whole of his time there were truces in operation between the kingdom of England and its enemies, not only gave away the greater part of his said patrimony to unworthy persons, but, because of this, was obliged to impose grants upon his realm almost every year, which greatly oppressed his people and impoverished his nation.  

Richard’s alleged actions were in direct violation of the contemporary expectation of kingship. The use of the term nation is significant as well, as it implies a direct link between the nation and “the people”: to oppress the people was to impoverish the nation.

Perjury and oathbreaking were recurring charges throughout the articles of deposition. There is an irony in the fact that Richard’s deposer, Henry Bolingbroke, would have similar charges levelled against him throughout the fifteenth century for his actions towards Richard between 1399 and 1400. However, charges of perjury and oathbreaking were present in articles three, nine (the charge in this article being that Richard had broken his coronation oath), eleven to thirteen, twenty-two, twenty-five, twenty-seven, and twenty-nine to thirty-three. Out of these charges, a number of significant points emerge. The first is the seriousness of the perjury charge itself, one that was seen by the standards of the time as being of great significance. The tract Dives and Pauper summarises this concern. Dives states:

Dives: Now Y se [th]at periurie is a wol greous synne and wol perylous to euyer comonte and cause of mychil mansalute & schadyng & of manys blod & lessyng of rewmys, for, as Y haue red [th]e rewme of Engelond for periuerie and flashed was

11 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 177.
translatid from Bretons to Saxianys. Afterward for periurie it was translated from Saxinays & from Englychmen to [th]e Danys.\textsuperscript{12}

The effects of perjury, according to this text, are not confined to the person who commits the crime and the people around him, but spread to impinge on the realm as a whole. Richard’s perjury, therefore, was detrimental to all England. Also interesting about this particular passage from \textit{Dives and Pauper} is that it implies that perjury and regime change go hand in hand. A causal link was made here between the two. Not only does perjury cause confusion and chaos, it overthrows ruling elites. Written and distributed only a few years after Henry’s seizure of power, it is possible that this passage was a subtle acknowledgement of the Lancastrian coup that had replaced Ricardian rule.

Of particular significance amongst the general charges of oathbreaking and perjury is article twenty-five, which states:

\begin{quote}
Item: the king was so variable and dissimulating in both word and letter, and so inconstant in his behaviour, especially in his dealings with the pope, and with kings, and with lords and others both within and beyond his kingdom, that virtually no living person which came to know him could or wished to trust him. Indeed, so faithless and deceitful was he reputed to be, he was a scandal not just to his own person and to the whole realm, but above all to foreigners throughout the world who heard about him.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

The notion of Richard’s behaviour affecting foreign opinion may well have been part of the hyperbole amongst the myriad other accusations contained with the articles of deposition. On the other hand, it may be part of a growing sense of


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Chronicles of the Revolution}, p. 180.
national identity, and a concern about how the domestic politics of England were perceived by an international audience.

Among the charges of perjury came the accusation that the king had corrupted the statutes of the land (article twenty-seven) and subverted the political processes of parliament by bringing in “armed men standing around in a threatening manner” in order to exile Thomas Arundel. In forcing this exile the king had acted “without lawful process and contrary to the laws of the kingdom which he himself had sworn to uphold.” As outlined in Chapter Three, the king was supposed to maintain justice. This failure to do so was a major indictment of Richard’s kingship.

Caroline Barron has noted that the charge of being a tyrant is never specifically made within the articles of deposition themselves: “Unlike Walsingham, the men who drafted the deposition articles of 1399 refrained from accusing Richard of behaving tyrannically.” Such accusations, however, were never far from the surface. Article thirty in particular, which deals with the king’s exiling of Arundel through the threat of “armed men” seems to bear this notion out. Article twenty-eight outlines how Richard: “wished so harshly to oppress and subject his people.” Article twenty-four, outlining Richard’s allegedly illegal removal of the royal treasury, refers to his “evil rule.” These crimes of Richard’s further contributed to the need to depose him. As the charges come to an end, it is stated: “that there was abundant cause, for the security and peace of the people, and the welfare of the realm, to depose the king.” Once again, the term “the people” is deployed in a propaganda document to imply that Richard’s crimes affected those who composed

---

16 See above, Chapter Three, p. 93.
18 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 181.
20 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 185.
the body of the realm. But why not use the term tyrant? Barron offered an intriguing answer to this question:

> The restraint of the composers of the deposition articles may be explained by another widely held belief about tyranny, namely that it was shameful and degrading for free men to live under a tyrant. Nicholas of Oresme described those who became habituated to tyranny as living in a condition ‘servili barbara’- of slavish barbarism. Henry may have eschewed the word tyrant for fear of offending his future subjects.\(^{21}\)

This argument, implying that Henry wanted to avoid offending and indeed patronising his subjects, indicates a powerful subtlety to early Lancastrian propaganda, more usually attributed to modern political writings.

The next section, after the articles themselves, outlines how Richard was to be deposed:

> on behalf of, in the name of, and by the authority of, all the aforesaid estates, in the same way as had been done in similar cases by the ancient customs of the kingdom.\(^{22}\)

This statement reinforced the legality of the deposition process. More significantly, the final clause about the “similar cases” implied that there were multiple precedents for deposing kings. In propagating this particular line, it is arguable that Bolingbroke and his supporters were seeking to inject a degree of normalcy into the proceedings, as if to say that similar incidents had happened before, and there was nothing unusual about the way this deposition was carried out. Such a move might be necessary to assuage the fears of a public who must have been taken by surprise at the speed and efficiency by which Richard II was overthrown.

Following the explication of the legality of the process came Henry’s speech in which he outlined his own claim to the throne:


\(^{22}\) *Chronicles of the Revolution*, p. 185.
I, Henry of Lancaster challenge this Realm of England, and the Crown with all its members and appurtenances, inasmuch as I am descended by right line of the blood coming from the good lord King Henry the third, and through that right that God of his grace has sent me, with the help of my kin and my friends, to recover it; which realm was on the point of being undone by default of government and the undoing of the good laws. 23

The legitimacy of blood and the faults of the previous government in enforcing good rule and maintaining the law were themes that would resonate with a contemporary audience. 24 The other important point is the statement’s language. While the rest of the “Record and Process” was in Latin, this statement of Bolingbroke’s claim to the throne was written in English. This claim is the most essential part of the document: the part that was aimed not just at a Latin literate audience, but at a perhaps less educated audience more familiar with the vernacular. Significantly, the only other parts of the document that are in English are the final sections dealing with how the news of the deposition was broken to the former king by William Thirning, 25 and another short speech by Henry assuring parliament of his intentions to rule well. 26

After Henry’s claim to the throne was read out, the archbishop of Canterbury delivered a short sermon. The key part of the sermon were his lines concerning the differences between the reign of a boy and the reign of a man:

When a boy reigns, therefore, wilfulness reigns, and reason is exiled. And where wilfulness reigns and reason is exiled, constancy is put to flight, and then great danger threatens. From this danger we are now liberated, for a man is ruling. 27

23 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 186.
24 See above, Chapter Three, pp. 91-93, 95-96.
25 Chronicles of the Revolution, pp. 187-188 The passage ends with the rather tragic comment attributed to Richard: “that he hoped, after all this, that his cousin would be a good lord to him.”
26 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 186.
27 Chronicles of the Revolution, p. 186.
These lines provided Lancastrian propaganda with a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the theme seems to be that Richard II was a childish king, the “boy” referred to in the passage, and that terrible things had come of his rule because of this fact. Having taken the throne at the age of ten, Richard’s boyish nature would not be hard to exaggerate, even though he was now a man in his early thirties. Henry Bolingbroke, on the other hand, was a “man”, and the kingdom would be much served by his rule.

In these cases, the “child” was a textually constructed one. Richard II and Henry VI were not children when these statements concerning a child’s rule were made. What if the child referred to in the archbishop’s speech was not textually constructed, but an actual child? It is quite possible that this statement functioned also as a refutation of the dynastic claims of Edmund Mortimer, who was the rightful heir by descent through the senior line. Certainly, as the next few years would prove, there were many parties within England who were willing to support the notion, even rebellions, based around the Mortimer claim to the throne.28

The “Record and Process” was the backbone of early Lancastrian propaganda. It highlighted the various themes that would remain important until the reign of Henry V and, arguably, until the end of the reign of Henry VI.29 More significantly, the “Record and Process” reflected both the need and the ability of the Lancastrians to propagandise their cause and claims during this early period. As has already been stated, the “Record and Process” was a propaganda document in every sense of the word. It was copied and distributed to monastic houses, important parts of the document were written in the vernacular and not Latin, and variations on the broad

28 See above, Chapter One, pp. 28-31.
29 They included Richard II’s dangerously incompetent rule, the right of the Lancastrian line to sit upon the throne through claims of descent from Henry III and the potential dangers of allowing a “child” to sit upon the throne, whoever that child might be.
themes also appeared in various city-based, vernacular chronicles.\textsuperscript{30} This dissemination reflected that the early Lancastrian government understood and valued the need to disseminate propaganda and a particular state line.

The justification offered by Edward IV for seizing the throne in 1461 was less complicated than that of Bolingbroke. Edward had emerged as a candidate for the throne after a decade of his father’s relentless campaigning. This campaigning, which had seen several points where a populist political agenda had been directed towards an audience of “the people” meant that the grievances of the Yorkists, and their potential claim to the throne, was well known. By early 1460 having popular appeal was not enough: one had to be seen to be popular as well. George Neville, Warwick’s brother, writing to Coppini just after Edward’s coronation, stated:

He was received joyfully by the entire population, and at Westminster on the fourth of the month [March] at the demand, nay, the compulsion of well nigh all present, both Lords and Commons, he was appointed king.\textsuperscript{31}

This letter reflected the main thrust of Yorkist propaganda at this point, namely that Edward had been made king by the will of all the land, not because he had won the battle of Towton. This part of Yorkist propaganda appeared most notably in ‘Vitellius A XVI’s account of the pseudo-

\textit{collaudatio} ceremony in St John’s Field in February, 1461, before the battle of Towton:

And then it was demaunded of the people whether the seid Henry were worthy to Reygne still; and the people cryed, Nay! Nay! And then they axed, of they wolde haue the erle of March to be their kyng; and they seid, Ye! Ye!\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Venice}, p. 99.

Similar accounts appeared in other chronicles of the time, referring either to the ceremony at St John’s Field, or the *collaudatio* of the coronation itself. All of these accounts reflect the official Yorkist position, that Edward had been elected by the will of the people.

The parliament of 1461 provides important insight into the Yorkist propaganda messages of this time. The primary goals were to denigrate the Lancastrian line, highlight the destructive behaviour of Margaret of Anjou’s forces, and promote the legitimacy of the Yorkist lineage. The parliamentary rolls reflect these themes. In terms of how these various lines of propagandistic writing are placed, it was the denigration of the Lancastrian forces that came before Edward IV’s claim to the throne:

> at such tyme as the seid Margarete, Edward hir son, and Dukes, and other Lordes aboveseid, commyng from the North partys of youre seid Reame, destroiying and spoiling the same in their commyng, neyther sparyng Godds Chirch, the violation therof, ne his Ministres of the same, ravishing and defoulyng religiouse Wymmen, Maydens, Wydowes, and Mennes Wyfes, shedyng in maner of tyrannye innocent blode; entendyng to the fynall and extreme destruction and subversion of your seid Reame: apperyng experiently by their cruell violence.

The language of this section of the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* was emotive, deliberately so. The above passage forms almost a template for exactly the sorts of accusations one would need to level against one’s dynastic opponents: the fifteenth century version of what twentieth century propaganda theorists would refer to as “atrocities propaganda.”

Similar histrionic accusations would feature heavily in the

---

parliament of Edward IV’s younger brother, Richard III, directed against his Woodville opponents. The goal was to leave no doubt in the readers’ minds as to the horrors that had accompanied the Lancastrian side of the campaigning. The negative aspects of Lancastrian rule were highlighted further by this description of Henry’s reign:

And that as in the tyme of the usurped Reigne of youre seid Adversarie Henry, late called Kyng Henry the sixt, Extorcion, Murdre, Rape, effusion of innocent Blode, Riot and Unrightwisnes, were commynly used in your seid Reame, withoute punicion; we hold for certayne and undoubted, that it wol please youre seid good grace, to preferre all thing that may serve to the seid Commyn wele, to the exercise of Justice and rightwisnes, and to punysh the grete and horrible Offendours, Extorcioners and Riotours, and have pite, compassion and mercy upon the Innocents, to Godds pleasure; to whom we bisech to contynue and prosper youre noble reigne longe upon us youre true and lowly Subgetts, in honoure, joy and felicite.37

This section corresponds to contemporary attitudes concerning the need to maintain justice. According to this account Henry had categorically failed to carry out this fundamental duty; therefore he was, like the similarly unjust Richard II, unworthy to sit upon the throne.

The next section of the Rotuli Parliamentorum dealt with the Yorkist descent from Henry III. This claim was placed in opposition to the Lancastrian claim to the throne asserted by Henry Bolingbroke: “by force and armes, ayenst his feith and Liegeaunce.”38 Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne displaced Edmund Mortimer,

---

who had the “the right and title of the same Coroune and Lordship.” The violent overthrow carried out by the Lancastrians was contrasted to the peaceful means used by the Yorkists. In reality, if anything, the reverse was true, but this was not the message disseminated throughout England and internationally in 1461. Edward IV’s lineal descent from Henry III (amongst others) would over the next few years be reproduced in magnificent, and often quite detailed genealogical rolls. These rolls, however, were not consigned to dusty manor houses, nor were they entirely a privileged possession of the elite. Alison Allan contended they rolls were meant to be reproduced. I would argue that she is somewhat hasty in her judgement that such rolls were not meant to be seen by the general public. Jonathan Hughes proposed that some of the extant rolls contain evidence that they were meant to be displayed, most likely in public places. Given the methods used by the Lancastrians in the earlier part of the fifteenth century, and the conflicts of the 1450s, I find it inconceivable that the Yorkists would not have had at least some genealogical rolls displayed in prominent public places such as churches, though direct evidence of such displays is lacking.

Genealogical concerns hung over the next usurpation: that of Richard III from the hapless child king Edward V. Given the circumstances of Edward V’s sudden overthrow by Richard, propaganda was needed to calm both these political audiences, as well as the community of England at large. Previous depositions would have given Richard little insight on how to handle this particular problem. A child king could not be accused of perjury or failure to maintain the common weal. Richard’s main political problem, however, was not so much Edward V himself, but the Woodville clique, his brother’s wife and her relatives who had been, thirteen

41 Allan, “Yorkist Propaganda”, p. 175.
42 Hughes, Arthurian Myths and Alchemy, p. 98.
43 See below, Chapter Six, pp. 200-204.
years earlier, the parvenus who had so infuriated Warwick. Richard’s opening move, as presented in his letters to the city of York, and from evidence contained within Mancini’s work and a number of contemporary chronicles, was to present evidence of a Woodville-led conspiracy against him. He had already struck against two members of the faction, Anthony Woodville and Thomas Grey as they accompanied Edward V to London, having “accused them of conspiring his death and of preparing ambushes both in the capital and on the road.”

More significant was the seizure of carts containing weapons that were allegedly to be used in a strike against Richard. Almost certainly this seizure was a case of “propaganda of the deed”. Mancini seemed to think so, writing:

As these two dukes [Gloucester and Buckingham] were seeking at every turn to arouse hatred against the queen’s kin, and to estrange public opinion from her relatives, they took especial pains to do so on the day they entered the city. For ahead of the procession they sent four wagons loaded with weapons bearing the devices of the queen’s brothers and sons, besides criers to make generally known throughout the crowded places by whatsoever way they passed, that these arms had been collected by the duke’s enemies and stored at convenient spots outside the capital, so as to attack and slay the duke of Gloucester coming in from the country. Since many knew these charges to be false, because the arms in question had been placed there long before the late king’s death for a different purpose, when war was being waged against the Scots, mistrust of both his accusation and his designs upon the throne were exceedingly augmented.

This passage is particularly revealing for examining Richard’s propaganda efforts. Firstly, they are recognised as such, reflecting a growing cynicism of this particular

---

target audience, at least from Mancini’s perspective. Secondly, the methods used are also clearly outlined, demonstrating how Richard was trying to get his message across and the purpose behind it, “to arouse hatred against the queen’s kin.” Thirdly, they demonstrate the hostile public relations conditions under which Richard had to operate. No other usurper from the fifteenth century needed to do so much in so little time.

While questions concerning Richard’s motives between the death of his brother and his final seizure of the throne in late June of 1483 continue to this day, what we can see is how Richard constructed his motives for the domestic audience. For London, Mancini recorded:

As there was current in the capital a sinister rumour that the duke had brought his nephew not under his care, but into his power, so as to gain for himself the crown, the duke of Gloucester amidst these doings wrote to the council and to the head of the city, whom they call mayor. The contents of both letters were something after this fashion. He had not confined his nephew the king of England, rather he had rescued him and the realm from perdition, since the young man would have fallen into the hands of those who, since they had not spared either the honour or life of the father, could not be expected to have more regard for the youthfulness of the son. The deed had been necessary for his own safety and to provide for that of the king and kingdom.46

This notion of a pre-emptive strike demonstrates that boundaries shifted in the messages disseminated in the fifteenth century public relations conflicts. Formerly, actions taken against a monarch would be on the grounds of his “bad councillors.” Richard’s justification of the seizure of his nephew was that he might fall into the hands of such councillors, not that these people were necessarily around him at that time. Public relations discourse had taken an important step forward. One could now

be criticised or justified on the ground of what might happen as opposed to what was actually happening.

Against this backdrop, and only two days after he executed his only remaining powerful rival, William Lord Hastings, Richard sent the following letter to the city of York, which seemed to reinforce these themes:

Right trusty and welbelovyd we grete you well, as ye love the wele of us and the wele and surtie of your own self, we hertely pray you to come unto us to London in all the diligence ye can possible, aftir the sight herof, with as mony as ye can make defensibly arraied, thair to eide and assiste us ayanst the quene, hir blode adherentes and affinities, which have entended and daly doith intend to murder and utterly distroy us and our cousyn the duc of Bukkyngham and the old royall blode of this realme, and as it is now openly knowne by their subtile and dampnabill wais forcasted the same, and also the finally distruccion and disheryson of you and all odir thenheritourz and men of haner, as weile of the north parties as odir contrees that belongen us…

This letter was openly proclaimed throughout the city, with only a few alterations to the wording, the most significant being at the end of the proclamation:

and therfor in all deligence prepar yourself and come up as ye love their honourz, weles and surties, and the surties of yourself and the common weile of this said realme.

Thematically, the reference to the common weal fits in with the propagandistic messages that had emerged during the fifteenth century. Richard both adopted older messages and shaped new discourses to confront the difficulties of deposing a child king.


The biggest challenge for Richard was to justify his seizure of the throne. The legitimacy topos was the only means by which Richard could stake a legal claim to the throne. The process of illegitimating his brother’s children was the most significant piece of propaganda of Richard’s reign, indeed the one on which his rule was based. While some evidence suggests that Richard may have been planning to claim the throne on the basis of Edward IV’s illegitimacy, he settled on illegitimating the children. This process was accompanied by the suppression of the Woodville clique, as well as personal displays of Richard's royal magnificence, described by Mancini:

When Richard felt secure from all those dangers that at first he feared, he took off the mourning clothes that he had always worn since his brother’s death, and putting on purple raiment he often rode through the capital surrounded by a thousand attendants. He publicly showed himself so as to receive the attention and applause of the people…

Richard had learned the required public relations lessons of his forebears about the importance of appearance. Once again the notion that he was acting in such a way as to “receive the attention and applause of the people” was reinforced. Destroying the legitimacy of his brother’s children was to be more difficult. As stated above, there seems to have been some ambiguity at the time as to who would be accused of illegitimacy: Edward IV or Edward’s children. Mancini recorded that Richard had:

so corrupted preachers of the divine word, that in their sermons to the people they did not blush to say, in the face of decency and all religion, that the progeny of King Edward should be instantly eradicated, for neither had he been a

---

50 Comparing this passage to the one from the *Great Chronicle of London* concerning Warwick’s attempts to display Henry VI to the public, and we can see that Richard knew not only how to appeal to a public, but the importance of shaping that public’s opinion *before* he took action.
legitimate king, nor could his issue be so. Edward, said they, was conceived in adultery and in every way was unlike the late duke of York, whose son he was falsely said to be, but Richard, duke of Gloucester, who altogether resembled his father, was to come to the throne as the legitimate successor.\footnote{Mancini, \textit{The Usurpation of Richard III}, p. 95.}

Once again we have outlined here one of the methods of propaganda dissemination, use of the church, that proved so useful for kings such as Henry V to get their messages across.\footnote{See below, Chapter Five, note 20.} What was presented in Mancini’s account, significantly, was the idea that these preachers were “corrupted” by their employment by Richard. Was this Mancini’s opinion, or was this a general perception that was relayed to him by Londoners who were cynical about Richard’s tactics? This possibility may suggest why Richard changed the focus of the story to the children of Edward IV, rather than Edward IV himself.

This process, however, was again carried out through the use of a preacher, Ralph Shaa, the brother of the mayor, who declared from Paul’s Cross that Edward V was not the rightful king.\footnote{Great Chronicle of London, p. 231.} This statement was quickly followed by the document \textit{Titulus Regius}:

It was put forward, by means of a supplication contained in a certain parchment roll, that King Edward’s sons were bastards, by submitting that he had been precontracted to a certain lady Eleanor Boteler before he married Queen Elizabeth and, further, that the blood of his other brother, George, duke of Clarence, had been attainted so that, at the time, no certain and uncorrupt blood of the lineage of Richard, duke of York, was to be found except in the person of the said Richard, duke of Gloucester. At the end of this roll, therefore, on behalf of the lords and commonalty of the kingdom, he was besought to
assume his lawful rights. It was put about then that this roll originated in the North whence so many people came to London although there was no-one who did not know the identity of the author (who was in London all the time) of such sedition and infamy.54

The Crowland Chronicle author shared Mancini’s cynicism to the propagandistic tactics of this period with the reference to “sedition and infamy.” The document itself was entered into the roll of Richard’s only parliament in January 1484, and was soaked in tendentious language concerning Richard’s title to the throne. The marriage between Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville was:

made of grete presumption, without the knowyng and assent of the Lords of this Lond, and also by Sorcerie and Wichecrafte, committed by the said Elizabeth, and her Moder Jacqyett Duchesses of Bedford, as the common opinion of the people, and the publique voice and fame is thorough all this Land…55

The document continued, establishing that at the time of this marriage Edward had been betrothed to Eleanor Butler:

Which premises being true, as in veray trouth they been true, it appeareth and foloweth evidently, that the said King Edward duryng his lif, and the seid Elizab eth, lived together sinfully and dampnably in adultery, against the Lawe of God and of his church…also it appeareth evidently and followeth, that all th’Issue and Children of the seid King Edward, been Bastards, and unable to inherite or to clayme any thing by Inheritance, by the law and custome of England.56

After dealing with the trial and attainder of the duke of Clarence, it was claimed that:

Ye [Richard] be the undoubted Son and Heire of Richard late Duke of Yorke, verry enheritour to the seid Crowne and

Dignite Roiall, and as in right Kyng of Englonde, by wey of Enheritaunce; and that this tyme, the premisses duey considered, there is noon othewr persoune lyving but Ye only, that by Right may clayme the said Coroune and Dignite Royall, by way of Enheritaunce, and howe that Ye be born withyn this Lande; by reason wherof, as we deme in oure myndes, Ye be more naturally enclyned to the prooperite and comen wele of the same…

These passages from the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* form the backbone of Richard’s propaganda drives. The specific issues of legitimacy were reinforced time and again in these statements. It is worth reiterating how durable the pre-contract story proved, and how dangerous it was to the Tudor government, who were, decades later, still trying to stem the story that claimed that the children of Edward IV were illegitimate.

Possibly just as significant was the line that Richard was the “undoubted son” of the duke of York, followed by the assertion that he was born “withyn this Lande.” This subtle touch, implying that Edward IV was illegitimate, matched the English born Richard against the foreign born Edward. The statement drew upon an older tradition that doubts over the succession could be raised if the heir to the throne was born overseas. This was changed in the parliament of 1351 so:

that the children of the Kings of England, in whatsoever parts
they be born, in England or elsewhere, be able and ought to
bear the inheritance after the death of their ancestors.

Richard used this tradition to hint at his brother’s illegitimacy even if he would not, or could not, state it outright. Other propagandistic themes appear in these passages destroying Edward V’s claim to the throne. The accusation that Elizabeth Woodville’s mother used sorcery to influence Edward IV had a number of

---

58 See above, Chapter One, note 84.
precedents, most notably during the inter-Lancastrian struggles of the 1430s and early 1440s, where duke Humphrey’s wife was accused of witchcraft, and more recently in the attainder of Clarence, who was charged with accusing Edward IV of using necromancy to “poison his subjects”\textsuperscript{60}. Here, however, Richard was radically expanding the palette for political accusations. Charles Ross, in his work \textit{Richard III}, stated that: “Richard was the first English king to use character assassination as a matter of state policy.” It is clear from this parliament how such a conclusion could be drawn.

Questioning of the legitimacy of his nephews and hinting at the possible illegitimacy of his older brother opened up, or possibly renewed an interesting topos for political propaganda, that of a moral purity set against the immorality of his brother and his brother’s advisors. In this sense Richard seemed to take a departure from the propaganda that had come before him. Usurpers of the fifteenth century would certainly denigrate their predecessors in terms of how they had governed, and how this misgovernance had affected the realm. More personalised attacks, however, were rare. Charles Ross even went as far as to argue that: “Richard III was the first English king to use character assassination as a deliberate instrument of policy.”\textsuperscript{61}

For Richard, unable to criticise effectively the rule of his predecessor, which technically had lasted only weeks, the need to turn to his brother’s court and the alleged moral corruption there was heightened. Paul Strohm, in referring to Lancastrian propaganda, used the phrase “amnesiac texts” to describe the process of masking or erasing the past.\textsuperscript{62} Richard employed a similar approach to his propaganda. Regardless of what Richard may have done to the princes in the tower physically, textually the vanishing process was already taking place.

The vitriol that was heaped upon Edward IV and the Woodvilles in the following lengthy passage seems to support the theory that selective amnesia was at work:

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{60} Rotuli Parliamentorum, Vol. VI, p. 191}
\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{61} Charles Ross, \textit{Richard III}, Eyre Methuen: London, 1981. p. 138.}
\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{62} Strohm, \textit{England’s Empty Throne}, p. 196.}
\end{footnotesize}
But afterward, whan that such as had the rule and governance of this Land, delityng in adulation and flattery, and lede by sensuality and concupiscence, folowed the counsaill of personnes insolent, vicious, and of inordinate avarice, despising the counsaill of good, vertuouse and prudent personnes, such as above be remembred; the prosperite of this Land daily decreased, soo that felicite was turned into miserie, and prosperite into adversite, and the ordre of polecye, and of the Lawe of God and Man, confounded…Over this, amonges other things, more specially we consider, howe that, the tyme of the Reigne of Kyng Edward the IIIIth, late decessed, after the ungracious pretensed Marriage, as all England hath cause soo to say, made betwixt the said King Edward and Elizabeth, sometyme Wife to Sir John Grey Knight, late nameing herself and many years heretofore Quene of Englond, the ordre of all poletique Rule was perverted, the lawes of God and of Gods Church, and also the Lawes of Nature and of Englond, and also the laudable Customes and Liberties of the same, wherein every Englishman is Inheritor, broken, subverted and contempned, against all reason and justice, soo that this Land was ruled by selfewill and pleasure, feare and drede, all manner of Equite and Lawes layd apart and despised, whereof ensued many inconvenients and mischief, as Murdres, Extorsions and Oppressions, namely of poore and impotent people, soo that no Man was sure of his Lif, Land ne Lyvelode, ne of his Wif, Doughter ne Servaunt, every good Maiden and Woman standing in drede to be ravished and defouled.63

Richard’s account of the immediate past completely omits Edward V. Several previous themes recur, particularly in regards to the flattery and adulation of

councillors, which had been a topos of didactic texts throughout the period, and the references to the maintenance of law and order. However, several new elements emerged.

The contrast between the sensuality of the councillors, and the prudence and virtue of those ignored by this group, seems to be a significant shift in attributing a kind of morality to the sides of the conflict that does not seem to be present in earlier, similar forms of propaganda. The references to the rule of “selfewill and pleasure” also seem to bear this conclusion out. In setting himself against his brother’s reign in this way, Richard promoted a more puritanical form of government that would presumably not be led away by sensuality and corruption. This moralistic line would be proclaimed outside parliament in a letter to the bishops, Richard stated:

Reverend fadre in god right trusty and welbeloved we grete you wele. Acertayning you that amonges othre our seculer besyness and Cures/our principalle entent and fervent desire is to see vertue and clennesse of lyving to be avaucned encresed and multiplied/ and vices and alle othre thinges repugnant to vertue/provoking the highe indignacion and ferefulle displeasure of god to be repressed and adnulled.

Similar sentiments were expressed in a proclamation entitled De Proclamationibus faciendis pro Morum Reformatione, released during Buckingham’s rebellion the previous year. The proclamation stated, in part, that Richard:

hath dressed himselfe to diverse Parties of this his reame for the indifferent Admynystacion of Justice to every Persone, havyng full Confidence and Trust that all Oppressours and Extortioners of his Subjectes, orible Adultres and Bawdes, provokyng the high indignation and Displeasure of God, shuld

---

64 With the possible exception of Adam of Usk’s Chronicle. See below, Chapter Eight.
have be reconciled and reduced to the way of Truth and Virtue, with the abiding in good Disposition.66

Further, the proclamation stated that the intent of the rebels was:

not only the destruction of the Riall Person of our seid Soveraign Lord and other his true Subjectes, the brech of his Peace, Tranquillite, and Common Wele of this his Reame, but also in letting of Virtue, and the damnable Maintenaunce of Vices and Syn as they have done in tymes passed to the grete Displeasure of God and evyll Exemple of all Christen People. Wher for the Kynges Highnes of his tender and loving Disposicion that he hath and bereth unto the Common Wele of this his Reame, and puttyng down and rebuking of Vices, Graunteth that no Yoman nor Commoner thus abused and Blynded by thes Tratours, Adultres, and Bawdes, or eny of theym, shall not be hurte in their Bodies ne Goodes of they withdrawe theym self fro their False Company, and medell no ferther with theym.67

Charles Ross has argued that Richard did possess a genuine piety.68 This may well be true, but his piety was clearly part of his arsenal of propagandistic messages. It is a fascinating insight into Richard’s character that he would issue a proclamation linking traitors to adulterers and bawds. These moralistic ascriptions do not seem to have appeared in previous forms of propaganda nor, apparently were they part of contemporary political expectations. Richard, essentially, was creating new propagandistic discourses in his attempts to denigrate his opponents. How successful these discourses were, of course, is debatable. Certainly, as mentioned above, there was during this time a growing cynicism about the messages coming from the state. The ruthlessness of Richard’s takeover may have rendered such messages ineffectual, if not irrelevant.

68 Ross, Richard III, p. 128.
Establishing the title of Henry VII was a similarly necessary act of creative fiction. Henry had the weakest claim to the throne of any of the pretenders and potential claimants of the fifteenth century. From the beginning, however, there was an indication that there might be problems and doubts. The act of settlement of the crown on Henry Tudor was worded:

To the pleasure of Allmghty God, the Wealth, Prosperitie, and Suretee of this Royallme of England, to the sangler Comfort of all the Kings Subjects of the same, and in avoiding of all Ambiguities and Questions, be it Ordeined, stablished and enacted, by auctoritee of thys present Parliament, that the Inheretance of the Crounes of the Roialmes of England and Fraunce…rest, remaine and abide in the most Royall p[er]sone of our now Soveraigne King Harry the VII, and in the heires of hys body lawfully comen…

The notion of avoiding all doubts and ambiguities may have been a rhetorical flourish, yet it was a real concern to a monarch whose claim to the throne was extraordinarily shaky, to the point where news of the death of Richard’s heir, John de le Pole, the earl of Lincoln on the field of Bosworth had been proclaimed shortly after the battle, despite the fact that he had not fought at Bosworth at all.

The first parliamentary roll also reflected this uncertainty through the dismissal of the pre-contract story:

Where afore this tyme, Richard, late Duke of Glouc’, and after in dede and not of right king of England, called Richard the III, caused a false and seditious of false and malicious ymaginacones ayenst all good and true disposicion, to be put unto hyme,..Whiche Bille, after that, with all the continue of

---

the same, by auctoritee of Parliament…was ratified, enrolled, recorded, approved and authorised; as in the same more plainly appereth…And that it beordeined by the said auctoritee, that the said Bill be cancelled, destreyed, and that the said Acte, Record and enrollinge, shall be taken and avoided out of the Roll and Records of the said Parliament of the said late King, and brente, and utterly destroyed. And over this, be it odered by the same auctoritee, that every person having anie Coppie or Remembrances of the said Bille or Acte, bring unto the Chaunceller of England for the tyme being…or utterlie destrey theym, afore the Fest of Easter next comen, upon Peine of ymprissonment, and makeing fyne and ransome to the Kinge atte his will. So that all thinges said and remembred in the said Bill and Acte thereof maie be for ever out of remembrance, and allso forgott.  

Several significant points emerge in this passage. Firstly, the dismissal of the bill outlining Richard’s claim to the throne through the pre-contract story reinforces the earlier points about the dynastic insecurity of the Tudors. It is also interesting that this bill, written in 1484 when Richard was, in every legal sense of the word, king of England, should be dismissed as “seditious.” The reign of Richard III was rapidly being constructed, in these first few months of Tudor rule, as an aberration, something that never should have occurred. Indeed, the majority of Tudor’s first parliament was devoted to undoing the work of Richard’s only parliament, especially in regards to the reversals of attainders enacted, that of Buckingham (above) standing out amongst hundreds of examples, the other significant one being that of Henry VI, whose attainder was described as being: “an inordinate, seditious and slaunderous Acte.”  

While the dismissal of predecessor’s reigns had been well established by the Yorkists, especially in Edward IV’s reference to the Lancastrian line, the notion of referring to the acts of these predecessors (be they parliamentary

---

acts or otherwise) as “seditious” rarely, if ever occurred. In the first parliament of Henry VII, however, these references occur frequently. Henry sought to undermine the legitimacy of Richard’s reign textually.

The importance of controlling texts, and information, is highlighted, as we get a glimpse of the censorship methods employed by the Tudor regime. The bills containing the pre-contract story were to be destroyed, burnt, cancelled and also to be put “for ever out of remembraunce, and allso forgott”. This reflects the seriousness of the bill itself, but also possibly suggests how far it had actually spread. Certainly these censorship methods indicate that multiple copies had been made and distributed. Strohm’s comments on amnesiac texts of the early Lancastrian period can again be applied here, as the Tudors tried to ensure that the pre-contract was, effectively, erased from both people’s minds, and history itself. The description of the contents of the bill was also significant. The language concerning sedition has been discussed, and “false imaginings” is typical for the era. The use of the term “untrouth”, however, is particularly interesting, as it fits into the broader pattern, that we can trace back to the censorship methods of Henry IV, of the notion that the state, or the king, has had a monopoly in the truth, and that anything that might contradict the state or the king was deemed to be “untruth”.  

Several factors bind these four usurpers together, other than their seizure of power. Their initial propaganda efforts were carried out primarily through the parliamentary rolls that were, as has been established above, often distributed to monastic houses for entry in to their chronicles. Other pieces of information derived from the parliamentary rolls also found their way into the vernacular chronicles, as seen in the case of Henry IV’s parliament. Their justifications varied depending on circumstances, yet all the themes that were engaged appropriated contemporary beliefs about kingship and “good governance”. In the case of Richard III and Henry VII, more overtly personal attacks had become a running theme as well, with a more vicious denigration of their predecessors than that embarked upon by Henry IV and

\[73\] See below, Chapter Six, p. 190-191.
Edward IV, who confined their attacks to the state of the realm, rather than the king. All had faced difficulties in becoming king, and these difficulties had to be addressed as soon as their rule began. What has been made obvious by Chapter Two was that for each king there was an audience that needed to be appealed to, since none, with the possible exception of Edward IV, had assumed the crown with popular assent, although all were keen to make it *appear* that they had. This initial propaganda, however, had to be built upon. How the process was carried out, not just by the usurpers but also by other the kings of the fifteenth century, and the messages involved, will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Five
Promoting Kingship: State Propaganda and Royal Policy

The previous chapter examined the initial propaganda employed by the usurpers of the fifteenth century to justify their seizures of the throne. Such propaganda was designed to appeal both to a domestic and an international audience in order to convince them of the right of a particular claim. In this chapter, the broader propaganda of all the kings of the period will be examined. Dynastic legitimation was an issue for all the kings of the fifteenth century, including Henry V who neither usurped his throne nor had it taken from him. Usurpation formed an important part of the broader study of fifteenth century politics, but was one factor amongst many defining fifteenth century English kingship. This chapter will examine the effect that some other factors, such as the war in France, had on state propaganda.

The positive propaganda of Henry IV has been focussed on mostly in the previous chapter as it stemmed from the circumstances under which he claimed the throne. The main focus of the propaganda of his regime was reactive, rather than active, and will be explored below. Overall, however, there is not much within his time as king that could be classified as “positive propaganda” outside the themes examined in Chapter Five. The succession of Henry V to the throne in 1413 proved to be a watershed for the fledgling Lancastrian regime. Henry V had an easier task in that he did not need to justify so overtly his claim to the throne. Nevertheless, the rumours that had carried through the reign of Henry IV continued in the reign of his son, fuelling the Southampton Plot of 1415. Henry V’s decision to renew the Hundred Years War with France provided the need for a new set of propagandistic discourses. The end of the war saw the decline of Lancastrian rule and the start of the Wars of the Roses. In this sense, Henry V, in the first few years of his reign, can be seen as a propagandistic lynchpin: the point where one set of propaganda needs dovetails into another.

1 See Chapter Six.
Henry V himself was the most successful of the propagandist kings of this period. While certain examples will be examined below, it must also be stated that in many ways Henry V’s entire reign was one giant piece of propaganda, a multi-faceted public relations program to convince not just the English community but an international audience of the rightness of the Lancastrian claim to the throne, the English claim to the French throne and the greatness of the English nation.

The first part of this program was the reburial of Richard II. The Brut contains the following account of the movement of Richard’s body from Langley to Westminster:

And yn [th]e ffirste yere of his regne, for gret loue & gedenesse, he sent to [th]e frreris of Langeley, [th]ere as his Fadir hadde do bury King Richard [th]e ijde, & let take vp his body ayen out of the erthe, and dede bring hym to Westmynstre, yn a ryal chare couert with a blak veluet, & baners of diuers armes alle aboute. & al [th]e horsses drawyng [th]e chare were trappid yn black, & bete with diuers armes and mony a torch brennyng, by alle [th]e wey, til he come to Westmynstre. And [th]ere he lette make for hym a ryalle & a solemnne terement, and buried hym with Quene Anne his wiff, as his owne desire was, on [th]e firther syde of Seyent Edwardes schryyne, yn the Abbey of Saint Petris of Westmynstre: on whose soule God haue mercy! Amen!²

Similar accounts appear in various chronicles.³ Reburying political opponents of one’s predecessor had previously been used as a public relations tactic, when Henry IV reburied Thomas of Woodstock, and would be used again in the fifteenth century by Richard III, who reburied Henry VI. The reburial was an effective way to critique

² The Brut, p. 373.
the actions of one’s forebears. For Henry V the critique of his father was less of an issue than the current problem of Thomas Ward, still alive in Scotland. Reburying Richard II would be an effective refutation of the notion that Ward was the dead king. These were obvious reasons for reburying of Richard II. Paul Strohm, however, argued something subtler happened. In *England’s Empty Throne*, he advanced the thesis of Henry V’s “two fathers”. To summarise, Henry IV was Henry’s natural, but dynastically illegitimate father, whilst Richard II was Henry V’s chosen and dynastically legitimate father:

The paradox is as intriguing as it is obvious: the symbolic strategy which Henry V was so brilliantly to adopt had the effect of disavowing the actual basis of his claim on the throne, through his natural but usurping father, and asserting a fictitious claim, through the implication that Richard II was his “true” spiritual mentor.  

Just how “obvious” this paradox was to the crowds witnessing the procession of Richard’s body to Westminster is debatable. However, Strohm’s thesis brings to mind the “prophecy” of Henry VI, espoused by Tudor sources, especially Polydore Vergil, that Henry VI had predicted Henry Tudor’s future as king. Figures from the past were being recalled to endorse current monarchs.  

This ceremony was intended to do more than prove that Richard was indeed dead. In reburying the “father” for whom he had such “gret loue & gedenesse”, Henry was erasing the misdeeds of his own father, whose reputation towards the end of his reign had become mired in the sorts of accusations that he himself had levelled at his deposed predecessor. For his own part, Henry IV had buried Richard at Langley, against the deceased king’s own wishes, according him a “semi-royal” burial procession designed more to prove the fact of Richard’s death than accord him any

---

4 *England’s Empty Throne*, pp. 117-118  
5 For the use of Henry VI in Tudor propaganda, see below, pp. 178-180.
level of respect. By reburying Richard at Westminster, Henry V started his reign by settling the ghosts of the past. *The Brut* recorded the “gret loue and gedenesse” that Henry V felt towards Richard, whilst *An English Chronicle* records Henry’s “grete and tender loue”. Whether or not this was the case is irrelevant. What is important is that certain meanings were conveyed about why Henry V was reburying Richard II, and these meanings were disseminated to a target audience through contemporary chronicle sources.

The reburial of Richard II marked the start of Henry V’s reign. His propaganda from this time on was to be consumed by the renewal of the Hundred Years War with France in 1415. The exception to the focus on the war was the persecution of the Lollards and the attempted overthrow of the regime with the Southampton Plot of 1415.

The public relations efforts to deal with these problems were framed very much in terms of tests to Henry’s kingship and his divine mission to conquer France. State-influenced histories such as the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* presented Lollard leader John Oldcastle and rebel leaders such as the earl of Cambridge as being tools of both the French and the Devil:

> God, still wishing to make trial of the constancy of his elect [Henry V], allowed him to again to be tested and smitten by yet another hammer blow causing great perturbation; for our adversary the Devil (who is at all times evilly disposed to any good purpose) entered the hearts of certain men close at hand, namely the lords Richard, earl of Cambridge, his cousin-german, Henry, Lord Scrope, an intimate member of his own household and one who was almost second to none in the kingdom among those in the king’s confidence, and also

---

7 *An English Chronicle*, p. 39.
8 See above, Chapter One, p. 30.
Thomas Gray, a knight famous and noble if only he had not been dishonoured by this stain of treason. These men, in their brutal madness and mad brutality, tainted with a lust for power, but even more so by the stench of French promises or bribes, had conspired all too viciously and inhumanly, not only to prevent the intended expedition, but also to inflict disaster by killing the king.\(^9\)

This account was written a few years after the event in question and combined a number of intriguing elements. As well as the notion of Henry being tested by God, there was the appeal to national sentiment in the identification of the traitors with “French promises or bribes.” This last point was a crucial part of Henry’s post-coronation propaganda: justifying the war in France to those who could provide him with money. These included parliament and the people of England generally, and the city of London specifically. And finally, the reduction of his opponents to the position of brutal madness rendered them almost animalistic. They had conspired “inhumanly” against Henry, and had therefore removed themselves from their human peers.

The targeting of the London power brokers provides an example of the methods of dissemination. In a series of letters addressed to the mayor and aldermen of London, Henry maintained a controlled flow of information concerning the French campaign. These letters were written in the vernacular, clearly fitting into the program that Henry proposed concerning the keeping of records in English, rather than Latin.\(^{10}\) Henry wanted his messages disseminated to the widest audience possible. Many of the extant proclamations sent to London from France concern the gathering of “lordes knyghts and Squiyers” for military aid, and “alle maner of men, marchauntz, artificers, or other of what estat, degre or condicion, that euere they be” to provide

\(^{10}\) See above, Chapter Three, note 63.
material goods for the French campaign. The letters that are addressed variously to the “Maiori, Aldermannis, & Comunibus” and to “[th]e Mair, Aldremen and Comunes” outlined the target audience. That the mayor and the aldermen would be addressed is not surprising, but the inclusion of the commons shows that Henry meant to include at least the common council, as broad a cross section of the city as possible. The letters outlined, between the years 1416 and 1419, the victories that Henry achieved in France. A typical missive reads:

Trusty and welbeloued, we grete you well, and do you to vnderstonde [th]at we been in good prosperite of oure persone, and so ben al [th]astates of our hoost, blessed be god…And aftur [th]at we hadde wonne our sayd toun of Louiers, we cam afore pount-de-larche, and bisieg ed it on [th]at oon syde of [th]e riuer of seyne, and vpon munday [th]e iiiij day of [th]e mone[th] of Juill we gate vpon our enemys [th]e passage ouer the sayd riuer, and god of his mercy shewed so for vs and for our right that it was withouten [th]e de[th] of any mannes persone of oures. The propaganda elements in this statement are obvious. Manoeuvring around the enemy had been a success, thanks to God, who explicitly supports “our right”. No loss of English life was incurred, demonstrating the capabilities of Henry’s generalship. Henry’s focus was on a popular kingship, and the notion of a dialogue with “the people”, who were to be kept updated on the progress of the war in France. How that progress was to be interpreted emerged in the letter, which is full of references to God’s assistance in Henry’s mission. Further evidence is provided in

12 *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, pp. 73, 78.
13 *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, p. 82.
14 This number fluctuated over the period, but could number in the hundreds. See Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 131-134.
a letter to Henry written, arguably, by his uncle Henry (later Cardinal) Beaufort, which stated:

Thy royal majesty deems and firmly holds, as I presume, that not thy hand but the outstretched hand of God hath done all these things, for His own praise, the honour and glory of the English nation, and the eternal memory of the royal name.  

Like Henry’s dispatches, the emphasis was on God’s will, an emerging nationalistic sentiment, and Henry’s continuing fame. The themes in this letter also demonstrate a propagandistic synchronicity between the messages disseminated by leading members of the Lancastrian regime.

These dispatches were distributed at least through London, as details from the war appear in many of the vernacular chronicles of the time. Indeed, it is significant that many of these chronicles have more detail concerning events like Agincourt than they do about domestic events that occurred closer to the time they were written in. Linking back to this thesis’ critique of modern propaganda theory, it seems obvious that messages could be filtered through a range of media to a target audience such as London, which in turn gave way to a wider national audience. As Kirby remarked: “to keep London informed was to keep the country informed.” After the well-publicised victory at Agincourt two main concerns emerged, both of which required a public relations push. The first was raising further funds from England to maintain the war in France. The second was to convince the French that Henry was their rightful king. These two audiences, domestic and foreign, have been discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three.

---

18 Chronicles that include detailed accounts of the various French campaigns include ‘Julius BII’, pp. 70-71; ‘Cleopatra C IV’, pp. 117-120, 122-126, 132, 139-141; ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ pp. 109-112, 115-122
Financing the war in France dominated English politics until the 1450s. To address these domestic concerns, Henry faced the task of maintaining public enthusiasm for the war, whilst at the same time carrying out the war in person. This meant that the most effective propaganda symbol the English government had, the king himself, was absent from England for long periods between the battle of Agincourt and Henry’s death in 1422. The flow of information to the citizens of London was one way of ensuring the message got across. Henry also revived the tactics of Edward III in employing the church to disseminate news of the victories that had been achieved in France. This was the later medieval equivalent of the “mass media” beloved of modern propaganda theorists, and an effective way for kings to reach a national audience.

Processions were another way that Henry, while in England, could display himself to his subjects, now facing heavy taxation for the French war. His extensive progresses through England in 1421, after signing the treaty of Troyes were undertaken to ensure a reinforcement of the might of the English crown, whilst at the same time raising desperately needed money for campaigning. Similar processions and public displays also took place in France, reinforcing for this foreign audience that they were to be ruled by the Lancastrian regime. These processions were outlined textually through the chronicles, allowing access to the information for yet another audience.

Henry V’s early death in 1422 dealt a crippling blow to the conquest of France. The treaty of Troyes guaranteed the succession of Henry VI to the French throne, but Henry VI at the time of his father’s death was an infant. Henry V’s brothers, the dukes of Bedford and Gloucester, were entrusted with the regencies of France and England respectively. With these changes, a new phase of Lancastrian propaganda

---

20 The church had first been used to manipulate public opinion by Edward I in his wars against the Scots and the French, see W.R Jones, “The English Church and Royal Propaganda During the Hundred Years War”, p. 23.
21 Harriss, Shaping the Nation, p. 592.
began. Both brothers had a fine grasp of the need for manipulating a public. Like his older brother, Bedford had been in communication with London’s “Maiori, Aldremannis & Communitati.” Both brothers were patrons of the arts, and were prepared to place: “their literary and artistic awareness at the disposal of Lancastrian policies.”

Over time, however, Lancastrian propaganda policies changed. Justifying the claim to the English throne was no longer as pressing as it had been in the earliest part of the century. The main aim now was the justification of the war in France, and this would remain the set pattern for the next couple of decades. The essential part of this propaganda push was convincing the people of France of the rights of Henry VI.

Propaganda was an essential part of the English efforts in France. Upon the death of Charles VI in October of 1422, Henry VI was now king of both England and France. The plan to conquer France, rather than just invade it, demanded a more overt propaganda approach. Here, the use of genealogies prominently displayed in public areas in France was employed by the Lancastrian regime to justify Henry VI’s claim to the French throne. One notable example was the painting of a genealogy in a Paris church showing Henry VI’s claim of descent from both Edward III and Charles V, through Edward’s mother Isabella. A canon of Rheims defaced the painting, but was caught by the English authorities. His punishment was not only to redraw the genealogy that he had erased, but to also reproduce two copies each of the genealogy and an accompanying poem for further distribution. This method of crushing dissent, as well as requiring the source of that dissent to disseminate state propaganda was nothing short of public relations genius. How successful this idea was in execution was another matter.

---

26 It should also be noted that there was a significant amount of French counter-propaganda. See Craig Taylor, “War, Propaganda and Diplomacy in Fifteenth Century France” in Christopher Allmand (ed.) War, Government and Power in Late Medieval France, Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2000, p. 71.
Along with the use of genealogies, coinage also became a powerful propaganda weapon during the 1420s. The early years of Henry VI saw a major advance in this form of propaganda in France. When Henry V had begun to mint coins for the French territories he had conquered, he had kept more or less to the designs that had been in place during the rule of Charles VI:

The coinage struck by the Anglo-Gallic mints of Henry V…had exhibited few variations from the designs and denominations already in circulation…this extraordinary faithfulness of the Anglo-Gallic coin types of Henry V to the French royal coinage undoubtedly stemmed in great measure from a desire to ensure that these coins would prove an acceptable currency among the Norman population.27

Henry V had stressed continuity in his coinage in France, with a few superficial changes being the only signs of the English population. This policy changed radically under the direction of his brother, Bedford, who ordered that new coins be minted “only weeks after Henry VI’s accession.”28 These new coins promoted: “the claim of the new king to be the personal link between England and France.”29 The motif of the two shields of England and France emphasised this link, representing the goals of the treaty of Troyes. These coins of Henry VI were distributed as far as the Low Countries, providing evidence that this form of Lancastrian propaganda reached a wide, international audience.30

Genealogies and coinage formed the backbone of the Lancastrian propaganda efforts in France. The later 1420s also saw the proliferation of verses justifying Henry VI’s claim to the French throne. John Lydgate in his poem ‘On the English Title to the

28 McKenna “Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy”, p. 146.
Crown of France’ outlined for “the people” the events leading up to the invasion of France and Henry VI’s assumption of the crown. This poem was an adaptation of an earlier piece by Laurence Calot that had been distributed through France. Lydgate, however, had added his own prologue, outlining his reasons for adapting/writing the piece:

Trouble hertis to sette in quyete
And make folkys theire language for to lette
Which disputen in their opynyons
Touching the ligne of two regions
The right, I mene, of Inglond and of Fraunce
To put away alle maner variaunce
Holy the doute and the ambyguyte
To sette the ligne where hit shuld be
And where hit aught justly to abide…

This prologue revealed, in a way few other pieces did, the intention behind the writing. Lydgate speaks of the “trouble hertis” of “folkys” which “disputen in their opynyons”. Several significant points are implied here. Firstly, an audience existed for state propaganda; secondly, that this audience had opinions that could run counter to what the state might desire; and thirdly that it was the desire of the state to put away “alle maner variaunce” in regards to matters of state importance, such as Henry VI’s claim to the throne of France. The long-term effects of shaping public opinion, away from “variaunce”, would help achieve public acceptance of taxation accompanying the continuation of the war. Failure to do so could lead, as seen in Chapter Two, to public revolt. After outlining the recent history of the conflict and Henry’s claim to the French throne the poem, concluded with these lines:

Rejoice, ye reames of Englond and of Fraunce
A braunche that sprang oute of the floure-de-lys
Blode of seint Edward and seint Lowys,

33 See Chapter Two, pp. 81-83.
God hath this day sent in governaunce
Likely to atteyne to grete honoure and pris
O hevenly, o budde of alle plesaunce,
God graunt the grace for to ben als wise
As was thi fader by circumspect advise,
Stable in virtue, withoute variaunce.\textsuperscript{34}

Lydgate outlined the descent of Henry VI, as well as repeating familiar themes of God’s blessing upon the king. Significantly, in the last few lines Lydgate urges Henry to rule through “circumspect advise.” The need for good advice has already been outlined in Chapter Three as being an important expectation of medieval kings.\textsuperscript{35} In Lydgate’s poem, which was intended not just for Henry but a wider audience, we can see how, and why, such ideas were disseminated.

The dual coronations of Henry VI, in England in 1429 and in Paris in 1431, form the centrepiece of this mid-period of Lancastrian propaganda. Both coronations were carried out as a matter of necessity. The siege of Orleans and the emergence of Joan of Arc as a centrepiece of French propaganda had made English propagandists such as the duke of Bedford and the earl of Warwick aware of the necessity of providing the people with the most powerful propaganda symbol the regime had: the king himself. In Henry’s case, this situation was a little more complicated than a typical medieval coronation. Firstly, the king himself was still a child, hardly the inspiring, militaristic image that the times demanded. Secondly, two coronations were required, one each for an English audience and a French audience.

The first coronation took place in London on 6 November 1429, staged at the same time that Charles VII, the former dauphin, was being crowned at Rheims. Various London chronicles, most notably ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’, provided detailed descriptions of the coronation ceremony itself, and of the banquet that was held afterwards. The recording of the coronation itself is significant:

\textsuperscript{34} Wright, Political Poems and Songs, Vol. II, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{35} See above, Chapter Three, pp. 94-95.
And there the kyng was sette in hys sete in the myddys of the schaffold there, beholdynge the pepylle alle a-boute saddely and wysely. Thenne the Archebyschopp of Cantyrebury made a proclamacyon at the iiiij quaterys of the schaffolde, sayynge in thys wiys: ‘Syrys, here comythe Harry, Kyng Harry the v ys sone, humylyche to God and Hooly Chyrche, askynge the crowne of thy[s] realme by right and dyscent of herytage. Yf ye holde you welle plesyd with alle and wylle be plesyd with hym, sat you nowe, ye! And holde uppe youre hondys.’ And thenne alle the pepylle cryde with oo voyce, ‘Ye! Ye!’

Three points are reinforced in this passage. The first is Henry’s claim to the throne. It was stressed that the crown belonged to him “by ryght and dyscent of herytage”, as if the Lancastrians wanted to remove all doubt concerning Henry’s right to the throne. This was almost a pre-emptive form of propaganda, dealing with criticism yet to come. The second point concerns the presentation of the *collaudatio*, the part of the ceremony in which the “voice of the people” are allowed to have their say. This was one of the final gasps of the Lancastrian pretence of being a populist regime. This passage resonates particularly strongly with those recorded about the meeting of “the people” in St John’s Field in 1461, who cried “Nay! Nay!” when asked if they wanted Henry to be their king. Thirdly, the reference to Henry’s sad and wise countenance lends him adult qualities the boy otherwise did not possess. This description was a reversal of the descriptions of Richard II as a child used by Henry IV: with Henry VI, a child was described as an adult.

The second coronation, which took place in Paris in 1431, was less successful. The target audience were mainly the French, who after more than a decade of bloodshed had yet to be convinced of the English claim to the throne. The somewhat cynical account of the chronicle of Monstrelet seems to bear out this assessment. Monstrelet’s description includes the various pieces of symbolism that accompanied

---

Henry’s entrance into Paris, most significantly the: “scaffold, on which was a representation of king Henry clothed in a robe of flowers-de-luce, and having two crowns on his head.”\textsuperscript{38} Far from the successful \textit{collaudatio} ceremony recorded by ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’, the actual crowning of Henry in Paris is recorded as follows:

The king was crowned by the cardinal of Winchester, who also chanted the mass, to the great displeasure of the bishop of Paris, who said that the office belonged to him. At the offertory the king made an offering of bread and wine in the usual manner. The wine was in a large pot of silver gilt, which was seized on by the king’s officers, to the discontent of the canons of the cathedral, who claimed it as their prerequisite; and they urged the complaints before the king and council, who, after it had cost them much in this claim, caused it to be returned to them. All the other ceremonies usual at coronations were this day performed, but more after the English way than the French mode.\textsuperscript{39}

Monstrelet’s account suggested that, from a French perspective at least, the Paris coronation of Henry VI was a shambles. The last line about the mode of the ceremony indicates that, as a piece of propaganda, the coronation was not suitably tailored to its target audience which numbered, as Monstrelet stated, not just members of the nobility: “With regards to the common people, they were numberless”.\textsuperscript{40} This account certainly indicates that there were witnesses to the behaviour of the English during the ceremony which seem to be, from the account of Monstrelet, a public relations blunder. This perception would prove to be a running theme in the remainder of the Lancastrian rule, as it fragmented and broke apart in France, and floundered in England. As discontent rose, the goals shifted to counteracting the sedition and finally the threats that the regime faced. How the

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstreslet}, Vol. I, p. 597.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstreslet}, Vol. I, p. 596.
Lancastrian government handled, or rather mishandled these threats, will be examined in the following chapter.

The Yorkist consolidation and promotion of Edward IV happened during a time of continuing skirmishes with remnant Lancastrian forces. Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou were still at large, attempting to recruit foreign powers to assist them in their struggle. A letter that Edward wrote to Thomas Cook, a London alderman, in 1462 requesting a benevolence, reflects the Yorkist message in regards to these attempts to enlist foreign support for the Lancastrian cause:

> Forasmuche as we by divers meanes beene credibly enfourmed and understanden for certayne that oure greate adversarie Henry naming hym selfe king of England, bi the malicious counsaill and excitation of Margarete his wife naming her selfe queen of England, have conspired, accorded, concluded and determined with oure outewarde ennemyes aswele of Fraunce and of Scotland as of othre divers countrees, that oure saide outwarde ennemyes in grete nombres shall in all haste to thayme possible entre into this oure reaume of Englande to make in the same suche cruell, horrible and mortall were, depopulacion, robberye and mansla ughter ashere before hathe not biene used among cristen people. And with all wayes and meanes to thayme possible to distroye utterly the people, the name, the tongue and all the blood Englisshe of this oure said reaume.41

This passage reflects the nationalism that had become a major part of political propaganda since the reign of Henry V, especially the final section discussing the

---

destruction of the people, the name, the tongue and “the blood Englisshe”. The association of political enemies with assistance from foreign powers would recur in the propaganda of Richard III. This passage creates a sense of continuity in the propaganda of the fifteenth century. Themes and messages were re-tailored and retooled for a different generation, but remained, in some cases, the same.

The other major part of the Yorkist consolidation was the re-writing of fifteenth century history. From the start, the Yorkists began to rewrite and re-imagine the fifteenth century. A key component of this re-writing was the pro-Yorkist ballad “A Political Retrospect”, composed either in 1462 or 1463. The ballad begins with the reign of Richard II, the “rightful enheritoure” of the English throne:

In whos tyme ther was habundaunce with plente
Of welthe and erthely joye, without langoure.

The earthly paradise that was late fourteenth century England was soon to change:

Than cam Henry of Derby, by force and might,
And undir the colour of fals perjury
He toke this rightwys kyng, Goddes trew knight,
And hym in prison put perpetually
Pyned to dethe, alas! Ful pyteuxly
Holy bishop Scrope, the blyssed confessour,
In that quarrel toke his dethe ful paciently
That alle the world, spak of that gret langoure.

The perjury charges that were a running theme of early Lancastrian propaganda against Richard II, and featured heavily in initial accusations against Henry IV, resurfaced in the early 1460s. This demonstrates the power and longevity of some propaganda statements during this period. This passage also demonstrates the

42 For the discussion of fifteenth-century nationalism, see above, Chapter Three, pp. 104-115.
46 For perjury charges against Richard II, see Chapter Four, pp. 121-122.
Yorkist appeal to the history of those who stood against the Lancastrians, as does the later stanza concerning Humphrey of Gloucester. McKenna argued that these statements were an attempt by the Yorkists to establish a “continuity of resistance” to Lancastrian rule throughout the fifteenth century. Edward IV, in that sense, was the heir to his father’s political program, and also to the programs of the Percies, Archbishop Scrope, York’s father the earl of Cambridge (who is declared to have been the rightful king in the Rotuli Parliamentorum), and Humphrey duke of Gloucester.

The propaganda of the Yorkists had been an important part of their quest for recognition of their claims, first to a voice in government, and then finally to the crown itself. But with the Lancastrians defeated, the public relations war would not end. Indeed, many of the Yorkist propaganda sources provide important clues for how this conflict would continue. The second last stanza of “A Political Retrospect” provides a clear indication of what the public relations war had been, and where it would become if the earl of Warwick was not kept in check:

Richard the erl of Warwyk, of knyghthode
Lodesterre, borne of a stok that evyr schal be trewe
Havyng the name of prowes and manhoode,
Hathe ay ben redy to helpe and resskewe
Kyng Edward, in hys right hym to endewe
The commens therto have redy every houre
The voyx of the people, the voix of Jhesu
Who kepe and preserve hym from alle langore.

The focus on the “voice of the people” here is a typical piece of Yorkist propaganda, especially the notion in line six that the people were ready to assist Edward “every houre”. But it is the notion that Warwick has ever “ben redy to helpe and resskewe Kyng Edward” that demonstrated that there may well be a subtle difference between

---

propaganda that was pro-Yorkist, and propaganda that was pro-Warwick. By 1463, Warwick had already been richly rewarded.\textsuperscript{50} Warwick was the main propagandist of the Yorkist party, and this in turn led to a perception that he was one of the most influential figures in England. The international audience who by now were turning fascinated eyes to the English conflict shared this perception. Antonio de la Torre, writing in 1461, described Warwick as being “another Caesar in these parts”\textsuperscript{51}, which does not seem to take into account “Caesar’s” disastrous commanding role at the second battle of St Albans. Francesco Coppini, writing to the duke of Milan, stated: “In the end my lord of Warwick has come off the best and \textit{made} a new king of the son of the duke of York.”\textsuperscript{52} Edward was not mentioned by name. While Warwick’s later title of “Kingmaker” was not used by his contemporaries, this was clearly how he was seen. Giovanni Pietro Cagnola writing to Milan shortly afterwards also stated: “They say that every day favours the earl of Warwick, who seems to me to be everything in this kingdom.”\textsuperscript{53} Clearly, the favourable perception of Warwick's influence was disseminated internationally.\textsuperscript{54} Such influence and ability at manipulating a public meant that when Warwick did finally turn against Edward in 1469, he had the ability to appeal to a diverse audience: domestic and foreign. This would prove useful when he fled England in 1470, to find refuge in a pro-Warwick France.

In 1471, it seemed that the crushing victories of Barnet and Tewkesbury would lead to political stabilisation. What Edward IV could not have counted on at that point, however, was a feud erupting between his two brothers, George and Richard. The course of this disagreement between the three brothers sparked off the events of 1477-1478, the end result of which was the attainder and execution of George of

\textsuperscript{50} Receiving in March of 1463 a massive payment (around 3,580 pounds) in recognition of his assistance over the previous few years. See Michael K. Jones, “Edward IV, the earl of Warwick and the Yorkist Claim to the Throne” \textit{Historical Research}, 70:173, 1997. p. 342
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Milan}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Milan}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Calendar of State Papers: Milan}, p. 100.
Clarence. Before this occurred, however, a ceremony took place to rebury the father of the three men: Richard duke of York. The timing of this ceremony, July 1476, was significant for judging the event as a propaganda exercise. Edward had returned the previous year from a French campaign that had been a diplomatic triumph, but a public relations disaster. After heavy taxation and benevolences, the only “victory” that Edward had achieved was the winning of French pensions for himself and his advisors and the possible marriage between his oldest daughter Elizabeth and the dauphin. Pragmatic as Edward’s compromise may have been, it was not aligned with contemporary expectations that a king should “fight the battles of his people”. The reburial of a high profile public figure could boost one’s own stock in the minds of the public. Many of the reburials that have been mentioned so far, such as Henry V’s reburial of Richard II, were elaborate ceremonies designed to appeal to various quarters for a number of different reasons, symbolic and political. Henry V’s reburial of Richard II, functioned both as a symbolic identification with his father’s predecessor and as a refutation to the rumours concerning Richard’s continued survival. For Edward IV, the reinterment of his father: “touched at the heart of the house’s dynastic pretensions.” It was a demonstration of the irrefutable Yorkist claim to the English throne, a demonstration not just to England, but to Europe as well. Accounts of the procession of the body and its reburial were copied into English, French and Latin. The ceremony itself took place at the end of July 1476, and involved the transportation of the bodies of the duke of York and Edmund earl of Rutland, who had also been killed at Wakefield, from Pontefract to Fotheringhay. The main focus of the ceremony at Fotheringhay was the effigy of York, which was described by one of the English narratives as follows:

And there was ordeyned a fayer hearssse, in whiche laye the body of the said duke chested, and above the chest an image like to the prince lieng upright in a surcott, and a mantle of blewe velvet furred with ermyns. And between the image and

---

55 To use Fortescue’s line. See Chapter Three, p. 91.
57 The Reburial of Richard duke of York, p. 1
the chest a bleue clothe of gold, and on his hed a cappe of maytenance with an awngell standing in white holding a crowne over his hed in token that hee was kinge of right.\textsuperscript{58}

The use of an effigy was significant, as by the fifteenth century effigies were used for kings, queens and bishops.\textsuperscript{59} The symbolism here is explicit within the text itself. The writer left nothing to chance in the minds of his readers when he stated that the “crowne over his hed” (a fairly obvious piece of symbolism) meant that Richard had been king in right, although not in deed. This piece of propaganda fits into the larger program that had been at the centre of Yorkist public relations since 1461, that Richard was the rightful king. Another piece of the effigy enforced this point, as the mantle of blue was the mourning colour reserved for kings. As was noted later, the only other person at the ceremony wearing blue was Edward IV.\textsuperscript{60} The purpose of the ceremony was to reinforce the house of York as the legitimate rulers of England, a legitimacy that \textit{predated} 1461. In line with the ceremony was a set of verses dedicated to the duke of York that were placed on the hearse as it made its way through central England. The intent of displaying such verses was similar to other ballads and verses during this period: that they would be read and copied. Certainly this seems to have occurred in this instance, as several copies of the “Epitaph for the duke of York” survive.\textsuperscript{61} It was an interesting example in that this ballad was “mobile” in contrast to other, similar forms during the period, which were merely placed in prominent public places. The verses established York’s rightful place as the heir to the English throne:

\begin{quote}
The right heir, proved in many a land of the crowns of France and England In the parliament held at Westminster He was fully acknowledged and found to be the right heir.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{The Reburial of Richard, Duke of York}, p. 31
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Reburial of Richard, Duke of York}, p. 6
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Reburial of Richard, Duke of York}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Reburial of Richard, Duke of York}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{62} Wright, \textit{Political Poems and Songs}, Vol. II, p. 256. Wright used a French version for his translation, the text of the above lines, in the original, being:
The reinforcement of lineage was of particular importance to Edward at this time. His actions in France had damaged his credentials as a king. Rumours circulated on the continent, sponsored by the duke of Burgundy, that Edward was not a legitimate claimant to the throne.\textsuperscript{63} It is also possible that rumours were beginning to circulate around this time about Edward’s own legitimacy, perhaps fostered by his brother Clarence.\textsuperscript{64} These various factors do not ultimately answer the question of why the dukes of York and Rutland were not reburied prior to this time, but they do perhaps point to why they were reburied at that particular time.\textsuperscript{65}

The positive propaganda supporting Richard III and his kingship was more complicated than that of his older brother, beginning before he made the attempt on the throne. Two points immediately spring to mind. The first was Richard’s refusal in 1475 to take part in the negotiations concerning the Treaty of Picquigny. The fact that Richard refused turned up in at least one contemporary source.\textsuperscript{66} Far more noteworthy was the praise of Richard contained in the last parliament of Edward IV in 1482, after Richard’s triumphant retaking of the Scottish town of Berwick. It was stated that Richard:

\begin{quote}
late by his manyfold and diligent labours and devoirs hath subdued grete part of the Westborders of Scotlande adjoyning to Englond…to the grete surety and ease of the North parties of England, and moche more therof he entendith, and with Goddis grace is like to gete and subdue hereafter.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Edward IV’s letter to the pope on August 25\textsuperscript{th} expressed similar sentiments:

\begin{quote}
“Droyt heritier, prouve en mainte terre
Des couronnez de France et d’Engleterre
Ou parlement tenu a Vestmestre
Bien fut congneu et trouve vray heir estre”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} See above, Chapter One, p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{64} See above, Chapter One, p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{65} Plans for the reburial had been worked on since the early 1460s. For the questions about why they were not buried sooner, see \textit{The Reburial of Richard Duke of York}, pp. 2-3  
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Rotuli Parliamentorum}, Vol. VI, p. 204.
Thank God, the giver of all good gifts, for the support received from our most loving brother, whose success is so proven that he alone would suffice to chastise the whole kingdom of Scotland...  

The letter further detailed that “the chief advantage of the whole expedition is the reconquest of Berwick, which one and twenty years ago, before our coronation, went over to the Scots…” While the letter can arguably only be considered to have propagandistic overtones and was not in itself propaganda, it nevertheless reflected the line that was being taken in parliament and presumably being proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

The propagation of Richard’s military abilities emerged a year later in Dominic Mancini’s *Usurpation of Richard III*:

Such was his renown in warfare, that whenever a difficult and dangerous policy had to be undertaken, it would be entrusted to his discretion and generalship. By these arts Richard acquired the favour of the people... 

Mancini was an Italian and the information he gained came from outside sources as much as it did from personal observation. In a matter such as Richard’s military victories the year before, Mancini must have been given this impression by someone else, a member of the “audience” to whom Richard and the Yorkists appealed. Richard’s successful military reputation was an image that had been constructed and accepted at the very least in London, where Mancini was based, if not in other parts of England. The significance of this passage is the line that “by these arts Richard acquired the favour of the people.” The methods of dissemination here were different and perhaps more complex than what happened previously. An extensive propaganda program accompanied Henry V’s invasion of France. However, the war itself was not seen as a propaganda exercise. Mancini’s statement indicated that this

---

68 *Calendar of State Papers: Venice*, p. 146.  
69 *Calendar of State Papers: Venice*, p. 146.  
changed, in the implication that Richard had used these battles as another form of propaganda to win over the people. War now assumed multiple functions and was for Richard propaganda by other means. It is arguable how successful these means were. While Mancini indicated that Richard did “win the favour of the people”, his use of the terms “arts” indicates that he recognised the underlying motive behind these propagandistic war acts. That such an act may fail was reflected by the writer of the *Crowland Chronicle*, who commented on the taking of Berwick:

> This trifling gain, or perhaps more accurately, loss (for the maintenance of Berwick costs 10,000 marks a year) diminished the substance of the king and the kingdom by more than 100,000 pounds at the time. King Edward was grieved at the frivolous expenditure of so much money although the recapture of Berwick alleviated his grief for a time.\(^{71}\)

From these passages, we witness how a propaganda message was constructed and received, even if we cannot see precisely how it was disseminated. The parliament of 1482 and the letter of Edward IV to Pope Sixtus IV established what the message was. Mancini’s account confirmed that these messages had spread through London, although through what means remains, as far as we can tell, unknown (proclamations of his victories would be the likely method of dissemination). Finally with the *Crowland Chronicle* account, we can see how effective this message was, at least as far as one source was concerned.

Positive efforts to promote the regime were elaborate. Richard’s coronation in particular was one of the most expensive of the period, described by the editors of its surrounding documents as “an especially spectacular example”\(^{72}\). It was also a double coronation, his wife Anne being crowned queen, the first such ceremony held in England since 1308. Significantly Richard’s oath of office was taken in English, perhaps the first time the oath had ever been given in the vernacular.\(^{73}\) The details of

---

\(^{71}\) *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 149.


\(^{73}\) *The Coronation of Richard III*, p. 3.
the ceremony were recorded, with numerous copies made and distributed.\textsuperscript{74} The details of the ceremony have been covered extensively in \textit{The Coronation of Richard III: The Extant Documents}, with its propagandistic purpose examined at some length.\textsuperscript{75}

Equally important were the progresses that Richard undertook throughout England, although it was the one following his coronation that most contemporary sources focus on. The Crowland chronicler, giving an account of this progress, wrote:

> Wishing therefore to display in the North…the superior royal rank…he left the royal city of London and passing through Windsor, Oxford and Coventry came at length to York. There, on a day appointed for the repetition of his crowning in the metropolitan church, he presented his only son, Edward, whom, that same day, he had created prince of Wales with the insignia of the golden wand and the wreath; and he arranged splendid and highly expensive feasts and entertainments to attract to himself the affection of many people.\textsuperscript{76}

The repetition of the coronation reflected Richard’s insecurity over his title. It also demonstrated his favour for the city of York, whilst enforcing the notion of his kingship for the north. The cynicism that the chronicler previously showed came to the fore, as the true cause of this progress and repeat coronation is exposed: to win the affection of the people. The London chronicle Vitellius A XVI also refers to the progress, leaving out the cynicism but perhaps reflecting Richard’s own propaganda line about why the progress was taking place:

> And anoon aftir his coronacion he Rood Northward, and did execucion there upon certaynee extorcioners and Riattours…\textsuperscript{77}

Here a different motive for Richard’s journey was presented, one that appealed to contemporary expectations that the king would act as the fount of justice for his

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Coronation of Richard III}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{The Coronation of Richard III}, pp. 11-12.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Crowland Chronicle Continuations}, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{77} ‘Vitellius A XVI’, p. 191.
country. Apparently this was a motive that Richard would promote himself. Evidence is provided in a letter that Richard sent to the city of York shortly before he arrived:

Ryght worshipfull sirs, I recommaunde me unto you as herty as I can, and thanked be jeshu the kinges grace is in good helth, and in lyke wyse the quenys grace, and in all their progressse have beyn worshipfully ressayved with pageantes and other etc., and hys lorde and juges in every place sittyng, determynyng the compleyntes of pore folkes with due punycion of offenders [against] hys lawes.  

This letter provides a fascinating example of the promotion of propaganda. It was not enough to embark on the progress, or to leave it up to a wider national audience to determine the point behind it. Here, Richard ensured that the progress would be seen the way he wanted it to be seen. The language used in the letter mirrors that of the other contemporary sources regarding his justice, such as John Rous' comments stating that Richard:

Rewled hys subiettys In hys Realme ful commendablyly poneschynge offenders of hys lawes specyally Extorcioners and oppressors of hys comyns and chereschynge tho that were vertues by the whyche dyscrete guydynge he gat gret thank of god and love of all hys subjiettys Ryche and pore and gret lavd of the people of all othyr landys a bowt hym.

It is worth noting that while Rous here seems to be supportive of Richard, he served ends of his own, writing a scathing critique of Richard’s reign a few years after Bosworth, an account that contained arguably the first mention of Richard’s alleged deformities.

All these propagandist actions stemmed out of justifying the usurpation. However as Richard’s reign progressed he found himself embroiled in what could be considered

---

a public relations war. Buckingham’s rebellion had seen the rise of a new contender for the throne, Henry Tudor, who proved adept at manipulating information and using propaganda against his opponents. This public relations struggle consumed the last eighteen months or so of Richard’s reign, and will be the subject of the next chapter.

Henry Tudor’s positive propaganda was also complex and multi-faceted in order to justify his claim to the throne and counter the threats posed by pretenders and other potential rebels. The most significant part of this propaganda was Henry’s marriage to Elizabeth of York. It was obvious from the act of settlement in his first parliament that he did not want to claim his title to the throne through marriage to her. Yet marrying the eldest daughter of Edward IV was too great an opportunity, guaranteeing support from the Yorkists alienated by the usurpation of Richard III. Beyond the pragmatic politics, it was a symbolic union between the two “warring factions” of the Wars of the Roses. This connection was clear from the start, in the summary of the papal bull recognising both Henry’s title, and his marriage to Elizabeth of York:

Our holy father the [Pope] Innocent VIII, to the perpetual memory of this [event] to be had, by his proper motion, without procurement of our sovereign lord the King or [of any] other person, for conservation of the universal peace and eschewing of slanders an[d to en]gender the contrary of the same, understanding of the long and grievous variance, dissensions, and debates that hath been in this realm of England between the house of the Duchy of Lancaster [on the] o[n]e part and [the] house of the Duchy of York on the other part, willing all such divisions [therefrom] following to be p[ut] part: by the counsel and consent of his college of cardinals, approveth, confi[rmeth] and establisheth the mat[ri]mony and conjunction made between our sovereign lord, King Henry VII of t[he house] of Lancaster of that one
party and the noble Princess Elizabeth of the house of York of that other [party], with all their issue lawfully born between the same.\(^{80}\)

The bull continued:

And in likewise His Holiness confirmeth, establisheth, and approveth the right and title to the crown of England of the said our sovereign lord Henry VII, and the heirs of his body lawfully begotten to him [as ap]pertaining, as well by reason of his highest and undoubted title of succession as by the right of his most noble [victory], and by election of the lords spiritual and temporal and other nobles of his realm, and by the [ordi]nance and authority of parliament made by the three estates of this land.\(^{81}\)

Key elements of the Tudor myth came into play in this proclamation, which was a translation of the pope’s original bull, not the bull itself. It presented a papal endorsement not only of the Tudors, but Tudor propaganda. Firstly, it presented Henry’s central claims to the throne. The notion of succession through conquest in 1485 was one that emerged through information channels not just domestically, but internationally. Philippe de Commynes, while taking a fairly balanced approach to the situation (remarking for example that Henry “was not next in line to the crown, regardless of what was claimed”\(^{82}\)) wrote at several points that Henry’s claim to the throne was through God’s will in granting a military victory to the usurper.\(^{83}\) Diplomatic correspondence also reflected this point, with reports that stated that Richard III had been killed in battle and replaced by Henry VII.\(^{84}\) These are in marked contrast to the similar flurry of correspondence that greeted the victories of

\(^{80}\) *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, p. 6.

\(^{81}\) *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, p. 6.


Edward IV, most of which focussed on his election by “the people”. While the papal bull does mention Henry’s election by the estates and the commons, it is the victory on the field of battle that is placed first.

Other propaganda themes emerge in the language of the translated bull. It portrays the notion of a kingdom divided, to be united through the marriage of these two halves of the royal family. This theme would carry through into the works of official Tudor historians such as Polydore Vergil. In taking this particular line the bull became the propagandistic heir to previous statements from usurpers such as Richard III, Edward IV and Henry IV. Each of these kings, particularly in their first parliaments, presented a version of England that was chaotic, lawless and in need of a strong ruler. Henry IV could not draw upon recent memories of civil conflict to back up his claims, but Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII could. The maintenance of peace formed one of the most elaborate passages of Fabyan’s chronicle, in which Henry was described:

suffycient lawde and prayse can nat be put in wrytynge, consyderynge y continuell peace and tranqullytie whiche he kept this his lande and comones in, with also this subduynge of his outewarde enemyes of the realmes of Fraunce and Scotlande, by his great polycy  and wysdome, more than by shedynge of Cristen blode or cruell warre: and ouer ruled soo myghtely his subgectes, and mynystered to them suche iustycye,..

Many of the previous expectations of kingship are covered in this passage. It is significant that Henry’s diplomatic abilities are also emphasised, reflecting a shift away from the battlefield emphasis of kings such as Henry V. But ending the civil conflicts tended to be emphasised in the pro-Tudor literature the most. This theme

85 See above, Chapter Four, pp. 127-128.
86 Anglica Historia, p. 149.
was reinforced in John Skelton’s poem concerning Henry VII, written three years after Bosworth:

This realme a seasone stode in great ieopardie
Whene that noble prince disceased king edwarde
Whiche In his dayes gate honore ful noblye
After his diceasse nyghe hande al was marrede
Eche regione this londe disp ised myschyef whene they harde
Wherefore now Reioyse fore ioyouse may thou bee
To se thy king so flowring in dignytie.\(^{88}\)

The usual Tudor themes about reunification, not just of the noble halves of the royal family, but of the realm itself are all present in this passage. These were the justifications that Henry had put forward for his own claim to the throne. In many ways they were most effective, and were certainly the most influential, shaping how fifteenth century history would be written right down to the twentieth century.

The unification of the two halves of the family in the marriage of Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of York was expressed symbolically through the combination of the two roses, red and white. This motif appeared again and again throughout the latter part of the fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth. Songs and ballads such as “The Roses Entwined” presented imagery that reinforced the positive aspects of each house:

“The rose it is a ryall floure”
“The red or the white? shewe his colour!”
“bothe be full swete & of lyke savoure…”

The next verse continued:

“I loue the rose both red & white.”
“Is that your pure perfite appetite?”
“to here talke of them is my delite!”
“Ioyed may we be,

oure prince to se,
& rosys thre!"89

V.J Scattergood interpreted this last line to mean the imminent arrival of Henry’s first son, Arthur.90 Certainly, the birth of Arthur would inspire a new round of Arthurian tinged propaganda.91 But the genre in which the roses entwined was most effective was visual media such as processions and entrances into cities. An excellent account of the proposed plan for Henry and Elizabeth’s entrance into York in 1486 was preserved in the York city records. The third part of the entry into the city was recorded as follows:

Thirdly, at the entre of the citie and first bar of the same shalbe craftily conceyvid a place in maner of a heven of grete joy and anglicall armony; under the heven shalbe a world desolaite full of treys and floures, in the which shall spryng up a rioall rich rede rose convaide by viace unto the which rose shall appeyre an other rich white rose unto whome so being to gedre all other floures shall lowte and evidently yeve suffrantie, shewing the rose to be principall of all floures…and thereupon shall come fro a cloude a crowne covering the roses…92

Sydney Anglo commented that many audiences witnessing such pageantry would fail to appreciate the subtlety of much of the imagery.93 It is difficult to believe, however, that any contemporary audience could have failed to see the significance of the part of Henry’s entrance mentioned above. The supremacy of this royal rose to the other flowers echoes the commentary of “The Roses Entwined”. The notion of a new rose combining elements of the two both reinforced Henry’s dynastic pretensions, whilst at the same time suggesting that the Tudor line was something new. The combined line would have supremacy over the other flowers: other potential dynastic lines that may arise. In this way, it could be seen that these early

89 Robbins, *Historical Poems*, p. 95.
91 See below, pp.181-186.
92 *York House Books*, vol. II, pp. 482.
93 Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Politics*, pp. 82, 94.
emphasis on the combined rose may have been a subtle refutation to the possible claims of the earl of Warwick who was, barring the act of attainder against his father, the rightful king.

Other elements to the entrance into York also figure as important points of Tudor propaganda. Lineal references were further reinforced by the following part of the pageant:

Fiftly shalbe on the hight of Ousebrigge a rioall treyne and therin sodanely appering set togidder in counsail sex kinges crownded betokining the sex Henries, which after the sight had of the king with certaine convenient laisour avisidly shall commit a ceptour unto Salamon cledd as king...

It was Solomon’s task to introduce the Henries to Henry Tudor. The outline for the pageant attributes the following speech from him to Henry:

Most prudent prince of pruved prevision,
Their primordial princes of this principalite
Haith preparate your reame the vijth by succession
Rermitting reame als right to your rialtie
Their ar kinges condigne of your consanguinitie,
Ful riall and rightwose in rewle of ther regence
And ful lordly thai execute the lawes of ther legence.

And further long in the speech:

Now reane ye reule ye your reame rightwosly
By politike providence as God haith indewid.

The connection of Henry VII to the previous Henries was an obvious dynastic ploy. A similar passage occurred in Fabyan’s New Chronicles of England and France, in which it was written that Henry was: “discendyd lineally from Henry iiiith lately

kyng of this realme.”\textsuperscript{97} It seems that these lines acted as an amnesiac text, erasing the Yorkist line from recent history. The York pageant reinforces the need for good rule. The notion of suppression of sedition emerged in another speech by “David’, who stated:

\begin{quote}
Seth that it is your citie not filid with dissavaunce  
Trew and bold to your blode not dreading perturbance.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

“David” also helped to emphasise some of the patriotic/nationalistic qualities of the Tudor regime, stating to Henry:

\begin{quote}
Your actes victorious be noted principall  
In maner more noble then Charlis of Fraunce…\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

Two things should be remembered when reading these passages. Firstly, they were written for a pageant that was organised by civic authorities. However, as Anglo pointed out, these entry ceremonies acted as both “an expression of the thematic material and symbolism which contemporaries believed would appeal to the king” as well providing themes that would “become fundamental elements of Early Tudor propaganda.”\textsuperscript{100} Secondly, these passages reflect the concerns of a city that had until Bosworth, been more or less pro-Richard III.\textsuperscript{101} There was a pleading element to the city’s pageant for Henry, particularly in the speeches that were given by the city’s legendary founder, Ebrank. Speaking in verse, he stated:

\begin{quote}
Please it I besuch you for my remembrance  
Seth that I am premative of your progenie  
Shew your grace to this citie with such aboundedance
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{97} The New Chronicles of England and France, p. 672.
\textsuperscript{100} Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Politics, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{101} Historians have perhaps been a little quick to judge the north in the 1480s as being pro-Ricardian, as there is certainly evidence within the York House Books of seditious speech being uttered against Richard, not only in Richard’s general bills against sedition, but in specific charges that were made concerning the comments of one “Master Roger Brere”, who had stated of Richard in mid 1482 “What might he do for the cite? Nothing bot gryn of us.” Other slanders were also reported in early 1483. This provides the counterpoint to the oft-quoted line concerning the city’s “grete hevynesses” at news of Richard’s death See York House Books, vol. II, pp. 696, 707.
As the reame may recover in to prosperite.

And then further:

It is knawne in trueth of grete experience
For your blode this citie made never degression
As recordith by the grete hurt for blode of your excellence
Wherfor the rather I pray for compassion
And to mynd how this citie of old and pure affeccion
Gladdith and inioith your high grace and commyng
With our concent knowing you ther sufferaine and king. 102

These lines are an interesting addition to the other points that were expressed in the verses and imagery of this pageant. We have already seen through Sydney Anglo’s comments that these civic processions could function on two levels, in that they both reflected state propaganda and suggested other possible symbols and themes for that propaganda. They also functioned, as can be seen from the above lines, as propaganda on behalf of the city. The message was fairly clear. The city had always been loyal to Henry. This loyalty therefore required compassion from Henry, acknowledging the perception that there might have been recent “mistakes’ in where the loyalty of the city actually lay. While it cannot be demonstrated that Henry actually read the account of the city’s sorrow at Richard III’s death, it is telling that this account of the pageant was entered into the same source. This propagandistic statement concerning the city’s loyalty worked on two levels, firstly as part of an oral/visual display and secondly as a piece of textual propaganda in the city records.

Records of other entrances into cities and towns during this period also survive. A number of elements common to all, became part of the larger Tudor propaganda trends. As seen in the York procession, references to a mythical British past, as well as more contemporary figures such as Henry VI, featured strongly. The Worcester procession, for example, was to feature a speech by “Henry VI”. As it turned out, this speech was never used, but was nevertheless preserved. A particularly telling passage revealed the essential Tudor construction of Henry VI in his statement:

Mek and mercifull was I evermore
From Crueltie refreyning and from Vengeaunce
God hath me rewarded largely therfor
And gentil Cosyn, sith thou hast this Chaunce
To be Myn Heire, use wele my Governaunce.
Pytie with Mercy, have alwey in thy Cure,
For by Meknesse thou shalt longest endure.¹⁰³

There are two points to be drawn from this proposed speech. Firstly, it fitted into the
general Tudor, and as I shall argue Ricardian, construction of Henry VI as a meek,
saintly figure.¹⁰⁴ The other element that is important is the description of Henry VII
by Henry VI as being “Myn Heire,” and “gentyl Cosyn”, reinforcing a notion both of
blood kinship and monarchical similarity. This theme would be further developed
through the introduction of Henry VI’s “prophecy” during the Readeption
concerning Henry Tudor, as expressed by writers such as Polydore Vergil:

And so Jaspar tooke the boy Henry from the wife of the lord
Harbert, and browght him with himself a little after whan he
cam to London unto king henry. Whan the king saw the
chylde, beholding within himself without speache a pretty
space the haultie disposition therof, he ys reportyd to have
sayd to the noble men ther present, ‘This trewly, this is he unto
whom both we and our adversaries must yeald and geave over
the dominion.’¹⁰⁵

This idea was already being developed through Henry’s reign and served the
purpose of reinforcing Henry’s Lancastrian heritage, as well as the notion that the
Tudors were somehow to supersede both the Lancastrian and the Yorkist lines.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Politics, p. 29.
¹⁰⁴ For further construction of this figure see below, Chapter Eight.
¹⁰⁵ Ellis, Henry (ed.) Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History Comprising
p. 135.
The elevation of Henry VI also formed a part of the anti-Richard III message, especially in the early sixteenth century, as the story began to grow that Richard had murdered Henry VI himself, as shown in the pro-Tudor elements of Fabyan’s chronicle:

Of y dethe of this prynce [Henry VI] dyurse tales were tolde:
but the moost comon fame wente, that he was stykked with a
dagger by the handes of the duke of Glouceter.\footnote{New Chronicles of England and France, p. 662.}

This attribution of the crime to Richard formed an important part of the growing Tudor character assassination of their immediate predecessor. As well as reinforcing the negative image of Richard, Henry VI’s murder also helped fit into the new image that was constructed of Henry VI as a saintly martyr. The “cult of Henry VI” dated back to the latter half of Edward IV’s reign, leading to measures by Edward in 1479 to bar pilgrims from Henry’s tomb, and order shrines to Henry in cathedrals such as Ripon and Durham to be removed.\footnote{J.W. McKenna, ‘Piety and Propaganda: the Cult of Henry VI’ in Beryl Rowland (ed.) Chaucer and Middle English Studies, Allen and Unwin: London, 1974. p. 74} Richard III had tried, arguably, to adopt the cult to his own ends by ordering the reburial of Henry VI in 1484. This move, a clear imitation of Henry V’s reburial of Richard II, could be interpreted as part of Richard’s broader propagandistic program of criticising his older brother.\footnote{‘Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of Henry VI’, p. 75.} For Henry VII, this program was to be taken one step further. Henry VI was not only to be reburied, or re-reburied, but he was to be canonised as well.\footnote{J.P.D. Cooper, Propaganda and the Tudor State: Political Culture in the West Country, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2003. p. 36} Both these moves, however, failed, causing what must have been some embarrassment for Henry VII. The cult of Henry VI, strong between the late 1470s and the late 1490s, began to die out in the reign of Henry VIII, whose propaganda needs became substantially different from those of his father.

Visual elements were also an important part of Tudor propaganda. Symbols that were used by the early Tudors included the portcullis and the greyhound. The
portcullis made reference to the Beaufort line of descent and the greyhound, while also connected to the Beauforts, had “been favoured by Edward III and especially by his Lancastrian heirs”\(^{110}\). Other kings had used symbols, badges and visuals before Henry Tudor, but it could be argued that no other king of this period had a greater need to stress his dynastic connections than Henry did. His use of these symbols of dynastic right is also quite significant. The chapel at King’s College, Cambridge, for example, contains what Sydney Anglo referred to as a “profuse scattering” of these Tudor images, as do other sites such as Henry VII’s chapel in Westminster Abbey and St George’s chapel at Windsor.\(^{111}\) The goal was simple: to impress upon all those who saw these symbols the *legitimacy* of the Tudor line, and its connections to previous English kings such as Edward III and Henry IV.

The final part of Tudor propaganda was the employment of a much larger dynastic scheme, that of the “mythical British history” that would not only connect the Tudor dynast to their immediate “predecessors”, but to the British kings of myth and legend, such as Arthur, Cadwallader and England’s legendary founder Brutus. This process had been carried out by previous kings, most notably Edward IV, who constructed as part of his coronation roll elaborate genealogical charts connecting the house of York to the lines of Arthur, Cadwallader and further back down the line, Biblical figures such as Noah.\(^{112}\) There had been due to the dynastic conflicts of the mid-fifteenth century: “a proliferation of elaborate genealogical rolls which sought to trace the kings of England back to their remote forebears.” Anglo also argued that such constructions could be interpreted as “the development of a paper chivalry which grew as the feudal bases of society became increasingly remote and ineffective.”\(^{113}\) How much of this can be attributed to the insecurities of the upper aristocracy, some of whom also had elaborate genealogical rolls drawn up for

\(^{110}\) Sydney Anglo, ‘Henry VII’s Dynastic Hieroglyphs’ in *The Historian*, 10, p. 5.
\(^{111}\) ‘Henry VII’s Dynastic Hieroglyphs’, p. 5.
themselves\textsuperscript{114}, is debatable. The increasing insecurities of the monarchs during this period were in no doubt, however, and these genealogical rolls expressed, in part, these insecurities.

Part of this insecurity, and the questing for a mythical past, could be found in the popular culture of the time, particularly in the works concerning King Arthur. William Caxton in particular, in his epilogue to \textit{Ordre of Chyvalry}, summarised the mood well. In an exhortation to his readers, Caxton stated:

\begin{quote}
O ye knyghtes of Englond, where is the custome and usage of noble chivalry that was used in tho dayes? What do ye now but go to the baynes and playe atte dyse? And some not wel advised use not honest and good rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode. Leve this. Leve it and rede the noble volumes of Saynt Graal, of Lancelot, of Galaad, of Trystram, of Perse Forest, of Percyval, of Gawayn and many mo. Ther shalle ye see manhode, curtosye and gentylnesse. And loke in latter dayes of the noble actes syth the conquest, as in Kyng Rychard dayes Cuer du Lyon, Edward the Fyrste and the Thyrd and his noble sones, Syre Robert Knolles, Syr Johan Hawkwode, Syr Johon Chaundos and Syre Gaultier Mauny. Rede Froissart. And also behold that vyctorious and noble kynge, Harry the Fyfthe, and the capytayns under hym, his noble bretheren, th’Erle of Salysbury Montagu and many other, whoos names shyne gloriously by their virtuous noblesse and actes that they did in th’onour of th’ordre of chyvalry.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

In his introduction to Malory’s \textit{Morte D’Arthur} itself, Caxton wrote:

\begin{quote}
But al is wryton for our doctrine and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but t’excersysye and folowe vertu, by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} The \textit{Rous Roll}, for example, was drawn up by John Rous on behalf of the Nevilles, traced their line back to the mythical Guy of Warwick, alleged to be one of Arthur’s knights.

These two passages are particularly revealing for the manipulation of both historical attitudes and the reflection of contemporary attitudes. The first passage appeared during the reign of Richard III. It revealed the notion of a decline in chivalric acts, and that the examples that would serve as guidelines could be found in remote British history. Caxton commented that “there can be no man reasonably gaynsaye but there was a kyng of thys lande named Arthur,” reflecting a contemporary belief in Arthur’s existence. It is debatable how prevalent these attitudes were amongst the English audiences as a whole, but Henry could build upon the belief that there was a decline in “good and honest rule” and use it as a justification of his own seizure of the throne. The recent examples that Caxton used are also quite illuminating, particularly the references to Edward III’s sons and Henry V, reflecting a pro-Lancastrian approach. The second quote, from the Morte D’Arthur prologue, was produced only weeks before Richard III’s death at Bosworth. This quote provides the historian with a cultural indication that virtue could be adopted as a propaganda tactic by rulers such as Richard III and Henry VII, as seen through both parliamentary documents and proclamations of the time. How much of a concern this was to contemporary audiences is debatable. For Caxton’s audience, however, those who were able to afford these now printed texts, there was an assumption that virtue in rulers may have been at least a factor in late fifteenth century political discourse, and that one way of critiquing this factor in contemporary leaders was to examine the virtue, or lack thereof, of leaders past, whether mythical or otherwise.

Henry VII’s adaptation of the British history for his own purposes was similar to that of Edward IV as described above, and reflected, perhaps to an even greater degree, the insecurities of his own position. This British history was expressed through

---

116 Caxton’s Own Prose, p. 109.
117 Caxton’s Own Prose, p. 108.
genealogical rolls, as well as visual imagery and banners, the most notable one being the “Rouge Pursuivant”, the Red Dragon of Wales, which came to represent the Tudor line as much as the roses entwined. Whilst Henry did not make many references to his Welsh heritage, this reference was perhaps the most blatant. It also signposted the mythical British history that Henry would draw upon in order to further justify his claim to the throne. This was the banner that was used by the Tudor forces at Bosworth. Upon Henry’s triumphant entry into the city of London immediately after the battle, this banner was prominently displayed.\(^{118}\) Edward IV had also employed the red dragon symbolising both a mythical British past with a connection to Wales and specific political prophecies, usually attributed to “Merlin”, concerning the battle between two dragons, red and white, over the future of England, with the red dragon representing Britons against the Saxons, or whatever other outsider fitted the bill at that particular time.\(^{119}\) Another Arthurian version of the prophecy meant that the outsider that the dragon fought against was a bear. This was further altered in Caxton’s edition by the transformation of the bear into a boar, reflecting, none too subtly, Richard III’s banner of the white boar.\(^{120}\) The Coventry pageant, for example, contained lines stating that Henry Tudor was Cadwallader’s heir:

Cadwaladers Blodde lynyally descending  
Longe hath bee towlde of such a Prince coming,  
Wherfor Frendes, if that I shal not lye  
This same is the Fulfiler of the Profecye.\(^{121}\)

This was an example of civic pageantry reflecting state propaganda. It is interesting to note that this was the same entry ceremony that originally contained speeches by “Henry VI”.\(^{122}\) It is possible that the speeches concerning the mythical British ancestors of Henry Tudor were perhaps of equal significance to those concerning his

\(^{118}\) *Great Chronicle of London*, pp. 238-239.  
\(^{119}\) Anglo, ‘Henry VII’s Dynastic Hieroglyphs’, p. 7. Also Anglo, ‘The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda’, p. 18  
\(^{120}\) Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy*, p. 306  
\(^{121}\) Quoted in Anglo, ‘The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda’, p. 17  
\(^{122}\) See above.
actual ancestors. In any event, this mythical history was used sporadically over the next few decades. Court poets such as Bernard Andre used it when reviewing the lineage of Henry VII. Writers such as Polydore Vergil would use it when it came to writing the history of England, at least from the Tudor perspective. Much like the political prophecies circulating at the time, the intention behind the use of the British history seems to have been, at least in part, to give the sense that the rule of the Tudors was somehow preordained, and a return to an older form of governing that had been “lost” with the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons. That Polydore Vergil contradicted these ideas, at least in his rejection of figures such as Arthur, indicates that these various works may have catered for multiple audiences.

Arthurian references also played a part in the propaganda of this period, in much the same way as they did, briefly, in the reign of Edward IV. It is highly significant, for example, that both kings had sons called Arthur, although Edward’s illegitimate son, who was to become Viscount Lisle of Lisle Letters fame, did not have, obviously, as much attention drawn towards him as did Arthur Tudor, Henry VII’s son and heir. Poems celebrating Arthur’s birth drew upon the legendary king, as did the pageants to welcome Arthur into cities such as Coventry in the late 1490s. The entrance was recorded in the Coventry Leet Book:

Mem that this [y]ere the Wensday the xvij day of Octobre anno xiiiij Regis H. vij, prince Arthur, the ffirrst begoton son of kyng Henre the vijth, then being of [th]e age of xij [y]eres & more, cam first to Couentre & there lay in [th]e priory fro Wensday unto [th]e Munday next suying, at which tyme he removed toward London. Ayenst whos coming was [th]e Spon-strete-[g]ate garnysshed with the ix worthy[s] and kyng Arthur then hauyng thus speech, as foloweth:-

[King Arthur] Hayle, prynce riall, most amiable in sight!
Whom the Court eternall, thurgh prudent gouernaunce

Hath chosen to be egall ons to me in might
To sprede our name, Arthur, & actes to auaunce,
And of meanys victorious to have such habundaunce,
That no fals treitour, ne cruel tirrant,
Shall in eny wyse make profer to your lande
And rebelles all falce quarels schall eschewe,
Thurgh [th]e fere of Pallas, that favoreth your lynage
And all outward Enmyes laboreth to subdue
To make them to do to yewe as to me dyd homage
Welcome therfore, the solace & comfort of my old age,
Prince peerless, Arthur, Icome of noble progeny,
To me & to youre Chambre with all [th]is hole companye!124

The political background to which this entrance took place was important. Perkin Warbeck had been captured, and the need to reinforce the legitimacy of the Tudor line had again risen. The connection to British history is reinforced by King Arthur’s line that Arthur Tudor is “egall” to him in might. The divine sanction of Arthur Tudor, and by extension Tudor rule generally, has been given by the “Court eternall”. The references to “fals treitours” and “cruell tirants” were remarkably topical, and reflected the general Tudor propaganda lines. The false traitors, in 1498, were no doubt the members of the Cornish insurrection of 1497 and those in the area who had supported Perkin Warbeck. While he was not named, the frequent references in earlier Tudor proclamation and the parliament of 1485 concerning Richard III’s tyranny would have left a contemporary audience in no doubt as to who the “cruell tirant” may have been. In this sense, this line may have been a subtle refutation of Perkin Warbeck’s use of the name “Richard IV”, reminding audiences of another tyrannical Richard. The exhortation that all false rebels should abandon their quarrels due to Pallas’s favour of the Tudor lineage is another clear indication of the Tudor propaganda line about the conclusion of the civil conflicts of the earlier part of the fifteenth century, and the folly of any attempt to restart them. While

perhaps a reference once again to Warbeck, it may also have been a reference to 
Edmund de la Pole, who was now beginning to have conflicts with the Tudor regime 
and would flee the country after being indicted for the murder of Thomas Crue in 
this year. The reference about subduing all outward enemies may have been a 
rhetorical flourish, but may also relate to the strained relations between England and 
Scotland during this time, after James IV’s financial, if not military support of the 
Warbeck invasions.

Sydney Anglo has argued that Arthurian references and pageants to celebrate the 
birth, and later progresses of Arthur Tudor were not in fact connected to the Tudor 
use of the British history. Anglo cited the Coventry entry as an example of: "merely 
a superficial name parallel--a feature of the fifteenth century Coventry pageants." This seems to be largely a matter of interpretation. No direct link was made, but did it need to be? Caxton’s own statements seem to indicate the belief that Arthur was an actual historical figure, and part of the British past. There would be no need for the Tudors to labour the point. The other point in refuting Anglo’s argument, of course, was that the Coventry pageant, whilst reflecting Tudor propaganda, was not actually an example of Tudor propaganda.

The propaganda efforts of Henry VII reflected the multifaceted and sophisticated 
approaches that fifteenth century kings, and in particular fifteenth century usurpers, 
had to take. Henry’s propaganda, as has been seen, began early, before he had even 
won the throne from Richard III. Yet even in these early letters, the historian can see 
the Tudor myth that was to dominate fifteenth and early sixteenth century 
historiography beginning to form, particularly in regards to the tyrannical and 
illegitimate rule of Richard. How this history came to be written, and how this 
history was written during the fifteenth century, will be the focus of Chapter Eight.

\[125\] See above, Chapter One, pp. 57-58.
\[126\] ‘The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda’, p. 31.
Chapter Six
A Public Relations War? Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda
1400-1509

The previous two chapters examined the foundation of each era’s propaganda, starting with those messages used to justify the usurpations of 1399, 1461, 1483 and 1485, then moving on to the examine the broader, positive public relations themes carried out by each king. However, as seen in Chapter Two, there were other forces and points of view operating within England during this time. The willingness of these groups to propagandise and disseminate their messages, and the state responses to these messages, is the focus for the next two chapters. This chapter will examine the attempts of the state to manipulate or censor information and the notion of a cyclical public relations conflict that was present in fifteenth century English politics. The following chapter will examine more closely the specific themes and messages present in these messages, and how they related to the contemporary expectations of political leadership examined in Chapter Three.

There are a number of questions that need to be asked in terms of defining a “public relations war.” Firstly, who is the “war” between? How can we define each “side” in such a conflict? What is each side fighting over? The answer to that particular question is easy enough: the favourable opinion of the public. But can we tell from contemporary sources that each side is aware of such a public? To reinforce the notion of a conflict or war these propaganda messages would need to display an awareness of the messages of the other side. Can we find such awareness in the propaganda pieces of this era? I will argue that we can. And finally, as the conclusion to the analysis, we need to see how each side deals with the other's messages, through propagandistic statements of their own, censorship, or both. I will argue that a key part to this conflict were the notions of “truth” and “untruth” that were used to categorise different sides of the conflict. This truth topos is the unifying factor of the fifteenth century public relations wars.
There was not an uninterrupted flow of propagandistic messages in the fifteenth century between opposing sides. The exchanges were cyclical, following the same political patterns outlined in Chapter Two, focussed around points of political crisis such as the early 1400s, the 1450s, 1469-1471 and the mid-1480s. The pattern that developed was that of the state (the king and his advisors) and those who opposed them generating competing texts. In the early 1400s, the parties were Henry IV against enemies such as the Percies and Archbishop Scrope. In the mid 1420s, the battle for public opinion was between two members of the Lancastrian faction: Cardinal Beaufort and Humphrey, the duke of Gloucester. The 1450s saw the most prolonged stages of such a conflict with the competing messages of the Lancastrian Henry VI on the one side, and the duke of York and his supporters on the other. The victory of the Yorkists in 1461 seemed to bring type of conflict to an end, only for it to re-emerge in the 1469-1471 period, between those loyal to Edward IV and those loyal to the earl of Warwick. A similar conflict arose between 1483 and 1485, with Richard III on one side and Henry Tudor on the other. Tudor’s victory at Bosworth and subsequent rule also saw a number of instances of a need for state control of information, and attempts to reign in counter-propaganda messages from pretenders such as Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck.

These were the various sides that engaged in information conflicts. It has been the working notion of this thesis that each side would use propaganda in order to appeal to the audience outlined in Chapter Three. But did each side of these conflicts recognise that this audience existed? At certain points in the messages between the sides mentioned above, this evidence also comes to the fore. Henry IV’s proclamation against rumours being spread concerning the continued existence of Richard II contained a significant detail concerning the possible audiences of such rumours: “directing our attention to the fact that a Lie of this sort had been subtly invented, and that (as it imparted) our aforesaid enemies, in order to deceive our people…”¹ The instructions concerning the proclamation itself are given:

¹ *Foedera*, Vol. IV, p. 29
We instruct you…without delay you have it publicly proclaimed that no-one should put faith in Rumours or Lies of this sort, but should take great care not to be seduced by them, and if you find any Fabricators of Rumours or Lies of this sort, they should be arrested at once and Committed to our prison, and you should have them kept safely in custody there, until we have given other orders for their punishment; And may you omit to do this in no wise, since you take care both of Us and our Honour, and for the Peace and Tranquillity of our said People.²

These sections demonstrate awareness that an audience, or a public, was present during this period. Henry’s concern that this audience, his people would be taken in by lies and rumours concerning his predecessor showed why it was necessary for proclamations and counter-propaganda to be used. Both sides raised the notion of “the people” as a factor to be taken into account. A war of words was also present in this proclamation. The words of Henry’s enemies are dismissed as “Rumours or Lies”, the two seemingly interchangeable. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that the words of the state must therefore be the truth. As Richard Firth Green examined in his work *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England*, the word "truth" itself had undergone a significant change in definition in the fourteenth century, from the notion of an individualistic "truth" (in terms of being a true person, particularly in regards to legal contracts) to meaning "a quality that can be considered apart from those who embody it."³ The evolving meaning of the word truth, as it would become in the modern parlance "the truth", something that could be proved or disproved, was an important part of the state's responses to sedition and political propaganda, as seen in the example above. This pattern would be repeated across the fifteenth century, with each side advocating a position of truth against the alleged lies and rumours of their opponents. Use of the state apparatus to

---

crush sedition became a common feature during times of crisis in the fifteenth century. The necessity in this instance was obvious, particularly given the foreign interest in spreading rumours of the illegitimacy of Henry’s rule, and domestic attempts to question the legitimacy of Henry himself. Such attempts arose almost immediately.  

The acknowledgement of an audience outlined in Henry IV’s proclamation was also present in the letters circulated between Henry VI, the duke of York and presumably a wider public in 1450. Henry VI’s first reply to York’s protestations of loyalty bill states that:

Soth it is that a lang tyme the pepill hath yeven upon yow moche straunge langage and in special anon eftir the discordinate and unlafull sleyng of the Bishop of Chichestre, divers and many of the untrue schypmen and other sayden in their maner wordys aynest oure astate, making manasse unto oure persone be your saying, that you schuld be fechid home with many thousandis, and that ye schulde take upon you that that ye nothir aught nor as we doute nat ye wolde not attempte, so far forth that it was sayde unto oure persone be divers and specialy we remember of oon Wastnesse which had suche wordis unto us. And also ther were divers of suche fals pepill that wentyn and had suche langage in divers of your townes in oure londe, which be oure true subiectes were takyn and deuly executed.

The notion of “moche straunge langage” was linked to the deaths of the leading Lancastrians during this period. According to Henry, language could be dangerous. Significantly, he castigated the spreaders of such language as being false pepill. This was in contrast to those “true subiectes” who have served the state by executing

---

4 For such an attempt, and the legitimacy themes contained within, see the John Sparrowhawk case below, Chapter Seven, pp. 222-223.
5 See below, note 33.
6 Printed in Griffiths, ‘Duke Richard’s Intentions in 1450…’ p. 204.
them. In this sense, we can see an intermingling of Green's ideas about the personal truth versus the universal truth. The term “the pepill” appeared, but its juxtaposition suggested Henry believed that these were the very same “false” individuals who stand against the crown. Thus Lancastrians both acknowledged and subverted the notion of a populist audience. For the Cade rebels, and for the Yorkists, “the people” were a source of strength, and a group who had genuine grievances. In the eyes of Henry “the people” disseminated “moche straunge langage”, and clearly could not be trusted. That this “straunge langage” was linked to the murder of Lancastrian ministers made these people all the more dangerous. Presumably, this was the background to commentators such as George Ashby, who stated: “put no ful truste in the Comonalte”. 7 In the eyes of the Lancastrians, the early 1450s provided numerous object lessons of this principle.

The Lancastrian acknowledgement of an audience for fifteenth century propaganda was the most pronounced in the Somnium Vigilantis; a document that revealed the development of both the Lancastrian attitude towards “the people”, as well as the Lancastrian perception of Yorkist policy. The piece was structured as a debate, in which the supposed point of view of the Yorkists was presented, only to be refuted by the Lancastrian defence. The supposed pro-York argument acknowledged that spoken word became a factor in the political discourse of the 1450s, and that this was the reason why the Yorkist viewpoint was being presented in the first place:

For because that it is hard to abolysshe a rumour that is oones taken in the wlgare voice, I wolle presuppose for the way of communicacion that they bene as ye reput thaim. 8

While the lines acknowledge the power of rumour, there is a subtle refutation of the source. “The people’s voice” was not employed here, merely a reference to the “wlgare”, or vulgar, voice. This is the first hint of Lancastrian sentiment towards popular opinion: it was expressed by the vulgar, the lower classes. At the same time,

7 George Ashby's Poems, p. 40.
there is recognition that rumours disseminated by this audience were difficult to control.

Article five of the “Yorkist” section of this piece is perhaps the most revealing in terms of this study. It states, in full:

Furthermore consyderynge the multitude of thennemies that in every syde environneth this Royame it were more need for to procure to have more heddes and lordis for the tuycioun and defence of the same than for to despose and destroy eny of thaim, specially suche as stoden gretely in the favoure of the peple...⁹

This was one of the main tactics pursued by the Yorkists: appealing to “the people”. In the Lancastrian refutation of the “Yorkist” defence, this opinion is given:

As for the favoure of the peple thaire is no grounde of sure argument, for by cause hit is so variable and for the moost parte it groweth of oppynable conceytis, and not of trowith. Hit is a schrewyde consequence: The peple favoureth hem, ergo thay be good. Who so hathe rede in the olde storyes, he may be sufficiently informed of [th]e grete varyablenes of the peple and of thycertitude of thaire oppynions.¹⁰

Having the favour of the people, according to this voice means nothing. This was a clever attempt to undermine one of the key areas of support claimed by the Yorkists. The opinions of the people are presented as being variable, and “not of trowith”. Significantly this notion of “truth” once again comes into these propagandistic arguments. The Lancastrians claimed they were the ones who held “the truth”, in contradistinction to the untruth of the variable populace. Debates of the truth in propaganda documents had developed during the fifteenth century. Unlike Henry IV, however, who identified those who spread rumours and sedition as being

---

“untruthful”\textsuperscript{11}, the later Lancastrians castigated an entire class as being “untruthful”. In the opening section of the articles deriding the argument of the “Yorkist” defender, the writer stated:

\begin{quote}
Now for as much as that ye be so farre oute of youre selfe and so alienat from reason, me thinketh it be good in the way of charyte some what for to assay to reduce you, yf it may be, \emph{to the lighte of trowthe}, and how be it that youre articuls ben knownen openly to be grounde in colourable deceyte and in seductius raysons…\textsuperscript{12} [my italics]
\end{quote}

The appeal to “olde storyes” as a precedent for the unreliability of the people is significant, as the writer did not present this view as opinion, but as accepted wisdom. This part of the \textit{Somnium Vigilantis} demonstrates how far the Lancastrian attitude to public relations had come. In 1411, Hoccleve urged the future Henry V: “Wynneth your peples voice, ffor peples vois is goddess voys, menne seyne.”\textsuperscript{13} In 1450, the poem “Advice to the Court” recommended: “Ffor feer or for faour of any fals man/loose not the loue of alle [th]e commynaltie.”\textsuperscript{14} By 1459, the voice and opinions of “the people” were deemed to be untrustworthy and unreliable. George Ashby devoted a poem to the Lancastrian heir advising Edward of Lancaster to:

\begin{quote}
Put no ful truste in the Comonalte
Thai be euer wauering in variance.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

It appeared that the Lancastrians had all but abandoned the contest for the favour of the people. A culture of distrust and disdain for the people developed, perhaps not surprisingly given the events of the previous decade. This shift in Lancastrian thinking left this particular segment of the domestic audience open for the Yorkists to appeal to. The \textit{Somnium} document acknowledged and defined an audience from the Lancastrian viewpoint, whilst confirming that such an audience was not merely acknowledged but actively cultivated by the Yorkists. These trends, of

\textsuperscript{11} See above, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{12} Gilson, ‘A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists’, p. 516.
\textsuperscript{13} Hoccleve, ‘Regement of Princes’, p.104.
\textsuperscript{14} Robbins, \textit{Historical Poems}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{George Ashby’s Poems}, p. 40.
acknowledging an audience through propaganda messages, would continue until the end of the fifteenth century, most notably in Richard III’s addresses to the true Englishmen who would support him against Henry Tudor. Finally, the existence of these propaganda messages themselves demonstrate that each side must have considered that there was some sort of audience for them, otherwise why produce them in the first place?

The next requirement of a proposed model of a propaganda war is the presence of attempts by each side to control and censor information, as well as actively dealing with specific propaganda messages directed against them. Henry Bolingbroke from the start was concerned about public reception to his actions. One contemporary writer alleged that he was prepared to manipulate information to make his cause appear just, as the following passage from the Scotichronicon:

He [Henry] sent to the abbot of Glastonbury for acts of parliament and a chronicle that stated that the daughters of Roger Mortimer ought to succeed; and because he [the abbot] refused with excuses, the king took possession of his temporality until he got hold of the chronicle; he then burned it and ordered new ones be made in favour of himself.

This control of chronicle sources brings to mind an earlier attempt by John of Gaunt to manipulate information to promote the Lancastrian claim to the throne. There was immediate opposition to Henry’s rule. While the dissemination of his propaganda can be examined, its effect in making people actually believe his claim

---

16 See below, Chapter Seven, pp. 235-236.
17 Scotichronicon, p. 21.
18 Commenting on this story, Paul Strohm stated:

“Whether or not John of Gaunt really tried to plant forged chronicles, the story captures at least one indisputable truth about the Lancastrians: their keen and precocious awareness of the value of textualisation, of the sense in which a written account, placed in the right kind of circulation can generate its own kind of historical truth.”

to the throne is more dubious, with conflict over different messages continuing for years afterwards. The heart of this particular conflict of information was the notion that Richard II was not dead, that the funeral procession featured an impostor and the real king was alive and living in Scotland. The issue of Richard II “was to cloud the whole reign of Henry IV and the early years of Henry V.” To counter these rumours, Henry issued proclamations denouncing both the rumours and those who spread them. A letter authorising a proclamation delivered in 1402 to the sheriff of Kent is particularly revealing for this thesis:

A rumour has come by insinuation to our hearing that...those same enemies of ours busily trying with all their efforts to destroy us and our kingdom, among other things, make rumours, which in these days become more than customarily powerful, to be spread about our kingdom every day and to be whispered into the ears of the simple, that Lord Richard, recently king of England, our most recent predecessor still lives in Scotland, and that with a strong force, and with banner held forth, he will come together with the Scots into our said kingdom, to attack us and our Ligei forthwith, when in truth the aforesaid Richard is dead and buried.

This proclamation contains two significant points. The first is the effect rumours of Richard’s continued existence had on the new regime, with a sense of urgency to the line that Richard is dead and buried. Secondly is Henry’s line that rumours have “become more than customarily powerful”. This reinforces the notion of a public relations conflict. Henry evidently felt that rumour had, prior to his reign, not been as important as it now was, reflecting his insecurities about his rule, and the increasing power the spoken word had and would have under the dynastically insecure regimes of the fifteenth century.

---

19 See above, Chapter One, pp. 24-27.
21 Foedera, Vol. 4, p. 29.
The Percy rebellion of 1403 and the Scrope rebellion of 1405 also provided examples of the propaganda conflicts that would continue through the fifteenth century. The death of the young Henry Percy at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403 did not prevent the spread of rumours that he was still alive. Richard II was not the only politically active corpse that Henry IV had to deal with. The prominent display of the body of Henry Percy was another attempt by the regime to quash rumours that might prove detrimental to its long-term rule. The manifestos distributed by Archbishop Scrope of York were potentially even more damaging, but also provide an important example of the kinds of messages being disseminated against Lancastrian rule during Henry IV’s reign. This case also provides an example of distribution methods, as the bills were posted not only on the gates of the city of York, but also copied and distributed to nearby towns. An English Chronicle provided an account of Scrope’s actions:

he made a sermon in the chirche of York, and exhortid and stirid the peple to be assistent and helpyng to the correccioun and amendement of the myschiefs and mysgouernaunces of the reme...thise articles and meney othir the archebisshope made be writen in English, and were set on the yatis of the cite, and sent to curatis of the townes about, forto be prechid openli.

Both bills and the church were used. The latter was quite unusual, as all other examples of this kind of dissemination from the period concern state-based propaganda messages, not the texts of those opposing the king. Attempting to quash the Scrope rebellion proved problematic. Henry had to stem the flow of propaganda, but also tread carefully in dealing with a priest who was using such methods against the state. He was unable to do the latter, executing Scrope before the gates of York. While the messages of Scrope will be examined in full in the next chapter, this example helps to demonstrate how messages seen as prejudicial to the state were

---

22 A Chronicle of London from 1089 to 1483, p. 85
23 For these specific messages, see below, Chapter Seven, p. 225.
24 An English Chronicle, pp. 31-32
deal with. Information was seen as a dangerous threat to Henry’s rule; its dissemination could lead to execution.

Conflict of messages can also be observed in the dispute that erupted between Cardinal Beaufort and Humphrey of Gloucester in 1424-1425. Gloucester’s marriage to Jacqueline of Hainault, and his subsequent military incursions into the Low Counties to claim territory on her behalf had alienated England’s Burgundian allies, the duke of Bedford, and Beaufort, who had important connections to Flemish merchants in London. Importantly for the notion of a public relations war, Gloucester’s campaign was accompanied by populist, anti-Flemish bills distributed throughout London. Beaufort’s attempts to reign in his errant half-nephew saw these propaganda tactics turned against him. Here, we can observe the interesting split that occurred, and would continue to occur throughout the century, between the pragmatic policies of some members of the ruling elite versus the populist policies of other members. The anti-Beaufort sentiments expressed throughout the vernacular chronicles of this period were usually framed in terms of the popularity of Gloucester with the Londoners. The author of ‘A Short English Chronicle’ wrote:

Also the same yere was a gret e dissencioun be twene the Duke of Gloucester and the Bysshope of Wyncheater that tyme Chaucyler, for the whiche all London a rose wi th the Duke a yenest the forsaide Bysshope.26

26 ‘A Short English Chronicle’, p. 59. *The Brut* recorded Beaufort’s entry into London with the duke of Bedford, as part of an attempted reconciliation: “With hem [Bedford] tho come the Bisshop of Wyncheste ridynge thorough London, to right grete greuance of the pepull.” *The Brut*, p. 433. *An English Chronicle* recorded that: “The iiij yeer of his regne, on the morrow aftir the feste of Simon and Jude, aros a gret debaat betwene Humfrey duke of Gloucstre and master Harri Beaufort his ncle bishope of Wynchestre, being that tyme chauncellor of England; so that alle the cite of Londoun was mevid ayens the bishope, and wolde haue destroid him…”

*An English Chronicle*, pp. 53-54.
The use of the chronicles to display these opinions was important, ensuring another audience would be informed of what was occurring in the capital. Even the reconciliation in 1426 between Gloucester and Beaufort was publicised in "Julius B II", the articles recorded directly into the chronicle.\(^{27}\) Within the accusation and counter-accusation was contained Beaufort’s allegation of Gloucester’s involvement in the spreading of:

sedicious and Odious Billes and Langage, caste and used in the citee off London sovnyng into ffongyng off Insurreccion and Rebellion ayens the kyngis pees, and destruccion as well of dyurs estates off Englande as off straungers beyng vundir the proteccion…\(^{28}\)

References to the use of bills, and the negative language contained within them continued throughout Beaufort’s statement. Referring to the previous year’s parliament, the articles state that:

dyuers persons off lowe estate off the citee off London, in grete nombre assembled on a day ypon the Wharffe, at the Crane in Vyntre, wysshed and desired that they hadde ther the persone off my seyde lord off Wynchestre; seyynge that they wolde haue throwne him in Temyse to haue taut him to swymme with wengis; ffor wiche billes and langage off sclaundre and manasse caste and spoken in the seyde citee caused be my seyde lorde the Chaunceller to suppose that they so seyde and dydde, wylled and desired his destruccion, how were yt they hadde noo cause.\(^ {29}\)

According to Beaufort the bills had led to direct violence being threatened. This seems similar to Henry IV’s complaints about seditious rumours. Once again, this sort of information was perceived to be dangerous, hence the necessity for Beaufort’s reconciliation with Gloucester. The threats to powerful political figures

\(^{27}\) ‘Julius B II’, pp. 76-94.
\(^{28}\) ‘Julius B II’, p. 79.
\(^{29}\) ‘Julius B II’, pp. 81-82.
were carried out textually as well as through direct confrontation. Gloucester’s appeal, alleged or otherwise, to Londoners foreshadowed the conflicts of the 1450s, where a powerful member of the royal family placed on the outer circles of the court was forced to appeal to a populist base for support.

This factor emerged in 1450 with the Jack Cade rebellion and the rise of the duke of York to political prominence. One of the common threads of seditious writings circulated at the time was that York should be given a more prominent place in the governing of the realm. In the face of such political pressure, York had to assure Henry VI of his loyalty, whilst at the same time court favourable popular opinion. His intentions were expressed in two letters that were addressed to the king, and distributed across England, finding their way into at least one chronicle and the Paston Letters. The first bill was a refutation of the rumours concerning the possible connection to Cade:

Please it your highnesse to conceive, that sith my departing out of this your realm, by your commandement, and being in your service in your land of Ireland, I have bin informed that diverse language, hath bene sayde of me to your moste excellente whiche shoulde sounde to my dishonour and reproch, and charge of my person: howe be it that, I aye have bene, and ever will be, your true liegeman and servaunt: and if there be any man that wyll or dare say the contrarie, or charge me otherwise, I beseech your rightwisenesse to call him before your high presence, and I wyll declare me for my discharge as a true Knighte ought to do, and if I doe not, as I doubt not but I shall, I beseech you to punishe me as the poorest man of youre lande: and if hee bee founde untrue in his suggestion and

---

information, I beseech you of your highnesse that he be
punished after his desert, in example of all other.32

In addressing the rumours, the “diverse language” that had dishonoured his good
name, York sought to effectively control the story, carefully not repeating what the
rumours actually were, only that his loyalty to the crown was intact. A populist
touch emerged as York stated that if the charges were true he would wished to be
punished “as the poorest man of your lande”, a possible sign that he was seeking to
place distance between himself and the perceived corruptions of other Lancastrian
ministers.

The second half of York’s 1452 bill to Shrewsbury contained a passage concerning
his efforts of two years previously:

And on the other part it is to be supposed it is not unknown to
you, how that, after my coming out of Ireland, I…advised his
Royal Majesty of certain Articles concerning the weal and
safeguard, as well of his royal person, as the tranquillity and
conservation of all this his realm: the which Advertisements,
how be it that it was thought that they were full necessary,
were laid apart, and to be of none effect, through the envy,
malice, and untruth of the said duke of Somerset; which for my
truth, faith, and allegiance that I owe unto the King, and the
good will and favour that I have to all the Realm, laboureth
continually about the Kings Highness for my undoing, and to
corrupt my blood, and to disherit me and my heirs…33

York’s comments on his advice to the king are significant. The articles he described
were the bills sent out two years previously concerning the “weal and safeguard” of
the king, and the “peace and tranquillity of all this his realm.” Previous examples of
propaganda were recast through the medium of other propaganda into instances of
laudable advice to the king from a loyal counsellor. Also described is how the

"Advertisements" were "laid apart, and to be of none effect" by the machinations of the duke of Somerset, showing how the public relations conflict was perceived by an actual participant. The distribution of the 1452 bill described to the public the conflicting pieces of information, demonstrating that propaganda was changing and becoming more sophisticated during the fifteenth century. In part this bill was used to justify not only York’s loyalty to the crown, but the reasons why his previous efforts may have failed: the enmity of Somerset.

Yorkist bills reflected, in the same way that Henry Bolingbroke had done in 1399, that the overthrow of the rightful king was a move supported by popular opinion. There were some Lancastrian attempts to court popular opinion, particularly in London, but they were generally ineffectual. Two letters are worth examining, to compare and contrast to similar Yorkist efforts at the time. These letters provide important support for notions voiced in the Somnium Vigilantis concerning Yorkist appeals to the commons. The first was written, or sent at the behest of, Edward of Lancaster in 1460. Addressed to the “city of London” it opened:

Trusti and welbeloved we grete you wele and halde for undoubted that ye kepe right wele in yor remebraunces under what false colourable receiptes and circumvencions that horrible and falsly forsworne traitor N [Richard] calling hym selfe duc of N [York], mortal ennemye unto my lord, to my lady and to us, hathe blinded my lordis subgettes and to thopteigning of his subtilly contrived treasons by untrew meanes often tymes provoked theim to commocions, sturinges and unlawfull assemblies agenst his roiall estate. Saying that he nevr entended hurt, dishonour nor preiudice to his personne, whom God preserve fro his ma lice, but that all his sayde purposes were grounded for the wele of this my lorde reaulme and the seurete and welfare of his subgettes of the same. Feignyng untrew causis and matieres of disclaudre ageinst all suche lordys and other as he thought had knowledge of his
entent, and as God wolde as their deutes was withstande and suppresses his malice. By occasion of whiche disclaundris divers of the said lordis were slayne and mourdred.\textsuperscript{34}

This passage confirmed not only that the duke of York’s campaign was accompanied by propaganda, but that these writings \textit{had an effect}. They had “blinded my lordis subgettes” into taking part in “commocions, sturinges and unlawfull assembles.” Once again, this was due to the “untrew meanes’ through which the Yorkists promoted their cause. This letter, like certain sections in the \textit{Somnium Vigilantis} was a rejection of the politics and ideals of “the people”. The reason they rebelled against the crown was because they had been lied to and deceived. The letter reflected the extent of these lies, that York “nevur entended hurt” to Henry VI’s person. This critiqued both York’s actual intentions and the tone of the messages that he disseminated. Perhaps the most significant point, however, comes at the end of this passage, with the line that “By occasion of whiche disclaundris divers of the said lordis were slayne and mourdred.” The accusation is that the propaganda and lies of the Yorkists \textit{caused} the conflict and deaths that had occurred since the 1450s. The connection is significant. Part of the challenge of any study of propaganda is determining both audience, and audience reaction. In this letter, one perceived reaction was constructed. Edward continued this theme, stating:

webe enfourmed that the same fals traitour that ceasith not his said malice but utterly entendith the destruccion of my lord and of my lady and the disherityng of us, hathe now sowen amongst you and many other of my lordis trewe liegemen…that we shulde entende to make assemble of grete numbre of straungers that wolde purpose to dispoile and to robbe you and thayme of yor good es and utterly to destruye you and thayme for evur mor…\textsuperscript{35}

Consequently, Edward of Lancaster was forced to reassure his audience that “noon of you shalbe robbed, despoiled nor wronged by any personne that shall at that tyme

\textsuperscript{34} John Vale’s Book, pp. 142-143.
\textsuperscript{35} John Vale’s Book, p. 143.
come with us or any other undir us.”

There is by this point a tone of desperation in the letter. The statement that York had “sowen these rumours amongst you” clearly indicates that each side not only used propaganda, but recognised that the opposing side was doing the same, and attempted to nullify persuasion with counter-persuasion.

The letter sent by Margaret of Anjou in 1461 contained similar themes. Addressed to “the city of London”, this letter accused York of:

extreme malice long hid undir colours imagining bi divers and
many weyes and meaynes the detruccion of my lordis good
grace, whom God of his mercy evur preserve, hathe now late
upon an untrewe pretense feyned a tytle to my lordis coronne
and roiall estate…

The rejection of York’s claim to the throne was one of the main themes of these last pieces of Lancastrian propaganda. This letter reinforced the nature of the propagandistic discourse that had been played out over the previous years, and the rejection of the Yorkist message, which consisted of:

divers untrewe and feyned materes and surmises, and
inspeciall that wee and my lordes said sone and oures shulde
newly drawe toward you with an unsen power of straungeres
disposed to robbe and to dispoile you of your goodes and
haveurs.

As with Edward’s letter, assurances were again given that:

ye nor noon of you shalbe robbed, despoiled nor wronged by
any personne that at that tyme we or oure sayde sone shalbe
accumpanyed with or any other sent in our or his name.

Both of these letters reflect the deep insecurities besetting the Lancastrians since 1459. The fact that by 1460/61 they needed to reassure a target audience that they

---

36 John Vale’s Book p. 143.
37 John Vale’s Book, p. 142.
38 John Vale’s Book, p. 142.
39 John Vale’s Book p. 142.
were not going to go on a rampage throughout the kingdom reflects the success of the Yorkist propaganda drives that had placed the Lancastrians very much into the defensive in the public relations conflict. In this context, the sacking of St Albans by the Lancastrians was a public relations blunder of the highest magnitude, yet these letters seem to reflect a Lancastrian notion that people believed them capable of such acts because of what the Yorkists had said, rather than what the Lancastrians themselves had actually done. The references to “divers untrewe and fayne materes” described the propaganda of the Yorkists by once again employing the truth topos to undercut the Yorkist message. As outlined in the start of this chapter, what we have here is further acknowledgement by one contemporary group of the propaganda efforts of another.

During the months of campaigning prior to Edward’s final victory, the Yorkists had been careful to cultivate not just a domestic audience, but a foreign one as well. The earl of Warwick, writing to the pope on the 11th January 1460, concerning the papal delegate to England, Francesco Coppini, claimed:

The people will see that our adversaries, who daily spread lying reports, are false and not true men; for they scorn your authority and the legate’s, and say the latter has no power and is no legate.  

Warwick expanded upon this theme in another letter addressed to the duke of Milan:

This [the proposed promotion of Coppini] would confound the malice of our enemies, who from lack of other means circulate among the people a thousand roggeries and lies against the authority of the Pope and the Legate.

These two letters contain a number of significant points. The first hints at the Yorkist stance taken by Coppini, arguably because the Yorkists recognised an important voice to an international audience and exploited it. The issue of competing discourses was raised, with the Lancastrians accused of spreading lying reports. The

---

40 Calendar of State Papers: Venice, p. 96.
41 Calendar of State Papers: Venice, p. 97.
The dichotomy of falsehood and truth was employed, as Warwick implied the Yorkists were the spreaders of truth, while York’s adversaries had spread “a thousand lies”. These statements were an implicit refutation of the *Somnium Vigilantis*, which had claimed that the Yorkists were the purveyors of “untrowith”. Importantly, they asserted to an international audience, the importance of “the people.” Not only was this group cultivated, the Yorkists wanted to show that they were being cultivated.

Edward’s proclamations against his wayward brother and the earl of Warwick in 1469, to counter those they had previously issued revealed similar public relations strategies, although the truth topos itself was not specifically employed. Outlining their crimes, Edward’s proclamation stated that:

```
the said Duke and Earl, unnaturally, unkindly and untruly intending his [Edward’s] destruction, and the subversion of his realm, and the commonweal of the same…falsely and traitorously provoked and stirred, as well by their writings as otherwise, Sir Robert Welles, late calling himself Great captain of the Commons of the said shire of Lincolnshire, to continue the said insurrections and rebellions, and to levy war against him [Edward IV]
```

Significantly, the insurrections had been stirred by “their writings”. According to this bill conflict between the two sides has spilled out into actual conflict. In a similar sense to the above bills, however, this document shows how each side engaged with the others propaganda messages.

The battle of Bosworth was preceded by a flurry of bills. Richard’s previous bills and parliamentary statements had established his position on Tudor. The derisive take on Tudor’s claim to the throne had been outlined in his proclamations after

---

42 See above, pp. 193-194.
43 See above, Chapter Four, pp. 127-129.
44 For the criticisms contained within these bills, see below, Chapter Seven, p. 227.
Buckingham’s rebellion, around the time Tudor made his pledge to marry Elizabeth of York, in which it was stated that:

Henry late calling himself Erle of Richemond whiche of his ambicious and insaciable Covetice stirred and excited by the confederace of the kinges said rebelles and trators encroethe upon him the name and title of Royalle estate of this Royaulme of England. whereunto he hathe noo manere interresses right or coloure as every mane wele knowethe.46

Richard’s concern for seditious bills can be seen below with his letter to the city of York,47 and it was a concern that would express itself most notoriously in the execution of William Collingborne, whose rhyme “The Catt, the ratt and Lovell oure dogge, rulyn all England under an hoggg” was distributed throughout London in 1484.48 Tudor’s own responses focussed on themes of Richard’s tyranny, and will be outlined more thoroughly in the next chapter.

These punishments for sedition lead into the final issue of the public relations conflict: censorship methods and how each side dealt with the other's propaganda. The dissemination of anti-government messages was a major concern for the state at several crucial periods in the fifteenth century. Some of the measures adopted have been outlined already in this chapter. In this final section we will study more closely the language of the bills and proclamations that attempted to censor and control propagandistic discourse in fifteenth century England.

Examples from the first crisis point of the early 1400s have been seen in Archbishop Scrope's dissemination of anti-government bills and his subsequent execution. To move onto the mid-fifteenth century, the series of bills against the government in 1450 by the duke of York came at a time when that government was struggling.49

47 See below, p. 216.
Prominent Lancastrians, including Adam Molyens, William Ayscough, James Lord Say and William de la Pole had been killed by mobs composed of “the people”, and the Jack Cade rebellion had raised the possibility that York should be made heir. The spread of seditious bills concerned the Lancastrian government, and the following was issued on the 14th April 1450:

To the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex. Order at their peril after receipt of these presents with all diligence to cause proclamation to be made, forbidding any man to read, pronounce, publish, deliver, or shew, copy or cause to be copied or impart to any man secretly or openly any seditious schedule or bill or one subversive of the peace, or any infamous libel which has come to his hands before such proclamation or shall come after, but forthwith to burn or tear it up, thereby giving notice that any who shall be found so doing before the proclamation or after shall be deemed the author and originator of such libel etc until he shall produce the author; as the king is bound specially to resist them who may stir up sedition within the realm, disturb the peace, or injure the fair fame of his subjects, and being informed, or rather having evidence of the fact, that a number of persons seduced by the spirit of malice, whom it is not easy to trace, do contrive to make, dictate, write or cause to be written schedules, bills or libels whereby sedition may be aroused, the peace broken and the good fame of his subjects blackened which the authors, because they desire not to be known, do secretly affix to the doors of churches or other places, or cause to be scattered in such places as they choose, and the king’s will is to resist their malice.

---

51 Harvey, Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450, p. 189.
52 Calendar of Close Rolls 1447-1454, pp. 194-195.
This document acts both as propaganda and counter-propaganda, a sign of the government’s need to react to what were potentially damaging bills. This piece of censorship is detailed as to how the information contained in such bills may be passed on. Such distribution methods reveal that bills had the potential to be seen or heard by a wide audience. Anti-government messages, apparently, passed freely from text to copy, and from text to verbal communication. In terms of distribution, the end of the passage indicates that the spread of such bills was secret and that while church doors may have been used, there were other places where bills could be placed. Distribution methods could be adapted to meet the demands of the moment.

The most significant part of this document is the notion that the king had a special responsibility to resist sedition. Such writings against the king affected not only him, but his subjects as well. Their “good fame is blackened” and “fair fame” injured by such seditious bills. This was a potentially damaging piece of counter-propaganda, attempting to persuade its listeners that sedition would destroy not only the king, but the realm. As with earlier pieces of censorship, the document entered a competition over information. Control was asserted through the encouragement of subjects to burn or tear up any seditious bills they might come across, or risk being taken for the author of such a bill.

The letters of assurance York sent to Henry VI prior to the first battle of St Albans were recorded in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* once York had gained control of the government. These letters reflected concerns of loyalty to the king and the need to remove those bad councillors surrounding him who would cause the kingdom to

---

Again, parliament was used for propagandist causes. This same parliament saw a statement made concerning Thomas Yonge, the Yorkist lawyer who had argued for York’s recognition as the heir in 1451. Yonge’s situation was described as follows:

That whereas he late beyng oon of the Knyghtes for the Shire and Towne of Bristowe, in dyvers Parlementes holden afore this, demened him in his saying in the same, as wele, faithfully, and with alle suche trewe diligent labour, as his symplenesse couthe or might, for the wele of the Kyng oure Sov[er]ain Lorde, and this his noble Realme; and notwithstanding that by the olde liberte and freedom of the Comyns of this Lande had, enjoyed and prescribed, fro the tyme that no mynde is, alle suche persones as for the tyme been assembled in eny Parlement for the same Comyn, ought to have theire freedom to speke and sey in the Hous of the assemble, as to theym is thought convenient or resonable, withoute eny maner chalange, charge or punycion therefore to be leyde to theym in eny wyse.\(^5^5\)

This statement was a powerful refutation of Lancastrian methods of censorship; or at least, it was constructed in such a way as to give that impression. How language was defined during this period by each side is significant to this study. From York’s bills complaining about how his “Advertisements” to the king were being “laid apart” by Somerset, through to the defence of Yonge's freedom of speech within parliament, the Yorkists presented themselves as promoting freedom of expression and dissemination of ideas, whereas the Lancastrians were portrayed as opposing such ideals. If such concepts seem anachronistic, it must be reinforced that this pre-modern justification for freedom of speech corresponded to the contemporary belief concerning the “voice of the people.” In making such statements, and critiquing the


censorship of the Lancastrians, the Yorkists were assuring a broader audience of their intention to listen to them. In reality this was nonsense, as Yorkist censorship methods proved just as brutal as those of the Lancastrians; nevertheless, the Yorkist authors must have believed it to be a persuasive public relations exercise.

The Lancastrians were increasingly placed on the back foot in terms of the public relations struggle, forced to react to the bills that were disseminated before each Yorkist strike. During this period, very few pro-Lancastrian pieces of propaganda were produced. One, however, emerged in 1456, known as the “Five Dogs of London” and directed at the duke of York. Parts two and four of the texts are perhaps the most significant. The second part opens with: “Offte beryth [th]e sone the faderis gylte,” a clear reference to York’s father, the earl of Cambridge, who had been executed after the failed Southampton plot of 1415 against Henry V. The unnamed propagandist appealed to a sense of history to remind present audiences of the stain upon the honour of the house of York. The fourth part, in full, reads:

Off folowynge aventurous, [th]e Iugement is Ieperdous
Wat planet compellyd me, or what signe,
To serue [th]at man that all men hate?
y wolde hys hede were here for myne,
Ffor he hathe caused all [th]e debate.

York alone was blamed for the strife and dissension of the previous couple of years. While such bills do not seem to have been government sponsored, their general tone was pro-Lancastrian.

Edward IV made a final effort in 1471 to refute the last stages of Lancastrian propaganda contained in the various polemical writings of Sir John Fortescue. The various tracts that Fortescue wrote included De Titulo Edwardi Comitis Marchiae,

---

56 Robbins, Historical Poems, p. 190.
57 See above, Chapter One, p. 30.
58 Robbins, Historical Poems, p. 190.
Of the Title of the House of York and Defensio Juris Domus Lancastriae. Written in Scotland in the 1460s, and in France in the late 1460s, these tracts were the intellectual arguments against the claims of the house of York to the English throne. Together with the less obviously propagandist De Natura Legis Naturae, these texts argued that the Yorkist claim to the throne through the female line was flawed.

Fortescue’s sophisticated works drew from a number of classical and historical examples. They were, arguably, not intended for “the people”, but rather an upper class readership: perhaps the targets of anti-populist tracts such as the Somnium Vigilantis. That they were written in Latin supports this idea. However, they do form an important part of later Lancastrian propaganda. The tract ascribed to Fortescue that was arguably the most significant, in terms of control of information during this period, was released after Edward IV had reclaimed the throne, entitled The Declaracion made by Sir John Fortescue, Knyght, upon certain Wrytinges sent oute of scotteland, ayenst the kinges title to the roialme of englond. Constructed as a dialogue between a “lernid man” and allegedly, although not certainly, Fortescue himself, the tract begins with the “lernid man” enquiring as to the source of the writings:

Sir, while ye were in Scotelande with Henry somtyme king of this lande in dede, though he wer not so in righte, there ware made there many wrytinges, and sent hedyre, by which was sowen amongs the peple matier of grete noyse and infamyte to

---


60 Fortescue stated:

“It is certain by the law and custom of England, and shall be manifest that women, or their husbands on pretext of title of their wives, or the children of the same, have always been excluded from all right of succeeding to royalty, and are to be forever whilst the same law and custom continue, duly, justly and legitimately excluded; and that the nearest male descending by the male line ought on the death of a king to succeed in the right of the kingdom…”

The Complete Works of Sir John Fortescue, p. 78.

the tytle whiche the Kingeoure souraigne lorde Edward the fourth hath, and thoo hadde to reigne vpon us. And truly fyr the conceyvinge and endytynge of thoo wrytings haue be ascribed to you in the opynioun of the people…

This passage claimed that Fortescue’s writings had been “sowen amongst the peple,” and highlighted the importance of the people as a group to be appealed to. Whether or not the writers genuinely believed that Fortescue’s bills were seen by this group is irrelevant. The important point is that they portrayed Fortescue’s bills as an attempt to influence “the people” as a whole. For the purposes of this refutation the Yorkists had to make Fortescue’s writings seem more important and widespread than they actually might have been.

Fortescue’s reply to this point simply stated his position, before refuting each of the individual points made by the “lernid man” to the previous writings. Fortescue replied:

But yit it is so that there wore many such wrytinges made in Scotelande, of which sum were made by other men than by me, whereunto I was never pryve. But yet the bryngers of tham into this lande said they were of my making, hopynge tharby that thay shulde have been the more favoured. There were also other writings made ther by the said Kyngs Councell, and sent hedyr, the whiche I was not well willynge, but yet thay passed by the more partie of that Counceill. And over this there were made wrytinges there, some by myne assente, and som by my selfe. In all such wrytinges it shall need that my declaracions were dyuers according to my merites in makynge them. Nevertheless I wollde fayne in all thoo wrytinges declare the effectes of thayme after my reason and larnynge, yf I might

---

63 A rather ironic accusation, given the Somnium Vigilantis criticism of appealing to “the people”.
have the copyes and doubles of thayme, which I have not, nor
have ever seen any minute of them, sythen I come into
Englande.\textsuperscript{64}

There are a number of significant points contained here. The most obvious one is
Fortescue’s denial of being involved in the production of most of the previously
issued bills. Rather than have Fortescue simply retract his statement, or even to
admit that they were false, this document claimed that the majority of the bills had
never been written by Fortescue. This was a sophisticated move on Edward’s part to
establish that the problems with the previous bills was not merely that they were
wrong, but also fraudulently attributed to a man who had nothing to do with them.
This in turn acted as another part of the truth topos established in previous forms of
propaganda. Indeed, when arguing against the first point of the “lernid man”
concerning the “Crouchback” story (a piece of Lancastrian propaganda predating
Fortescue’s work by several decades), Fortescue wrote:

\textit{For soothe, syr, nay, nor was I neuer ascentynge to the writing
thereof. And yit I was gretely desired by my felowys in
Scotelande, to haue made this wrytinge or othyr lyke therto,
but I wolde not do it, be cause I knew verily that it was
vntrue.}\textsuperscript{65}

Fortescue had never actually written any documents supporting the Crouchback
story, which had been abandoned in the early 1400s as a viable piece of Lancastrian
propaganda. What Edward’s writer seems to be doing here is ensuring Fortescue
refuted not just the propaganda he was personally responsible for, but Lancastrian
propaganda that had been produced prior to Fortescue’s works. This element of
control of information has few, if any precedents in the course of the fifteenth
century public relations struggles.

Information control was also a growing concern for Richard III during the public
relations problems dominating his reign. Rumours damaging his reputation spread

\textsuperscript{64} The Complete Works of Sir John Fortescue, p. 524.
\textsuperscript{65} The Complete Works of Sir John Fortescue, pp. 524-525.
even before he seized the throne. Mancini, writing in 1483, records that in relation to Edward V:

I have seen many men burst forth into tears and lamentations when mention was made of him after his removal from men’s sights; and already there was the suspicion that he had been done away with.66

Richard’s failure to deal with these rumours by producing his nephews has been considered to be evidence of his responsibility for, or at least complicity in, permanently silencing them.67 More significant to this study were the rumours circulating concerning his intentions to marry his niece in 1485. While the scheme was unlikely given Richard’s bastardisation of her family, it remains compelling that Richard was prepared to go to such extraordinary lengths to deny it. The public statement that he made remains almost unprecedented in English political history up to this point. Nevertheless, the Crowland chronicler records that Richard’s councillors Sir Richard Ratcliffe and William Catesby instructed Richard:

that if he did not deny any such purpose and did not counter it by public declaration before the mayor and commonality of the city of London, the northerners, in whom he placed the greatest trust, would all rise up against him…Shortly before Easter, therefore, the king took his stand in the great hall at St John’s in the presence of the mayor and citizens of London and in a clear, loud voice carried out fully the advice to make a denial of this kind—as many people believed, more by the will of these counsellors than by his own.68

Such denials were treated with the same scepticism as Richard’s other propaganda. That Richard needed to make a public refutation probably demonstrates how powerful rumour became during the fifteenth century, and certainly shows how much power fifteenth century texts were willing to concede to them. Richard’s

68 *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 177.
desire, or apparent desire to make the proclamation himself was unusual. The usual methods would be to send such proclamations through civic and religious channels. Richard’s failure to do so seems to have not so much aroused suspicion but to have confirmed contemporary beliefs about his character. His need to censor detrimental rumours emerges most strongly in a letter he sent to the city of York shortly after his speech to the mayor and people of London:

diverse seditious and evil disposed personnes both in our citie of London and elleswher within this oure realme, enforce themself daily to sowe sede of noise and disclaudre agaynst our persone…to abuse the multitude of oure subgiettes and avertie there myndes from us, if they coude by any meane atteyne to that ther mischevous entent and purpose, some by setting up of billes, some by messages and sending furth of false and abominable langage and lyes…for remedie wherof and to thentent the troth opinlye declared shuld represse all suche false and contrived invencions, we now of late called before us the maire and aldermen of our citie of London togidder with the moost sadde and discrete persons of the same citie in grete nombre, being present many of the lordes spirituel and temporel of our land, and the substance of all our housland, to whome we largely shewed our true entent and mynd in all suche thinges as the said noise and disclaudre renne upon in suche wise as we doubt not all wel disposed personnes were and be therwith righte wele content; where we also at the same tyme gafe straitly in charge aswell to the said maire as to all othre our officers, servauntes and faithfull subgiettes whersoever they be, that fromhensfurth as oft as they find any persone speking of us or any othre lord or estate of this our land otherwise than is according to honour, trouth and the peas and ristfulnesse of this our realme, or telling of tales and tidinges wherby the people might be stird to
This lengthy passage contains several important points. Firstly, the notion that language could have an effect on not only the opinion but also the actions of “the people” and that the state was well aware of this provides strong support for the notion that pre-modern era propaganda not only existed, but was openly discussed. Richard’s language was significant, not only in describing those spreading such rumours as “evil disposed personnes”, but also in the notion that “wel disposed” persons would not pay attention to such slanders and sedition. This may be an attempt to win over the target audience by implying that good people and faithful subjects would not listen or read anything prejudicial to the state. Promotional attention was drawn to Richard’s speech to the mayor and colleagues in London, precisely the tactic used when writing to York about his progress through England. Nothing was left to chance. Bills and proclamations were produced promoting and interpreting propaganda for a public who missed it the first time. In this case, it is significant that Richard did not repeat these rumours, only that he refuted these lies with the “trouth”. Finally and most importantly, we can see both late fifteenth century censorship methods, as well as the importance placed on the power of language.

Parallels between Richard III and Henry VII’s reigns can be drawn in terms of the need to manipulate information, as seditious writings and actions were present during Tudor’s reign. Indeed, the need to suppress seditious information became one of the hallmarks of early Tudor rule. This was, arguably, the legacy Richard left to

---

Tudor, the potential for rumour and hearsay to be just as important as any other factor in the political spectrum. There had been elements of this importance in other reigns, and precedents for Tudor’s problems with pretenders. Both Lovel’s rebellion and the Lambert Simnel revolt set a paranoid cast on how Henry would deal with contemporary audiences. The punishments set out in the parliamentary document above\(^{70}\) for anyone possessing a copy of Richard’s claim to the throne is one such example. Another in 1487, in a proclamation ordering pillory for spreading false news:

> Forasmuch as many of the King our sovereign lord’s subjects be disposed daily to hear feigned, contrived, and forged tidings and tales; and the same tidings and tales, neither dreading God nor his highness, utter and tell again as though they were true, to the great hurt of divers of his subjects and to his grievous displeasure: Therefore in eschewing of such untrue and forged tidings and tales, the King our sovereign lord straightly chargeth and commandeth that no manner person, whatsoever he be, utter nor tell any such tidings or tales but he bring forth the same person which was the author and teller of the said tidings of tales; upon pain to be set on the pillory...Furthermore the same our sovereign lord straightly chargeth and commandeth that all mayors, bailiffs, and other officers diligently search and inquire of all such persons, tellers of such tidings and tales not bringing forth the author of the same, and them set on the pillory as it is above said.\(^{71}\)

This proclamation was delivered immediately after the Lambert Simnel revolt. The messages distributed as part of that conflict primarily concerned the forged identity of Simnel. These were in all likelihood the “forged tales and tidings” referred to in the proclamation. At the same time, this document reveals the broader insecurities of

\(^{70}\) Parliament of 1485.

the new Tudor regime. Like Richard III, Tudor was keen to track down not only the authors of such seditious works, but any who had assisted in their dissemination. This particular proclamation was sent to York, a city that had only two years previously recorded “that King Richard late mercifully reigning upon us was through grete treason…was pitiously slane and murdred to the grete hevenesse of this citie.”\textsuperscript{72} Clearly, this was an audience that Henry needed to win.\textsuperscript{73} But it was also an audience that must be controlled. The first few years of Henry’s reign saw several proclamations issued by the king for the brutal suppression of sedition. The punishment meted out to Thomas Sturgeon and William Willemot in 1488, for uttering “great untrouth” and “certain seditious and obprobrius language ayanest our majestie royall” was to be placed in the pillory and to have their ears cut off.\textsuperscript{74} In June 1488, Henry sent a lengthy missive to York concerning “the use and entreteyiing of sad rule and good governaunce in every cite and towne…”\textsuperscript{75} An essential part of this process was the need to arrest and punish any who would:

sowe any sederceiuose langage, arreise any rumours or forge or contrive newes or tidinges of us or eny estates of this our land or of othir withoute the same to abuse and blynde our innocent subgettes, provoking and endusing theyme to renne or falle into rebellian and disobeaunce in subversion of all gude rule pollicie…\textsuperscript{76}

As in the reign of previous kings, the notion that seditious language could actually cause previously loyal subjects to rise up and attempt to overthrow the king was perpetrated. Indeed, the idea gained legal justification with the development, new to the fifteenth century, of the doctrine of treason by words.\textsuperscript{77} The events of the

\textsuperscript{73} See above, Henry VII's pageants into York, Chapter Five, pp. 175-178.
\textsuperscript{77} This was a notion new to the fifteenth century. See J.G. Bellamy The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1970. p. 106.
following year, in which an angry Yorkshire mob lynched the earl of Northumberland, must have added to Henry’s concerns.\footnote{113}

Henry’s response to the uprising of the impostors Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck was the denigration of both claims. The claim that Simnel was really the earl of Warwick was met firstly by a procession through the city featuring the real earl of Warwick: “so that thereby the foolish notion that the boy was in Ireland would be driven from men’s minds.”\footnote{114} Upon Lambert Simnel’s capture he was publicly displayed in London, “at one stage at least with the real Warwick.”\footnote{115} Once Warbeck was captured in the late 1490s, a series of moves were undertaken by Henry to finally quiet, or attempt to quiet, rumours about Warbeck that had now spread throughout Europe. One of the most significant of these included the public display of Warbeck, seated upon a heavily symbolic scaffold “made of pypis & of othir Empty vessells.”\footnote{116} A confession was also produced and distributed, with Warbeck outlining his true identity for the masses; and the text was entered into at least one of the London chronicles.\footnote{117} Further public statements had to be made when he escaped again in 1499 to the effect that: “he nevyr was the person which he was namyd nor any thing of that blood.”\footnote{118} A few years later, a confession was allegedly extracted from Sir James Tyrell, one of the men implicated as being part of Edmund de la Pole’s circle. This confession, in which Tyrell apparently claimed to have murdered the two princes, later formed part of the works of Polydore Vergil and Sir Thomas More.

To sum up, it is clear that at certain points during the fifteenth century, an information war was being waged over the opinions of a public. This public was defined throughout the documents as being “the people”. During certain crisis

\footnote{114}{Anglica Historia, p. 17.}
\footnote{115}{Bennett, \textit{Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke}, p. 111.}
\footnote{116}{Great Chronicle of London, p. 287.}
\footnote{117}{Great Chronicle of London, pp. 284-286.}
\footnote{118}{Great Chronicle of London, p. 291.}
points, messages disseminated by both the state and by those who opposed the state reveal both an acknowledgement of an audience, and awareness that propaganda was required to manipulate that audience. In addition, these messages contained, within themselves, refutations of previous propagandistic statements. This demonstrated that there was, even if it was not stated in such terms, the concept of a public relations war, or conflict, during certain points in the fifteenth century. Propaganda during this period was more than just a way for the king to promote himself. It became a necessity to counter messages that were being propagated by those opposed to, or seeking to overthrow the crown. It is difficult dismiss the propaganda of this period as being ephemeral, or of little importance in the political process. Propaganda began as an important part of the Lancastrian regime, and a necessary accompaniment to the means by which Henry Bolingbroke had seized power. Discontent stemmed from powerful aristocratic factions alienated from the centre of power, as well as those who would be described as ‘the commons” or “the people”. The men of “low estate” who threatened Beaufort in 1425 may have been an important precursor to “the commons” who would enthusiastically support the Yorkists in the late 1450s and early 1460s. By this time the Lancastrians changed their propagandist methods, now criticising Yorkist leaders for appealing to “the people”. The shift to this point from 1411, when Thomas Hoccleve had urged the future Henry V “wynneth the peples vois” is striking. The Yorkists had claimed the populist mantle, and used it to their advantage when appealing to the “public”. But looking across the century of these messages, it can be seen that the longevity of messages such as the perjury of Richard II, the saintliness of Henry VI, or the illegitimacy of the princes in the Tower indicate that the textualisation process, through which these messages were written down and disseminated, ensured their transmission to future generations. These specific messages will be the focus of the Chapter Seven. How these messages then became history will be examined in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Seven

Propagandistic Messages: Themes and Critiques

In this chapter, we will examine the final stages of the processes outlined in the previous chapter in regards to the propaganda levelled against the state. What were the most important messages contained in these oppositional discourses and critiques of the state? How, if at all, did these critiques relate to the contemporary expectations of kingship present in the didactic texts that were examined in Chapter Four? Was there consistency in the messages that were disseminated across the fifteenth century? Were there similarities between the messages disseminated by and to different classes of people and texts during this period? In this chapter, we will develop a more complete picture of how the themes contained in these documents related to the political propaganda in general of fifteenth century England. In Chapter Eight, we will examine how those messages went from being propaganda to being history.

A number of themes were used in the propagandist messages against the kings during this period. These themes were strongly linked to the didactic texts and expectations of kingship. Due to the scope of the thesis, not all of these expectations can be examined. Indeed, not all are even present in the critiques levelled against the state. Nevertheless, several important topoi recurred constantly during this period. These include the birth legitimacy of the king, or that of the king’s opponents, maintenance of justice and stability in the kingdom, sound financial management, the need for good counsel and appeals to nationalism. In comparing these points, the final question to be addressed is whether any of the messages contained in the propaganda of the fifteenth century were new, or merely continuations of previous themes.

Legitimacy was a key point that emerged as a critique of rulers from the very beginning of the period. The trial of John Sparrowhawk provided an outline of the questions that were allegedly raised during the early years of Henry IV’s rule:
The said John Sparrowhawk says...in a village which lately belonged to the Earl Marshal about one or two miles from Baldock, he came to a house there of a tailor unknown to him. And there the said tailor’s wife said to the said John: ‘See how wet it is and what dreadful weather there is these days and has been all the time of the present king, for there has not been seven days good and seasonable weather all his time.’ And she further said that the present king was not the rightful king but that the earl of March is king by right, and that the present king was not son to the very noble prince John, duke of Lancaster, whom God assoil, but that he was born son to a butcher of Ghent...¹

The Sparrowhawk case presented the double-edged sword of Henry’s illegitimacy. Not only was he not the legitimate king, he was not even the legitimate son of his father. This kind of accusation would become the propaganda standard during the mid to latter part of the fifteenth century, as the legitimacy of Edward IV, Edward V and Henry VII would all be brought into question. Questions over the legitimacy of Edward IV and Edward V formed part of Richard III’s justification for claiming the throne.² In this sense, he was repeating the alleged actions of his brother, Clarence, a few years previously. Richard III also impugned the future Henry VII’s legitimacy in his proclamations:

for he is descended of bastard blode both of the fader side and moder side; for the said Owen, the grandfader, was a bastard borne, and his moder was doughter unto John duc of Somerset, sone unto John Erle of Somerset, son unto dame Kateryne Swynford, and of her in double advoutrow goten; wherby it evidently appereth that noo title can or may be in hym, whiche fulley entendeth to entre this Royaume purposing a conquest:

² See above, Chapter Four, pp. 136-138.
and if he should atcheve this false entent and purpose, every manmys lif, livelood, and goods shuld be in his hands, libertie and disposition: wherby shul d ensue the disheriting and distruction of all the noble and worshipfull blode of this Royalme for ever.³

Questioning Tudor’s legitimacy was a vital part of Richard’s propaganda. It is clear from Richard’s propaganda that he was keen to paint Tudor in as black a light as possible, an illegitimate pretender. These claims concerning legitimacy formed a powerful accusation against kings, or potential kings. Fortescue wrote:

> It is a trite proverb that *If a bastard be good, it comes to him by accident*, that is to say, by special grace; *but if he shall be bad, it comes to him by nature*. For the illegitimate offspring is deemed to contract corruption and blemish from the sin of his progenitors…⁴

The illegitimacy of the monarch, therefore, would be disastrous. This disaster is reinforced in the Sparrowhawk case, where the weather itself seems to react to the alleged illegitimacy of Henry IV. Richard’s proclamation claimed that an illegitimate ruler would set at risk the inheritance structure of the kingdom, hence anyone who supported such a ruler would thereby endanger their own succession to lands and titles. An illegitimate king, therefore, could not be expected to uphold the laws of justice if he himself transgressed against the laws of nature as outlined by Fortescue. In summary, the message conveyed at all points in the fifteenth century was that illegitimacy not only disqualified a king from ruling, it would also ruin the kingdom.

---

Justice was another key concern that was incorporated into critiques of the state. The first example comes from the Scrope rebellion. Archbishop Scrope’s methods of disseminating his messages against the state have already been examined above. Scrope’s bills were ironically enough, to be “emended and reformed, in avoidance of opposition and revolt, such as are likely to befall a kingdom because of failure of the law.” [my italics]. The emphasis on failure of the law was reinforced by the following point concerning the governing of the realm:

On account of the evil governance which is in the kingdom, it is to be emended, according to the course of truth and justice, and it is to be set in order because of the unsupportable burdens which run into all ranks of the clergy, and the injuries and derogations done to the estates, the spiritual as much as the temporal...

Five decades later, we find that little had changed in the language and the intention behind messages concerning justice. In 1450, a bill that York wrote to the king stated, in part:

Please it youre Hyghnes tenderly to considere the grett grutchyng and romore that is vniuersaly in this youre reame of [th]at justice is nouth dewly ministrid to such as trepas and offende a-yens youre lawes, and in special of them that ben endited of treson and o[th]er beyng openly noysed of the same. Wherfore for gret inconueniens [th]at haue fallen, and gretter is lyke to fallen here-aftere in youre seid reame, which God defende, but if be youre Hyghnesse prouysion couenable be

---

6 See Chapter Six, pp. 197-198.
8 Chronica et Annales, p. 403.
mad for dew reformacion and punishment in this behalf; wherfore I, youre humble sugett and lyge man, Richard duke of York, willyng as effectually as I can and desirynge suerte and prosperite of youre most roiall person and welfare of this youre noble reame, council and aduertyse youre Excellens…I offer and wol put me in deuoure for to exexeute youre comandementes in thes premises of such offenders and redresse of the seid mysrewlers to my myth and powere.9

This bill provides clues as to the state of the popular opinion at this point, or at least popular opinion as York constructed it. York alleges that “grett grutchyng and romore” are universal throughout the realm. Regardless of the truth, York made the point that popular opinion was on his side. This opinion, according to York, held that justice was not carried out by the king and was not “dewly ministrid.” This accusation corresponded directly to contempor ary concerns about the need of the king to carry out justice. York concluded by offering to assist the king in rendering justice to those who deserve it, thereby guaranteeing peace and tranquillity for the realm.

These themes of peace and tranquillity were an important element of the propaganda messages of the time, particularly since they connect to many of the state-influenced histories that will be examined in the next chapter. Once again, they were present from the very start of the period. When issuing his manifestos against the government of Henry IV, Scrope claimed that:

by means of these articles and grievances, let there be correction, reform and emendation, and when the government is justly and rightly ordered, for the sake of prosperity, peace, unity and tranquillity of the kingdom, let it then be laboured at among ourselves to make ways and directions to resist our external enemies, by the grace of God, who now ruin us, and our merchants, who ought to be one of the essential riches of

---

our land. And similarly, to make many other ways so far neglected because of the lack of good government, as much by water as by land, to resist the malice of the aforesaid enemies. And if it should be possible that these things be implemented, we have information and the full promise of those very men who now revolt in Wales, that they will be prudent and happy under the government of the King of England, just as they were in the times of Kings Edward and Richard, without rebellion or resistance having to be made.10

The use of propaganda to refer to a mythical, peaceful past would become a long-running topos. The notion that this peace could be shattered was a powerful public relations tool. After containing the rebellion in Lincolnshire in 1469, Edward issued his own set of proclamations against his wayward brother and the earl of Warwick, to counter those they had previously issued.11 These proclamations conflated the notions of peace and justice with concern for the commonweal. Outlining their crimes, Edward’s proclamation stated that:

the said Duke and Earl, unnaturally, unkindly and untruly intending his [Edward’s] destruction, and the subversion of his realm, and the commonweal of the same…12

The emotive language contained within the proclamation is clear. Significantly, this language resembled previous letters, bills and parliamentary propaganda, especially the three-part line concerning the destruction of the king, followed by the subversion of the realm, and the “commonweal of the same.”13 Edward’s propaganda now resembled the Lancastrian propaganda of 1460-61. Warwick and Clarence’s response to this bill was sent into England ahead of their return from France in 1470 and opened with an acknowledgement of their great love for the common weal:

10 *Chronica et Annales*, pp. 404-405.
11 For the criticisms contained within these bills, see *Chronicles of the White Rose*, pp. 219-222.
12 *Chronicles of the White Rose*, p. 227.
It is we dowte not notarily and open knowne unto you all, how uncurtasyly that in late dayes we have bene entreated, takyn, and accepted for the trwe hertes, tendar zeales, loves and affections that God knowith we have evar borne and entend, before all things erthly, to the weale of the Crowne and the advauncynge of the Common Weale of England; and for reprouvynge of falsehodd and oppresyon of the pore people; God and owr dedes our Judge.  

This was a clear refutation of the accusations of Edward IV. In turn, Richard III’s attacks in the parliament of 1484 against the Woodvilles would contain elements of both these statements. It seems that the fifteenth century saw the development of a kind of blueprint for propaganda; a common language of threats to the nation’s stability and welfare which could be repeatedly employed with merely a change of names and dates.

Financial concerns, particularly in regard to the king’s personal finances and issues with royal taxation formed a major part of the didactic texts of the fifteenth century. Responsible expenditure was stressed by texts such as the Secretum Secretorum. It is worth quoting the passage from the Secretum again:

But yf he [the king] enclyne hym to largesse, he shall perpetual ioye of his reavme. And yf the kynge dispose hym to rescuer vnduewly, to take the godes of his comons with vnreisonable and to grevous imposicions, he may not longe governe, neyther by Goddes lawe ne by mannes lawe.  

In this instance there were direct connections between the kinds of didactic texts circulating in the fifteenth century, and the propagandistic messages disseminated by those opposing the crown. In disseminating his critiques of 1405, Scrope stated that the intention of the bills, and by extension the uprisings in the north, were to:

---

15 Secretum Secretorum, p. 287.
put in order an emendation regarding excessive governance and unsupportable taxes and subsidies and extortions and oppressions, which rule over nobles, those working for pay, and the commons of the kingdom, towards the ultimate impoverishment and destruction of those who ought to be true supporters to all of the estates, spiritual and temporal…and that voluntary wastefulness be punished, that is, expenses made for individual and private profit from the great goods and wealth received from the aforesaid nobles, persons working for pay and commons, and that those goods be restored, for the salvation of the kingdom, and for the emendation of the faithful community.¹⁶

Forty-five years later, the Cade rebels disseminated similar points concerning the mismanagement of the king’s finances:

Item that the kyng is steryd & mevyd to lyve only on his comyns & other men to have the revenues of the crown whyche harth causyd porete in his excellence & grete paiements of the peple nou late to the kyng grauntyd in his parlements.¹⁷

During the Readeption period of 1469-1471, Warwick made similar accusations concerning Edward IV’s taxations, referring to: “other inordinate charges, upon their subjects, and commons, to the great grudge and impoverishing of them, which caused all the people of this land to grudge.”¹⁸ The responsible handling of the finances of the realm was strongly linked, as seen in these quotes, to the notions of peace and tranquillity that have been outlined above. Warwick’s bills against Edward IV in this matter attributed these taxes and imposition to the ‘seditious persons’, the bad councillors surrounding the king. It must be noted, of course, that such critiques were not an innovation of the fifteenth century, and indeed formed

¹⁶ Chronica et Annales, p. 404.
¹⁸ Chronicles of the White Rose, p. 220.
one of the longest running criticisms of royal government, expressed in parliamentary debate, popular literature and at times outright revolt, most famously that of the peasants in 1381. These critiques still carried weight in the fifteenth century, particularly combined with the litany of charges that usually accompanied anti-government propaganda.

The importance of good counsellors during this period was emphasised by didactic texts, and became a prominent theme towards the middle of the century. The Cade bills made the following criticism of Henry VI’s court:

Item that the lordys of his ryall blode being put from his dayly presence & other mene persones of lower nature exaltyd & made cheyff of privy counsel the whiche stoppyth materys of wronge done in his realme from his excellent audines & may not be redressyd as lawe wull…

The exclusion of councillors of the “ryall blood” was an oblique reference to York’s exclusion from government during this period. It also reinforced broader notion about the class of people who should be advising the king, and provided a textual justification for the brutal murders of Lancastrian advisors during 1450. Warwick and Clarence employed a similar strategy in 1469 against the leading Woodville allies of Edward IV. The messages reiterated the same themes, with the “Commons petition” distributed by Warwick and Clarence being a prime example. The opening section, the only part of the document that Warwick, Clarence and the Archbishop of York (George Neville, Warwick’s brother) openly claimed to have written, claimed that:

the King our Sovereign Lord’s true subjects of divers parts of this his realm of England, have delivered to us certain bills of Articles, which we suppose that ye have in those parts, remembering in the same the deceivable covetous rule, and guiding, of certain seditious persons; that is to say: the Lord

---

19 Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 251.
20 *Jack Cade’s Rebellion*, p. 187.
Rivers; the Duchess of Bedford his wife…and others of their mischievous rule opinion and assent, which have caused our said sovereign Lord, and his said realm, to fall in (to) great poverty of misery, disturbing the ministration of the laws, only attending to their own promotion and enrichment.21

The bill constructed the Woodvilles as grasping self-promoters. This image of the Woodvilles was a powerful propaganda tool in the hands of Richard III. Whether this bill was actually written by “the commons” is debatable. If not, then the document certainly comes across as being a particularly sophisticated form of propaganda. In claiming the articles were written by “the commons”, Warwick and the others could distance themselves from the accusations they contained, in much the same way as vernacular chroniclers might attribute certain potentially treasonous actions, writings or statements to “the commons” or “the people.” The version of the articles that appeared in *John Vale’s Book* was prefaced by the claim that: “the articles following were divised made and desired by the duc of Clarence, therle of Warrewik, the lorde Willowby and lorde Wellis before the felde of Lyncolnshire men.”22 It is however, just possible that some members of the “commons” did produce these articles. Certainly articles attributed to the ‘commons of Kent’ were distributed in 1460.23

The first items were prefaced by:

In three the next articles underwritten are comprised and specified the occasions and very causes of the great inconveniences and mischiefs that fell in this land, in the days of King Edward the Second, King Richard the Second, and King Henry the Sixth, to the destruction of them, and to the great hurt, and impoverishing of the land.24

---

21 *Chronicles of the White Rose*, p. 219.
22 *John Vale’s Book*, p. 212.
23 *John Vale’s Book*, pp. 210-212.
24 *Chronicles of the White Rose*, pp. 219-220.
This section was a devastating warning to Edward IV, reminding both him and the larger audience of the three kings who had previously been overthrown. This bill suggests that fifteenth century audiences had some basic grasp of not only the history of, but the continuity of critiques against, ruling kings. Otherwise, why should messages of this kind have been thought effective? The three articles that follow contained the various mistakes that these kings made, with the obvious implication that Edward IV repeated these errors, primarily in his choice of councillors. The preceding three kings had:

- estranged the great lords of their blood, from their secret council and were not advised by them; and taking about them,
- others not of their blood, and inclining only to their council, rule and advice, the which persons took not respect, nor consideration to the weal of the said princes, nor to the commonweal of this land.\(^{25}\)

This passage both targeted the Woodville clique surrounding Edward IV and demonstrated how many of the accusations against ruling kings now sounded the same, showing continuity across the period.

Nationalism was another significant feature of fifteenth-century propaganda tracts, although they seemed to reflect contemporary attitudes present in chronicles and government documents, rather than anything specifically outlined in contemporary didactic texts, which did not emphasise, for the most part, nationalistic sentiment.\(^{26}\) York’s public relations strike preceding his attempt in 1452 to overthrow the duke of Somerset involved sending letters to various towns informing the citizens of his actions. One such letter was sent: “To my right worshipful Friends, the Bailiffs, Burgesses, and Commons of the good Town of Shroesbury”. The potential audience is outlined, and a number of significant elements emerge in the letter itself:

\(^{25}\) *Chronicles of the White Rose*, p. 220.
\(^{26}\) Many of the didactic tracts of the period were translations from earlier, sometimes continental texts. Nationalistic sentiment does appear in specifically English tract such as Fortescue’s various writings.
Right worshipful friends… I suppose it is well known unto you, as well by experience as by common language said and reported throughout all Christendom, what laud, what worship, honour and manhood was ascribed of all Nations unto the people of this realm, whilst the Kingdom’s Sovereign Lord stood possessed of his Lordship in the Realm of France, and Dutchy of Normandy; and what derogation, loss of merchandize, lesion of honour, and villainy, is said and reported generally unto the English nation, for loss of the same; namely unto the Duke of Somerset, when he had the commandence and charge thereof...  

The nationalistic touches that York used are obvious. Significantly, he attributed England’s greatness to the effects of “common language”, reflecting a sense that, as Benedict Anderson might have it, that the English nation was being “imagined” through spoken word “throughout all Christendom.” Somerset’s losses in France were injuries “unto the English nation”. This trope of injury to the nation through some misdeed of the bill’s target was used a number of times during this period. The bill distributed on Henry’s behalf in 1450 spoke of injury to the nation from seditious language.  

York’s 1452 bill spoke of injury to the nation through the military failures of Somerset. This trope would continue to be used throughout the fifteenth century, until it became a standard accusation.  

Six years later, themes concerning nationhood arose during the “Loveday” procession, Henry VI’s attempt to bring both sides together in the spirit of reconciliation and harmony. In truth, anti-alien riots and clashes between Yorkist and Lancastrian retainers in the streets of London had rendered such a reconciliation too little, too late.  

A service was held at Paul’s Cross, after which the “united”

---

parties progressed through the city. Nationalistic sentiment was reinforced throughout the ballad:

Oure enemys quaken & dreden in ful sore
That peas is made there was diusion
Which to them is a gret confusion
And to vs ioi and felicite
God hold hem longe in eury season
That Anglond may reioise in concord and vnite.\(^{30}\)

If there was any doubt as to England’s primary enemy, the next stanza cleared it:

Now is sorowe with shame fled into ffraunce
As a felon that hath forsworn this londe.\(^{31}\)

The negativity of the civil conflict had fled to France, the natural home for such a “felon”. The lines in the first stanza concerning the fear of England’s enemies at the unified nobility imply that once the reconciliation has taken place, military action overseas may resume. Peaceful sentiments were underpinned with a militaristic bent to ensure that this reconciliation was seen as aligned to contemporary expectations of warlike kingship.

Nationalistic sentiments were also present in the bills that Warwick and Clarence sent from France, albeit under circumstances that were far from ideal. Warwick and Clarence had concluded an alliance with the remnant Lancastrian forces in France led by Margaret of Anjou. This was not, however, mentioned in the bills. Warwick’s intention to “chastice and punishe the seyde covetows persons” surrounding the king, would be done though the:

helpe and assistaunce of Almighty God, his blessed Mothar and glorious Virgyne seynt Marye, with all the hoole company of Heaven; secondly the blessed and holy martire Seynt George owr patronoe, and every trew englyshe man dredyng God, lovynge his realme and the wele of his neighbours; and


thirdly we shall for owar discharges in that behalf, both agaynst God and Man, put us in owre uttarmoste devour that we can or may: and thereupon jeopardy bothe owr lyves, bodyes and goods.\textsuperscript{32}

The last people that were going to be mentioned were Margaret of Anjou and the remaining Lancastrians, an indication that the intention was to win over disaffected Yorkists rather than Lancastrian sympathisers. Additionally, the assistance from the French king may have prompted Warwick to add the lines about St George and “trewe englyshe men”, reinforcing an impression of his own love of his nation as much as appealing to any English sense of nationalism.

Similar themes were employed by Richard III in order to critique his dynastic rival Henry Tudor. The actual nature of the public relations conflict between the men, where competing messages were sent throughout England at around the same time, has been examined above\textsuperscript{33}. The specifically foreign threat of Henry Tudor’s invasion was a running theme of Richard’s propaganda, especially during 1485, when Tudor’s invasion was imminent. References had previously been made to the numbers of “Straungiers from Britayn over the See” who would support Tudor during such an invasion.\textsuperscript{34} A proclamation that was “made to every shire” reinforced this point, describing Tudor’s supporters as having:

\begin{quote}
  forsaken theire naturalle Contre…taking theim to be under thobeissaunce of the kinges auncyent ennemye Charles calling himself king of Fraunce and to abuse and blynde the Commons of this said Royaulme. the said Rebelles & traytors have chosen to be theire Capitaigne oon Henry tydder Son of Edmond Tydder Son of Owen Tidder which of his Ambicious & insaciable Covetyce incroceth.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Original Letters, Series 2, Vol. I, p 137.
\textsuperscript{33} See above, Chapter Six.
\textsuperscript{34} Rotuli Parliamentorum, p. 245.
This proclamation contains several key points. Richard played to nationalistic sentiment, marginalizing the rebels against him by the references to foreign assistance. An earlier proclamation made a similar point:

The king our said soverain lord desirethe willethe and chargethe alle and everyche of the naturre subgiettes of this his Royaulme to calle the premisses to their mynde. And like gode and true englisshe men to endevoire theimself at alle theire powairs for the defense of theimself theire wifes children goothes and enheritaunces ayemst the said malicious porposes and conspiracions whiche the auncyentes ennemyes of this lande have made with the kinges said Rebelles for the finall destruccion of the same lande as is aforesaid.36

The emphasis was obvious. True Englishmen would stand with Richard against the foreign enemy. Both this proclamation and the previous one claimed that the intention of these enemies was to “abuse and blind” the commons. It seems clear that Richard was seeking to appeal to this group in particular, as his forebears did. But this group now assumed a more nationalistic character. The people were now more than just the voice of God. They were the English voice of God. The propagandistic nationalism of Henry V had now come full circle. English nationality was now a tool to be used against those who stood against the crown, in this case Henry Tudor, who intended to ruin the lives of all “true” Englishmen with his army of foreign supporters and who would sell out England’s continental interests.37

Henry VII also adopted a similar topos. A letter sent into Wales in early August 1485, with the intention of inciting the Welsh, expanded the above themes:

Right trusty and well beloved, we greet you well. And where it is so that through the help of Almighty God, the assistance of our loving friends and true subjects, and the great confidence that we have to the nobles and commons of this our

principality of Wales, we be entered into the same, purposing by the help above rehearsed in all haste possible to descend into our realm of England not only for the adeption of the crown unto us of right appertaining, but also for the oppression of that odious tyrant Richard late duke of Gloucester, usurper of our said right, and moreover to reduce as well our said realm of England into his ancient estate, honour and prosperity, as this our said principality of Wales, and the people of the same to their erst liberties, delivering them of such miserable servitudes as they have piteously long stand in…

Tudor shrewdly attempted to manipulate the Welsh audience of this letter, by implying that England and Wales were two separate entities, and that the “liberties” of both, presumably removed by the odious tyranny of Richard, would be restored under his rule. The appeal to English nationalism is a little more diffuse, yet Tudor still felt the need to refer to English liberties. He had possibly been informed of Richard’s proclamations concerning the foreign support and foreign composition if his forces, and sought to response with reassurances about English and Welsh identity and freedom.

Connected to this point are Tudor’s references to his “true subjects”. Throughout this period the notion of “truth” was an important propaganda theme. Tudor adapted and shaped this theme to his own ends, namely to encourage loyal subjects to commit treason. As Horrox has noted, these letters present a monarch appealing to his subjects. When combined with notions of England and the English, the similarities between Richard’s messages and Tudor’s messages become more pronounced. For Richard, the “true Englishmen” would stand against the foreign

---

Tudor. For Henry, the “true subjects” were those who would remain true to him, and rid themselves of the tyrannical Richard.

This last point forms the final part of analysis of this chapter, the notion of innovations in the propaganda of this period. While many of the messages concerning good governance, peace and tranquillity and the maintenance of justice are consistent, other themes emerged in propagandistic statements, particularly in the latter part of the fifteenth century, with the innovative kings and pretenders being Richard III, Henry VII, Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck. The various different messages disseminated by these figures seems to lend credence to the claim that there was some evolution in the themes of fifteenth-century English propaganda.

Richard III’s vicious morality attacks against his opponents are an example of such innovations. As Charles Ross bluntly stated: “Richard was the first English king to use character assassination as state policy.”\(^{40}\) These attacks were present throughout his parliament of 1484, where he castigated Edward IV’s Woodville advisors as:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
    \item delityng in adulation and flattery, and lede by sensuality and concupiscence…personnes insolent, vicious, and of inordinate avarice\(^{41}\)
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

These themes would be pursued in his proclamations against Tudor’s followers, who were described as:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
    \item Rebelles and traytors diabled and atteynted by auctorite of highe court of parliament of whom many ben knowen for open murdrers adultrers & extorcioners contrary to the pleasire of god and ayeimst alle trouthe honnor & nature\(^{42}\)
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

Richard’s enemies were not just traitors and murderers, but also adulterers. This tends to reflect a more puritanical line that Richard seemed to take generally in promoting his kingship, perhaps as a contrast to the decadence, or perceived

\(^{41}\) *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, p. 240.
decadence, of his brother’s court. His letter to the bishops to advising them that his "principall entent and fervent desire is to see vertue and clennesse of lyving to be advaunced and multiplied" seem to reinforce this point.

The surviving letters of Henry Tudor sent through England during 1485 reveal that Henry was also taking new approaches to convincing potential supporters of his political program. This letter from mid-1485 presents the start of the Tudor propaganda program:

Right trusty, worshipfull and honourable good friends, and our allies, I greet you well. Being given to understand your good devoir and intent to advance me to the furtherance of my rightful claim due and lineal inheritance of the crown, and for the just depriving of that homicide and unnaturall tyrant which now unjustly bears dominion over you, I give you to understand that no christian heart can be more full of joy and gladnesse that the heart of me your poor exiled friend…Given under our signet. H.R.

Another letter sent into Wales in early August 1485, with the intention of inciting the Welsh, expanded the above themes:

Right trusty and well beloved, we greet you well. And where it is so that through the help of Almighty God, the assistance of our loving friends and true subjects, and the great confidence that we have to the nobles and commons of this our principality of Wales, we be entered into the same, purposing by the help above rehearsed in all haste possible to descend into our realm of England not only for the adeption of the crown unto us of right appertaining, but also for the oppression of that odious tyrant Richard late duke of Gloucester, usurper

---

43 Ross, Richard III, p. 128.
of our said right, and moreover to reduce as well our said realm of England into his ancient estate, honour and prosperity, as this our said principality of Wales, and the people of the same to their erst liberties, delivering them of such miserable servitudes as they have piteously long stand in…

The message contained in these letters is groundbreaking. Previous usurpers such as Henry IV and Richard III concealed their intentions to claim the throne. Edward IV used the parliamentary endorsement of his father’s claims, then military victories to support his actions. Henry Tudor’s approach was different, in that he claimed to be the rightful king from the start, a public relations act unprecedented in this period. As Rosemary Horrox pointed out, the tone of these letters suggested that Henry was “writing as a king making war on his rebellious subjects.” Hence Richard was referred to as the duke of Gloucester, calling himself king of England. While this message had obvious precedents, particularly in Yorkist references to the Lancastrians being kings “in deed, but not in right”, what was groundbreaking was the timing: that Henry made such an accusation before he had won the throne. This principle would carry through to his victory at Bosworth: he dated his reign to the previous day, the 21st of August, allowing the possibility of attainting those who fought for Richard. While he could not hold to this policy, it is worth noting that the idea of backdating the reign was being used in the lead up to Bosworth.

Henry’s use of the term “tyrant” is also worth noting. As outlined in the sections concerning Henry IV’s justification of seizing the throne, the early Lancastrian propaganda came close to accusing Richard II of tyranny, but never actually did so. Here, Tudor became the first counter-propagandist of the period (in England) to accuse the ruler of tyranny. This accusation linked directly to didactic tracts such as John Trevisa’s *The Governance of Kings and Princes*, which warned of the dangers

---

46 Quoted in Griffiths *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty*, p. 139.
of “tyraundise”, describing it as the “worste lordschepe”. The themes of Richard’s tyranny would move from Henry’s pre-invasion letters into his official parliamentary records and, as we shall see in the next chapter, into the state-influenced history of Polydore Vergil.

Both the Simnel revolt and Perkin Warbeck’s various adventures adapted previous themes such as the subversion of justice for their brief messages to “the people” that were disseminated in 1487 and the late 1490s respectively. An example from 1487 was recorded into the York city records from “Lambert Simnel”, which stated:

Trusty and welbiloved, we gret e you wele, and forasmoche as we beeene commen within this our realme not oonely by Goddes grace to atteyne our right of the same but also for the relief and well of our said realme, you and all othre our true subgiettes which hath bene gretyely iniuiried and oppressid in default of nowne ministracion of good rules and justice…

Writing a decade later, Perkin Warbeck wrote:

Richard, by the Grace of God, King of England, Lord of Ireland, prince of Wales: to all those who will see or read our present letters, greeting. It hath pleased God, who putteth down the mighty from their seat and exalteth the humble and suffreth not the hopes of the just to perish in the end, to give us means to show ourselves armed unto our lieges and people of England. But far be it from us to intend their hurt or damage, or to make war upon them, otherwise to deliver ourself and them from tyranny and oppression. For our mortal enemy, Henry Tudor, a false usurper of the crown of England, which to us by natural and lineal right appertaineth, knowing in his heart our undoubted right…

50 Quoted in Ian Arthurson, The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy, p.146.
Another version of the letter rewrote the events of 1485, stating that:

The which season it happened one Henry son to Edmond Tydder-Earl of Richmond created, son to Owen Tydder of low birth in the country of Wales-to come from France and entered into this our realm, and by subtle false means to obtain the crown of the same unto us of right appertaining…

As well as reinforcing the contemporary expectations of kingship that could be found in bills throughout the fifteenth century, these letters also reflected the innovations of Tudor’s messages, and played upon the notions that Simnel and Warbeck were the rightful kings, entering the realm to claim their respective thrones from a tyrant who had trampled upon the liberties of the people.

What conclusions can be drawn about the messages that were present in the oppositional discourses of the fifteenth century? Firstly many of the messages outlined in the didactic texts examined in Chapter Three appeared in the propaganda of this period. Themes such as justice, the need to preserve the common weal and maintain tranquillity in the realm show an interrelation between the political tracts and the political propaganda of the period. Secondly, we can see that there was a degree of continuity concerning the various messages. Similar claims can be found throughout all the bills of complaint against the state, from the very beginning of the period, with Henry Bolingbroke’s claims against Richard II, through to the complaints of Perkin Warbeck. While continuity was a hallmark of this period, a number of innovations appeared the latter part of the century, especially in the propaganda of 1483-1485. The final conclusion that can be drawn is that these critiques and understandings of concepts of good kingship were not limited to any one class of people. The figures involved in the John Sparrowhawk case at the start of the chapter were a tailor, a beggar, and his wife: hardly the educated upper classes. Nevertheless, they seemed to know what was expected of kings during this period. Apparently the messages of the didactic texts discussed in Chapter Three had

escaped the page, spreading through the realm and providing commoners with a vocabulary with which they could express discontent about their rulers. This case demonstrated that these ideas about kingship were spread through many different levels of society, not just those members of society who possessed didactic texts. This may be the reason why many of these complaints are similar. The Scrope case a few years later, and its reportage in various chronicles shows how the messages concerning good kingship moved between different sections of society, and from different forms of media, from the didactic text to the distributed bill and proclamation, and on to the chronicle sources. In a similar fashion, the links here between the didactic texts concerning kingship, the letters distributed by York and the bills disseminated by Cade’s followers show that there was a flow of information moving between these groups that mirrored the information flow outlined at the start of this chapter between those mentioned in the Sparrowhawk case and the bills of Scrope. Neither expectations of kingship, nor clear articulations of anti-government sentiment were confined to any one class; instead they moved freely between all. The final stage of this process is to now see how these various messages went from being propaganda to being history.
Chapter Eight
Rewriting the Fifteenth Century: English Kings and State Influenced Histories

Several “histories” written during the period will be examined in this chapter. Some of these have been introduced already. All of these histories were influenced by the propaganda of the fifteenth century English state. Some of these works themselves act as propaganda. So why, at the end of four chapters on propaganda, do we examine these histories? Firstly, and most importantly, it demonstrates how the messages contained within the propagandist media of the various Lancastrian, Yorkist and Tudor dynasties were turned into “history”. Secondly, they show how fifteenth-century writers imagined the past. The construction of a nation’s history is an important step in the examination of nationalism that was undertaken in Chapter Four. Thirdly, from these histories we can glean not only how fifteenth and early sixteenth century writers imagined their past, but how their imagining has affected the writing of the fifteenth century down to the present day.

Why “state influenced” history, rather than state sponsored? Proving that a particular history, such as the Arrival of Edward IV was authorised by the state is problematic, partly because the authors of so many of them are anonymous. Whilst figures such as Adam of Usk and Polydore Vergil are familiar, the identity of the author of the Gesta Henrici Quinti, for example, remains elusive. Even when we can identify certain writers, elements of their lives remain obscure. However, our lack of knowledge about the author of the Arrival does not prevent us from knowing that the work was written both in the vernacular and French, and distributed on the continent. The Gesta Henrici Quinti was not any less an influential cornerstone of the Henry V myth because the author’s identity is unknown. Hence “state influenced” is a more accurate, flexible term to describe these works. In the case of Adam of Usk’s history, a counter-discourse to the state can also be detected, as his sympathies changed from being pro-Lancastrian to pro-Mortimer.
Using the word “history” to describe the six different accounts that will be analysed in this chapter is also problematic. These texts are radically different from one another both in presentation, and intention. Is it feasible to place a pamphlet like the *Arrival of Edward IV*, which merely recounts Edward’s return to England in 1471 and his reclamation of the throne, alongside Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia*, which traces a history of England starting with its Roman foundations, and ends with Henry VIII? I would argue that it is. These documents each represent an attempt to come to terms with the past, whether the immediate past of the Reademption period, in the case of the *Arrival*, or England’s past as a whole. Both writers incorporated the propaganda of their own time into these texts. Both works can be distinguished from the bills and proclamations referred to in the previous four chapters that were designed to deal with the political needs of the moment. These histories are different, a broader record of a fifteenth century that would undergo many different interpretations both during the time and for centuries after. They are also different from contemporary town chronicles, which tended to be multi-authored texts, more concerned with local than national concerns.

One example of a state-influenced history has been selected from each reign, or each king of the period. These histories have been chosen as examples primarily because of the proximity to the kings each of the authors had. For the reign of Henry IV, I have selected *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, which details the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV. Adam’s position as a historian of this period was unique. He was propelled from the inner circles of Lancastrian power to the outer in a few years. The *Gesta Henrici Quinti* had the advantage of being written, as far as modern historians can determine, by someone who was with Henry V at Agincourt, and recorded his account of Henry’s reign up until 1417. The *Gesta* was far more propagandistic and supportive of the state than Usk, and could safely be referred to as a “state-endorsed” history.

The reign of Henry VI presents more of a problem. Hardyng’s chronicle, while initially dedicated to Henry VI, was revised in the light of Yorkist victories. For Henry VI, we must move forward a number of decades, but not before covering the *Arrival of Edward IV*, which provides the closest example of a state-sponsored history that we have from the
fifteenth century.¹ This document gave the Yorkist account of the Readeption, as well as a character sketch of Edward IV completely at odds with many other historical interpretations. John Blacman’s Life of Henry VI was quite probably written in the reign of Richard III and served slightly different purposes than the other histories mentioned on this list. I intend to argue that far from being a Tudor-influenced text, as others have supposed, that it in fact formed part of the cult of Henry VI that was developing towards the end of Edward IV’s reign, and represents one of Richard III’s efforts to harness this cult to his own ends.

The final work is perhaps the only text out of the six claiming to be a history, and moreover a new kind of history, one that would be free from the constraints and historiographical problems of its past; a history that would be objective and truthful.² Polydore Vergil’s Anglica Historia was one of the most influential histories published in the early Tudor period. It gave an intellectual gloss to the Tudor myths that had been established since the death of Richard III in 1485. This history was used by Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed in their own chronicles, and then transmitted through them to William Shakespeare, whose historical plays largely formed how the fifteenth century would be seen in the popular imagination up to the present day.

Due to the constraints of space and the political focus on the usurpations and political turmoil of the fifteenth century, the pre-fifteenth century elements of these texts will not be analysed in as great depth as the fifteenth century sections. The reasons for doing so are obvious: the purpose of this chapter is to examine the textual construction of the fifteenth century, and how these histories were both influenced by propaganda and acted themselves, in some cases, as propaganda.

The first history to be examined is The Chronicle of Adam of Usk. His viewpoint is important as his history shows both the state-sponsored discourse of the Lancastrians, as

² Denys Hay, Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, pp. xxviii-xxix.
well as the anti-Lancastrian sentiment that would arise during Henry IV’s reign. Usk was a Welsh-born lawyer, whose patrons included the Mortimer family and Thomas Arundel. These brief facts show how Usk’s loyalties could be divided between the family of the rightful heir to Richard II, Edmund Mortimer, and the man who did more than anyone else to assist Bolingbroke onto the throne.

The chronicle opens with the death of Edward III, and the succession of Richard II. Some brief points of Usk’s relation of the reign of Richard II must be noted, particularly in terms of Usk’s criticism of Richard’s youth, and the attendant evils that flowed from having a child on the throne:

In keeping with the saying of Solomon, ‘Woe to the land whose king is a child’, during the time of this Richard’s youth, both because of it and because of what resulted from it, numerous misfortunes continued to plague the English kingdom, as has already been explained, and will become more apparent from what follows, leading to great confusion in this realm and, in the end, to the destruction of King Richard himself and of those who clung to him too fondly.

This passage suggests that the propaganda of the Lancastrian usurpation influenced the work of Usk. Signposted here was the notion of the chaotic kingdom that would be replaced by the stable rule of Henry Bolingbroke. The line about the king being a child is significant given Usk’s divided loyalties. The use of this argument in Lancastrian justifications for seizing the throne concerned the young Edmund Mortimer as much as the childishness of Richard II. If correct, this was potentially a dangerous piece of propaganda to include, even if the Mortimer family would never read the work itself. The incorporation of propaganda into history, whilst undoubtedly taking place in this section, was not without its problems.

Usk’s support for the Mortimer family was in no doubt. Writing about Roger Mortimer, Usk described him as: “A young man of the highest character…the people welcomed him

4 The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, p. 7.
5 See above, Chapter Four, p. 125.
joyfully and with open hearts.” Reinforced in the early sections on the Mortimer family are references to their lineal might. Usk traced their connections to the noble houses of Wales, which in turn derived from legendary British figures such as Cadwallader. Other lines are also traced, leading to descent from the: “noble kings of Britain, Italy, Troy, England, France and Spain.” This elaborate genealogy was potentially explosive given Usk’s connections to the family. In many ways, however, the connection to the royal line was only problematic if people chose to act upon it. It could also be argued that with this elaborate genealogy, Usk was hedging his bets. The turbulence of the reign of Henry IV, and the Southampton Plot of 1415, had centred on placing Edmund Mortimer upon the throne. While Usk could not directly state that Mortimer should be king, he seems to have created sections of his text in order to justify his position if Mortimer did ever successfully claim the throne. An elaborate genealogy could prove, in such an event, that despite some overt Lancastrian sympathies, Usk had in fact supported Mortimer all along.

Usk's account of the deposition proceedings is also revealing. Adam of Usk advised Bolingbroke during the deposition proceedings, and the chronicle reveals a number of different approaches that could have been taken to depose Richard II. Amongst these approaches included the claim that the eldest child of Henry III was not Edward I but his younger brother Edmund:

> It was suggested by some people- who claimed that Edmund earl of Lincoln was really the first born son of King Henry the third, but that he had been denied his birthright because of his imbecility and thus replaced by his younger brother Edward-that Richard should be deprived of his succession to the throne in the direct line of accordance with the right of blood descent from this Edmund.

Other possibilities were suggested in Usk’s work, when he compared Richard to the legendary British king Arthgallus, who:

> debased the noble and exalted the ignoble, seizing the goods of the wealthy and amassing indescribable treasures…as a result of this the heroes of the realm,

---

7 *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 41.
8 *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 65.
unable to bear such evils any longer, rose up against him, deposed him, and set up his brother in his place. Precisely the same things happened with this Richard, concerning whose birth many unsavoury things were commonly said, namely that he was not born of a father of the royal line, but of a mother given to slippery ways -- to say nothing of many other things I have heard.\(^9\)

Firstly here we can see the use of the British history that would serve other English kings of the fifteenth century. Usk’s work displayed the shifting depositional discourses that were constructed to replace Richard II. The legitimacy of Richard’s line of descent, as well as his birth, was impugned. The arguments were ridiculous, which is why they were abandoned in favour of a list of accusations concerning Richard’s rule. Nevertheless, Usk established in these passages a political strategy that informed much of the propaganda of the fifteenth century, one that involved throwing as much mud as possible, in the hope that something would stick. The parallels between 1399 and 1483 become obvious. In 1483, it was Richard III who acted as the historian, rewriting the Yorkist dynastic line to exclude both his brother and his brother’s children. Usk proposed a model in which the kings since Henry III were illegitimate, allowing Bolingbroke to take his rightful place on the throne. While he recorded this strategy, Usk carefully distanced himself from it through statements such as “suggested by some people” and “many other things I have heard”. These strategies put his work alongside the various city-based chronicles, which commonly ascribed their distancing of their critiques and comments to “the people said” or “the commons grutched sore”. In following this method, Usk was drawing upon and giving direction to a textual system of governmental critiques that would be carried out throughout the fifteenth century.

A short statement from Richard, who bemoaned his fate whilst in captivity in the Tower of London, preceded Usk’s account of the deposition. Usk wrote:

\[\text{the king began to discourse dolefully as follows, ‘My God, this is a strange and fickle land, which has exiled, slain, destroyed and ruined so many kings, so many rulers, so many great men, and which never ceases to be riven and worn down by dissensions and strife and internecine hatreds.’ And he recounted the names and} \]

\(^9\) *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 63.
the histories of those who had suffered such fates, from the time when the realm was first inhabited.\textsuperscript{10}

It is impossible to determine what Richard II said to Usk. What is significant is what Usk attributed to Richard, for the themes in this statement would be adapted for propagandistic ends in the fifteenth century, and influence how the history of that time would be constructed. The notion that England was being “worn down” by “dissensions and strife and internecine hatreds” appeared in the records of the initial parliaments of all usurping monarchs of the fifteenth century (Henry IV, Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII) as well as the state influenced histories that appeared during or after the reigns of those kings.\textsuperscript{11} This theme of instability and the rapid turnover of kings can also be seen in diplomatic correspondence, particularly the letters that Roderigo de Puebla sent to Spain in the late 1480s and 1490s. The notion of long-term instability being followed by the ordered rule of a usurping party was strong.

The account of the deposition closely follows the official record that was outlined in Chapter Five. Usk wrote that the archbishop of Canterbury:

Delivered a sermon on the theme ‘A man shall rule over them’, in which he praised unreservedly the vigour, good sense, and other qualities of the duke of Lancaster, commending him, and deservedly, as a ruler; he spoke also, among other things, of King Richard’s crimes, especially of how he had perfidiously and iniquitously had his uncle the duke of Gloucester suffocated in prison without giving him a hearing or the opportunity to reply, and how he had striven to subvert the entire law of the land, which he had sworn to uphold.\textsuperscript{12}

Here, Usk presents the official reasons for Richard’s deposition. The rumours and innuendo of what “some people” said have been left aside for, implicitly, the truth. This notion of truth is even more apparent when Usk recounts the coronation oath of Henry: “I heard the king swear to my lord of Canterbury that he would strive to rule his people with

\textsuperscript{10} The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, pp. 63-65.
\textsuperscript{11} For justifications of usurpations see above, Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{12} The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, p. 69.
mercy and truthfulness in all matters.”13 These notions, both of why Richard II was deposed and the promise of Henry to rule his people with “truthfulness” formed part of Lancastrian propaganda, along with the discourse of anti-government propaganda. Many of Henry’s proclamations against sedition focussed on matters of truth and untruth, with the latter presented as indicative of those who opposed his rule. The “truth” that Henry promoted was present in Usk’s account of the reasons for deposing Richard. The death of Gloucester and Richard’s striving to “subvert the entire law of the land” were the truth, the rumours and innuendo the work of other people. Through this process, Usk’s history incorporated not only the propaganda of the early Lancastrian regime, but also the “drafts”, the ideas that may have been proposed but were abandoned.

Usk’s history becomes less detailed after the Epiphany Uprising. This section, however, contains one of the most interesting and significant passages of the whole chronicle. Referring to those who had seized the lords at the centre of the uprising he wrote:

Meanwhile Lord Despenser, lord of Glamorgan, who was also a party to this conspiracy, was most despicably beheaded by workmen at Bristol; and the heads of those who had thus been brought to ruin were stuck on poles…seeing that all these acts were perpetrated solely by the violence of the common people, I fear that possession of the sword, which, although contrary to the natural order…might at some future time embolden them to rise up in arms against the lords.14

This statement stood in contrast to other sections of Usk’s chronicle, where the favour of the people was constructed as positive.15 Here the intervention of the common people into the political process is condemned. From this passage, we can witness the kind of state influenced discourse that would run within many fifteenth century texts in regards to the commons or the people. The tone of the above passage resembles passages in ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’ concerning Jack Cade’s rebellion. The involvement of the common people leading to trouble was a theme running through several didactic and

13 *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 73.
14 *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 91.
15 Such as in the case of Roger Mortimer.
propagandistic texts of the later Lancastrians such as George Ashby, who warned that the people could not be trusted. Lancastrian propaganda tracts such as the *Somnium Vigilantis* also criticised the Yorkists for appealing to the commons. These moves were arguably a shift in the perception of the commons from the earlier populism of Lancastrian kings such as Henry V to the more hostile perception of those who stood with Henry VI. But it is possible on reading this passage that a different interpretation could be made, that the later Lancastrians were reclaiming a discourse present in state influenced histories such as Adam of Usk.

Several key sections of early Lancastrian history are missing from Usk’s account: as a consequence of Usk’s retreat to Rome in 1402, Usk was unable to bring to events such as the Percy revolts the same level of detail as to the deposition. This is frustrating, as his observations on the Mortimer element to this plotting in 1403 would have been interesting to observe. The reader is left with a few brief, yet informative lines:

> In the following year, after a violent quarrel had broken out between the king and the house of Percy, that is, the family of the earl of Northumberland, who, it was rumoured, wanted to seize the crown of England for the earl of March because of their kinship with him -- which caused turmoil in the realm, because it was divided between the two sides -- a plan was formed to settle the issue by battle…

The elements recorded in other chronicle accounts are present here. The possibilities of March claiming the throne were only hinted at in this section. The primary motive was constructed as the kinship between the Percies and the Mortimers. However, the extensive claims for the Mortimer lineage made earlier in Usk’s piece may have rendered such an overt connection pointless. Usk could not have stated directly that Mortimer should have been king. By outlining the connection to the Percy family, and having written an earlier piece on Mortimer’s royal lines of descent, Usk could allow the reader to draw that conclusion. More significant was the final part of this section, in which Usk stated that the realm was divided into two sides because of this conflict. While there

---

17 For the lineage, see *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, p. 41.
is no contemporary evidence to suggest that this was the case, the theme of the divided realm was used repeatedly throughout the fifteenth century. The use of this theme reinforces the earlier point that these state-influenced histories could shape future propaganda discourses just as much as they could be shaped by current ones.

The last years of Henry’s reign, and the opening years of his son’s reign, seemed an anti-climax for Usk. The brightness and possibilities of 1399 were squandered, and Henry IV was left as a physically incapable king, ridden with problems. Usk in the section dealing with Henry’s death, in which a less than sympathetic portrayal of the dying king is given, graphically outlines these problems. The passage reads:

On the twentieth of March in the year of our Lord [1413], after fourteen years of powerful rule during which he crushed all those who rebelled against him, the infection which for five years had cruelly tormented Henry IV with festering of the flesh, dehydration of the eyes, and rupture of the internal organs, caused him to end his days, dying in the sanctuary of the abbot’s chamber at Westminster, whereby he fulfilled his horoscope that he would die in the Holy Land; and he was taken away by water to be buried at Canterbury. This festering was foreshadowed at his coronation, for as a result of his anointing then, his head was so infected with lice that his hair fell out, and for several months he had to keep his head covered.18

The physical disintegration of Henry IV was a commentary that reinforced Usk’s disillusionment. The reference to the coronation echoed Usk’s remarks about Richard II’s coronation. Unlike the largely symbolic problems contained in that section, the revelation of Henry’s hair loss seems more personal and derogatory. Themes of illness would prove to be influential in fifteenth century propagandistic discourse. As Jonathan Hughes argued, the links between the sick and dying king and the sick and dying land would be resurrected through Yorkist propaganda and various Arthurian stories concerning the Fisher King.19 The specific example of Henry would also be used by pro-Yorkist writers as an example of the sins of the Lancastrians in their seizure of the throne from an

19 Hughes, Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV, pp. 1, 19.
anointed king, and Henry’s responsibility for the execution of Archbishop Scrope in 1405. The notion of the physical defects of the king would be used by Tudor writers to present an image of Richard III that was divorced from reality.

The final section of Usk’s work dealt with the reign of Henry V, and shows Usk’s lack of personal information and insight. Most of it followed the same line as other sources from this period, showing perhaps the power of Henry V’s propaganda. A point of interest can be found in Usk’s account of the Southampton Plot:

Henry V, having first gone with the utmost devotion to visit the holy shrines, left London in glorious array on his way to make war against France, heading for the coast at Portsmouth. There he was met by ambassadors of the king of France; they pretended to be seeking a peace, but in fact bribed a number of the king’s councillors, namely Richard earl of Cambridge, the brother of the duke of York, and Lords Scrope and Grey, with a large sum of gold, to kill him, or at least put a stop to his expedition. Their plot was revealed by the earl of March, however, and they suffered the fate which they justly merited for such treason.

The notion of French involvement in the Southampton Plot appeared in other contemporary accounts, such as The Brut. What is significant about this passage is the role played by the earl of March. Despite the prior knowledge that March almost certainly had to the plot, the intention of which was to overthrow Henry V and place March on the throne, here he is presented as the hero of the piece, without whom the plot might never have come to light. While this role has been ascribed to him by other sources, the argument put forward by Pugh that March had developed cold feet and actually betrayed his companions is a strong possibility. In eliding any reference to the earl's possible involvement in the plot, Usk demonstrated the primary loyalties that had remained with him throughout the Lancastrian period. While these loyalties were never overt within his Chronicle, it was smaller moments like this that reveal them still present.

---

21 The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, p. 255.
22 The Brut, p. 374.
The Chronicle of Adam of Usk presented a state-influenced view of the deposition of 1399, and hinted at the messages that ran counter to the official propaganda of the early 1400s. While it revealed how the propaganda drives of the state could influence the writing of history, Usk’s personal history meant that limitations and restrictions to his sources obscured significant parts of Henry IV’s reign. The final sections of the chronicle, dealing with the reign of Henry V, are brief compared to the earlier sections of the chronicle. But the reign of Henry V provides a perfect dovetail into the next state influenced history to be examined, the Gesta Henrici Quinti.

Unlike Usk, the writer of the Gesta seems to have been a genuine insider. While his identity remains a mystery, historians have deduced that he was probably a cleric of Henry V’s court. The author was seemingly a member of the court at the Lollard revolt of 1414, and accompanied Henry on the French campaign of 1415. Such an eyewitness account is invaluable for showing not only the propaganda of the second Lancastrian monarch, but how this propaganda dictated Henry’s portrayal both in future fifteenth century sources, and general historiography down to the twenty-first century.

The period of time selected by the author was briefer than that of Usk. This is the first key difference between these texts. Usk’s text was in the chronicle tradition, his work originally intended as an addition to Higden’s Polychronicon. The Gesta was overtly propagandistic: meant to be read by a target audience. The date of composition, around 1417, is particularly important in this regard. Parliament had convened to meet Henry’s demands for funds to continue the fight in France. This may have been the audience for whom the Gesta was intended, although the modern editors of the Gesta have claimed that certain “imperfections” within the text may have meant that it was not for a noble audience. It is possible that the text was aimed more at the commons, the lower houses of parliament. It could also be argued that the Londoners that Henry was keen to appeal to during this period may have been one of the intended audiences for this text. In this

---

23 Gesta Henrici Quinti, p. xv.
24 Gesta Henrici Quinti, p. xxiv.
sense, the history acted as propaganda, an attempt to convince a target audience of a particular claim. How that claim was constructed will be seen below.

The *Gesta Henrici Quinti* encompasses what were in the eyes of the author the two defining events of Henry’s kingship: Oldcastle’s revolt and the victory at Agincourt. These events were framed in terms of Henry’s divine mandate to rule not only England, but France as well. From the beginning of the text, this mandate is outlined by the author. When discussing Henry V’s reign, and Henry himself, the author stated:

> When, young in years but old in experience, he began his reign, like the true elect of God savouring the things that are above, he applied his mind with all devotion to encompass what could promote the honour of God, the extension of the Church, the deliverance of his country, and the peace and tranquillity of kingdoms, and especially (because they were more closely connected and associated) the peace and tranquillity of the two kingdoms of England and France, which over a long and lamentable period of time have done injury to themselves by their internal conflicts, not without a great and grievous shedding of human blood.\(^{25}\)

This introductory passage contributed to the construction of the Lancastrian narrative begun by texts such as Adam of Usk’s *Chronicle*. As in Usk, Henry’s youthfulness is emphasised, in contrast to the sickly father not mentioned in the *Gesta*. The second part of the passage is equally significant, connecting the *Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, and later texts such as Polydore Vergil. The notions of the divided kingdom and internal strife are reinforced. Henry V did not take the throne under the same conditions as his father, and arguably there was less of a need to justify his position. But that need, in part, was still there, after a reign of rebellions, revolts and pretenders to the throne, the most significant of whom were still alive. The theme of unification outlined in the *Gesta* forms part of a broader public relations drive to deal with the reign of Henry's father, a process that included the reburial of Richard II. The failure to mention Henry IV in the *Gesta* may well be interpreted as being part of this program. The previous reigns of the English kings are reduced to a “long and lamentable time” marked by periods of “internal conflict”. The

---

\(^{25}\) *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 3.
significance of this *Gesta* passage is that the same theme was applied not only to England, but France as well, showing that the propagandistic discourses used by fifteenth century monarchs influenced the writing of not only history, but foreign policy. This reinforced the intention behind the writing of the *Gesta*, which in this context seems to be Henry’s need to bring peace and unification to France as well as England. The invasions that had occurred at the time of the writing and the later campaigns were to be undertaken for the good of France.

Prior to the campaigns in France, however, Henry had to deal with the Oldcastle rebellion and the Southampton Plot. These movements against him were framed as acts of God:

> God himself, Who is the searcher of hearts and in Whose hand are the hearts of kings, in order that at one and the same time vexation might furnish understanding and His elect be proved in the furnace of tribulation, allowed an adversary to rise up against him, a certain Sir John Oldcastle.\(^\text{26}\)

This was a masterful reinterpretation of recent events. In much the same way that Henry Tudor’s agency would be reduced by references to him as an avenging angel in texts such as Phillipe de Commynes *Memoirs*, so too has Oldcastle’s autonomy been cut short. The notion of Oldcastle’s lack of autonomy is reinforced by the passage following, which stated:

> This man, of great popular reputation, proud of heart, strong in body but weak in virtue, dared to presume not only against the king, but also against the Universal Church. For so poisoned had he been by Wycliffite malevolence that…he became as it were the leader and captain over those turbulent people who through divers parts of England had been grievously afflicted by such a malignant disease.\(^\text{27}\)

Lollard corruption had damaged any possibility that Oldcastle may have had. The notion that the Lollard “poison” could affect the kingdom was a powerful statement that combated the Lollards own propaganda. This ensured that Henry’s actions against Oldcastle would be a reinforcement of the favour that God had shown Henry:

---

\(^\text{26}\) *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 3.

\(^\text{27}\) *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, pp. 3-5.
But a just and merciful God, Who allows no one to be tried beyond his strength but always provides a way of escape for His elect in time of temptation, not only made steadfast the king’s heart, but also armed his against both the traitor’s person and his poison.\(^{28}\)

In much the same way as his father proclaimed the notion of the state’s truth opposed to the untruth of those who propagated messages against the king, here the \textit{Gesta} author embarked on a similar program. The poison of the Lollards opinions had to be combated as much as the Lollards themselves. Throughout the passages on Oldcastle Henry is presented as giving him every opportunity to repent:

\begin{quote}
The king…in consideration of the knightly rank of this apostate, charitably deferred sentence of death by fire and, in the hope of leading back the lost sheep from the waylessness of his error to the way of the truth…ordered him for a time to be put in chains in the Tower of London.\(^{29}\)
\end{quote}

The construction of Henry throughout these passages present him as being more of a religious leader than a secular one, whose duties included returning lost sheep to the church. The suppression of Oldcastle’s supporters that followed is reinforced by the sense of Henry’s spiritual mission.

Similar themes are employed in the \textit{Gesta}’s treatment of the Southampton Plot: the attempt to overthrow Henry to place Edmund Mortimer on the throne. Once again, the potential rebellion was presented as a divine test for the new king:

\begin{quote}
And then, while he [Henry] was waiting for a short time at his castle of Porchester before making the crossing, behold! God, still wishing to make trial of the constancy of His elect, allowed him to be tested…for our adversary the Devil (who is at all times evilly disposed to any good purpose) entered into the hearts of certain men close at hand, namely, the lords Richard, earl of Cambridge, his cousin-german, Henry, lord Scrope…and also Thomas Grey…These men, in their brutal madness and their mad brutality, tainted with a lust for power, but even more so by the stench of French promises or bribes, had conspired…not only to
\end{quote}

\(^{28}\) \textit{Gesta Henrici Quinti}, p. 5. \(^{29}\) \textit{Gesta Henrici Quinti}, p. 7.
prevent the intended expedition but also to inflict disaster by killing the king. But He Who sits above the cherubim and beholds the depths, and knows how vain are the deliberations of men, soon delivered the just from the ungodly and revealed the Judas-like iniquity and treason of these evil men through the lord Mortimer, the earl of March, whose innocence they had assaulted as part of this murderous design.  

This passage bears remarkable similarities not only to the passages within the *Gesta* dealing with Oldcastle’s rebellion, but to passages in *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk* that dealt with the Southampton Plot. The manipulation of the king’s enemies by supernatural forces was reinforced, as was the construction of the situation as a test from God. The attribution of French bribes mirrors the passages in both Usk and *The Brut*. That such similarities existed between these texts suggests common sources, most likely government accounts of the plot. The significant element that links the Usk and Gesta passages was the role attributed to Edmund Mortimer. In each, this role was minimised. It was not in the Lancastrian interest to publicise the intent of the conspirators towards Edmund Mortimer, nor Mortimer’s claim to the throne. His connection to the plot in both these instances seems almost non-existent. In this sense, Paul Strohm’s “amnesiac texts” theory can be used here. Both Usk and the *Gesta* acted in this way to erase the real Edmund Mortimer, the only potential dynastic challenge to Henry V’s rule.

The main concern of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* was the deeds of Henry V in France. These parts of the *Gesta* followed the formula that God was on Henry’s side. This point was reinforced by the final surrender of the French at Harfleur:  

> God’s favour for the English reinforced Henry’s claim to France and the claims of English nationalism that made themselves felt during Henry V’s kingship, and would reach their height at the council of

---

30 *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 19.
31 “But God Himself, gracious and merciful to His people, sparing the bloodshed which must undoubtedly have occurred in an assault upon the walls, turned away the sword from us and struck terror into our enemies, who were quite broken in spirit at the loss of the barbican…that night they entered into negotiations with the king to the end that, if he would deign to put off the assault and spare them…they would surrender”, *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, pp. 49-51.
Constance. Any agency the French had was eradicated by this text. Their surrender was due to God, and the fear instilled in them.

The battle of Agincourt was dealt with in a similar fashion. The fact that the English were outnumbered was supported by most of the contemporary sources. Henry’s speech to his men, also mentioned in most of these sources and later filled out into one of Shakespeare’s most famous passages, references the shortage of English troops:

a certain knight, Sir Walter Hungerford, expressed a desire to the king’s face that he might have had…ten thousand of the best archers in England who would have been only too glad to be there. ‘That is a foolish way to talk,’ the king said to him, ‘because, by the God in Heaven upon Whose grace I have relied and in Whom is my firm hope of victory, I would not, even if I could, have a single man more than I do. For these I have here are God’s people, whom He deigns to let me have at this time. Do you not believe,’ he asked, ‘that the Almighty, with these His humble few, is able to overcome the opposing arrogance of the French who boast of their great number and their own strength?’ as if to say, He can if He wishes. And, as I myself believe, it was not possible, because of the true righteousness of God, for misfortune to befall a son of His with so sublime a faith…

This passage was the summary of the tests that Henry underwent. God here was subverted towards English ends. The English soldiers are described as “God’s own people”. Claiming God for England was part of a broader public relations strategy, tied directly to the Henry’s notion of a political union of the crowns of France and England. It has been argued by Gransden that the Gesta was intended for a continental audience. From these passages, one can see how the promotion of God fighting on the English side might convince some of the futility of standing against them. At the same time, clear signs of God’s favour would have had a powerful effect on a domestic audience about to be taxed further by Henry and his military successors.

32 Gesta Henrici Quinti, p. 79.
The impact of Henry’s victories, and how these were constructed in the text reflected the religious themes and topos of the *Gesta*. Henry’s arrival into London was an interplay of humility amidst triumphalism:

Amid these public expressions of praise and the display...the king himself, wearing a gown of purple, proceeded...with an impassive countenance and at a dignified pace...Indeed, from his quiet demeanour, gentle pace, and sober progress, it might have been gathered that the king, silently pondering the matter in his heart, was rendering thanks and glory to God alone...³⁴

The *Gesta* author only presumed to know what the king thought, yet this description of Henry’s humility in the face of the London masses would leave the reader in no doubt that the author’s assessment was the correct one. This passage fits into the overall theme of the *Gesta* that Henry was God’s chosen. Other early Lancastrian themes that emerge in this section on Henry’s entrance:

the king came through their midst and the citizens had given to God glory and honour, and to the king congratulations and thanks for the victory he had gained and for his efforts on behalf of the common weal...³⁵ [my italics]

The references to the “common weal” are an important part of this early Lancastrian populist approach. Henry and his brothers had sent letters, in English, to the “Maiori, Aldermannis, & Comunibus” and “[th]e Mair, Aldremen and Comunes” ³⁶ These letters primed the domestic audience for the reception of Henry. Preservation of the common weal was said to be at the forefront of Henry’s domestic policies and was reinforced in this state-influenced history. There was a clear relation between Henry’s letters to London and the writing of a larger history that would create long term, positive attitudes towards the Lancastrian regime.

The final part of the *Gesta* concerned the renewal of campaigning in France. The skirmishes in which the earl of Dorset was involved are referenced, reinforcing not only

---

³⁴ *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 113.
³⁵ *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 103.
³⁶ *A Book of London English*, pp. 73, 78
the themes of God’s favour, but the themes of nationalism and the political intentions behind Henry’s conquest of France as well:

And at last, after they had manfully come to grips with the enemy…God Himself, gracious and merciful to the English people (and Who, with three hundred men separated from the rest of the multitude of the people of Israel, triumphed with the sword of Gideon over the countless host of Midian), did, with not many more than nine hundred Englishmen, make subject to the crown of England upwards of fifteen thousand rebel Frenchmen, in that we put them to flight, captured them, or smote them with the sword…the illustrious earl, with joy and exultation, returned with his men in peace to Harfleur. And when, by letter, he had sent word to our king of this gracious and glorious act of God, the king fell upon his face in prayer, giving thanks to God…And he straighthaway ordered to be chanted by his chapel to angelic hymn: Te deum laudamus etc. to the praise and glory of God Who had so marvellously deigned to receive His England and her people as His very own.37

God’s favour towards the English was reinforced, with a comparison to the Israelites. In placing the English in such company, the author was leaving no doubt in the minds of potential readers as to which side in this particular conflict had God’s favour. On a deeper level, the author also provides the modern historian with an important clue as to how the English were now constructing themselves as a people. On the political front, things become even more interesting, with the notion that the rebellious French have now been made subject to the English crown. The notion that the French had somehow rebelled against the English was a significant step in establishing Henry’s policies towards conquered French territories textually. These lines further reinforce the argument that a foreign, as well as a domestic audience was the target of the Gesta Henrici Quinti. In outlining the meaning behind military action against the French, Henry justified not only the war itself, but staking his claim to the French throne, even if in later years a compromise had to be reached. It is interesting that Henry Tudor used a similar approach when invading England in 1485, announcing his right to the throne before he actually claimed it.

37 Gesta Henrici Quinti, p. 121.
The *Gesta Henrici Quinti* formed part of a Lancastrian propaganda movement that was devoted to English nationalism, the war in France and the transformation of a usurping regime into a monarchy that had God’s favour. The *Gesta*, however, was only one of a series of texts devoted to Henry V. Thomas Elmham’s *Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto*, updated Henry’s reign until 1418, and in 1437, under the patronage of Henry’s younger brother Humphrey, the duke of Gloucester, Tito Livius Frulovisi wrote the *Vita Henrici Quinti*, along with a life of Humphrey himself.\(^{38}\) These portrayals of Henry V created an image of a perfect medieval English king. Such propaganda efforts were part of a broader literary movement, one that was in part sponsored by Henry, who encouraged government offices and merchant companies to begin keeping their records in the vernacular.\(^{39}\) More importantly, Henry’s reign and its aftermath saw the growth of vernacular, city based chronicles, and the updating of older chronicle sources. Additionally, court poets such as Lydgate, as well as writing verses for the Lancastrian regime, worked on longer pieces such as the *Troy Book*, which helped connect England to a distant, classical past.

Henry V died in 1422. One of the contentions of this thesis is that the reign of Henry VI saw a move away from the populist approach of Henry V and his brothers Bedford, Clarence and Gloucester, towards a regime that was inherently suspicious of “the people” or “the commons.” One noticeable part of this period was the lack of texts resembling the *Gesta*. No one felt compelled to write about Henry VI in any meaningful way, save for the verses composed for events such as his coronations in France and England and his marriage to Margaret of Anjou. There were attempts at a broader history, such as John Hardyng’s chronicle. But Hardyng’s conflicted loyalties, from Henry VI to the duke of York/Edward IV meant that his history resembles more a typical chronicle of the time, as does John Capgrave’s work, dedicated to Edward IV.

---


\(^{39}\) See above, Chapter Three, pp. 106-107.
While it leaves a chronological gap from the *Gesta* to the Readeption of 1469-1471, an examination of *The Arrival of Edward the Fourth* is a necessary part of this study. More overtly propagandistic than the chronicle histories produced during the reign of Henry VI, the structure of the *Arrival* provides an interesting counterpoint to both the *Chronicle of Adam of Usk*, and the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*. It engaged with themes that emerge in all the histories dealt with in this chapter, in that it deals with the usurpation and murder of an anointed king.

The political context of the *Arrival of Edward the Fourth* was the turbulent period of 1469-1471. As outlined above, such political conflicts demanded an increase in the use of propaganda by both sides in order to influence not only current conflicts, but also how those conflicts would be seen by later generations. The *Arrival* fits into this process perfectly. As Gransden has argued:

> The *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* and the *Arrival* are political tracts designed as propaganda. Any kind of official history was rare in medieval England, but the literary form of these examples was almost unprecedented…

How unprecedented these works were is debatable. Gransden refers to Thomas Flavent’s *History of the Wonderful Parliament* as being the closest example of a similar work. I will contend that in many ways, the *Arrival* bears a great resemblance to the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*. It should be noted, however, that while *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk* and the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* were both composed in Latin, the *Arrival* was written in English, reflecting both the growth in the importance and use of the vernacular in the period after the *Gesta* was written, and the desire to appeal to a broader audience. Other versions of the *Arrival* that were written in French will be dealt with below.

It is obvious that the *Arrival* was, like the *Gesta*, the work of an insider. It was stated that the *Arrival* was:

> Compiled and put in this forme suinge, by a servaunt of the Kyngs, that presently saw in effect a great parte of his exploytes, and the resydewe knewe by true relation of them that were present at every tyme.\(^41\)

Once again, the notion of truth emerges. Unlike Usk and the *Gesta* author, the *Arrival* author established his credentials from the very start. This attempt to give authority to the text disguises its propagandistic purposes.\(^{42}\) The *Arrival*’s intent is obvious from the author’s own introduction. After outlining the “true” accounts that have been given to him, the author states that Edward:

> aryved in England; and, by his force and valliannes, of newe redewced and reconqueryd the sayde realme, upon and against th’Erle of Warwicke, his traytor and rebel, calling himselfe Lievetenaunte of England, by pretensed auctoritie of the usurpowre Henry, and his complices; and, also, upon and agains Edward, callynge hymselfe prince of Wales, sonne to the sayde Henry than wrongfully occupienge the Royme and Crowne of England.\(^{43}\)

These lines were the standard for Yorkist propaganda from this period.\(^{44}\) They show evidence of a program of textual transmission, whereby the arguments used in government bills were then recycled into sources such as the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* and the *Arrival*. Both sides were effective at using such techniques, and Edward’s propaganda strategies had to compete against those of Warwick.

Edward’s account of his rights to the throne rewrote fifteenth century history, and shows how people at the time understood, or went meant to understand the origins of the civil conflicts around them. This was reinforced by the account of Edward’s landing at Ravenspur, as Henry Bolingbroke had done after returning from exile. This coincidence was not lost upon the author of the *Arrival*, who wrote that Edward landed:

> At a place callyd Ravenersporne, even in the same place where somtime the Usurpowr Henry of Derby, aftar called Kynge Henry IV. landed , aftar his exile, contrary and to the dissobeysance of his sovereigne lord, Kynge Richard the II. whome, aftar that, he wrongfully distresse d, and put from his reigne and regalie, and usurped it falsely to hymselfe and to his iswe, from whome was lineally

\(^{41}\) *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, p. 147.

\(^{42}\) A similar process, although on a much larger scale, would be undertaken by Polydore Vergil in his *Anglica Historia*. See below.

\(^{43}\) *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, p. 147.

\(^{44}\) See above, Chapter Four, p. 128-129.
descended Kynge Henry, at this tyme usinge and usurpinge the corone, as sonne to his eldest sonne, somtyme callyd Kynge Henry the V.\textsuperscript{45} This passage justified both the initial Yorkist usurpation by the illegitimacy of the Lancastrian line, and the current campaign against Henry VI and his allies. It also provided a nice historical link between Edward IV and Richard II, in that they both had to confront usurpers. In much the same way as Lancastrian texts and propaganda of Henry V emphasised this link, so too can we see a similar theme being invoked in this passage. Later in the text, the references to Henry’s “usurpynge and usynge the authoritie royall” further highlight the rewriting of both recent history (the Readeption period) and the distant past -- the original Lancastrian seizure of power.

While not as obvious as in the \textit{Gesta}, religious themes play an important part in the \textit{Arrival of Edward IV}. The part played by St Anne seems to be the most significant. After the reconciliation with his brother Clarence, and a lengthy passage about the usurpation of the king’s rights by Henry\textsuperscript{46}, the author outlined Edward’s arrival in the town of Daventry where:

\begin{quote}
the Kynge., with greate devocion, hard all divine service upon the morne, Palme-Sunday, in the parishe churche, wher God, and Seint Anne, shewyd a fayre miracle; a goode pronostique of good aventure that aftar shuld befall unto the Kynge by the hand of God, and mediation of that holy matron Seynt Anne.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

The author details how Edward, when out of the realm and “specially upon the sea” had prayed to “God, owr Lady, and Seint George” but above all St Anne, with the promise that the next time he saw any image of Anne, he would offer thanks and praise to her.\textsuperscript{48} The author then goes on to state that the king entered the church and as he kneeled to pray, noticed:

\begin{quote}
a lytle ymage of Seint Anne…this ymage was thus shett, closed, and claspd, accordynge to the rulles that, in all the churchis of England, be observyd, all ymages to be hid from Ashe Wednesday to Estarday in the mornynge. And so the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV}, pp. 148-149.
\textsuperscript{46} See above, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV}, p. 159.
sayd ymage had bene from Ashwensday to that tyme. And even sodaynly, at that season of the service, the bords compassyng the ymage about gave a great crak, and a little openyd, whiche the Kynge weel perceyveyd and all the people about hym. And anon, aftar, the bords drewe and closed togethers agayne, withowt any mans hand, or touchinge, and, as thowghe it had bene a thinge done with a violence, with a gretar might it openyd all abrod, and so the ymage stode, open and discovert, in syght of all the people there beynge. The Kynge, this seinge, thanked and honoryd God, and Seint Anne, takynge it for a good signe, and token of good and prosperous aventure that God wold send hym in that he had to do, and, remembrenge his promyse, he honoryd God, and Seint Anne... 49

The construction of this particular miracle is significant. It linked the Arrival, in a textual sense, to the miracles, signs and portents outlined in the Chronicle of Adam of Usk and provided the clearest sign of God’s favour to Edward IV, that He should be willing to bend the rules of the liturgical seasons to show his favour to Edward. It was a brilliant piece of propagandistic writing. Edward’s construction as a devout son of the church formed an important part of the defence both of Edward’s deceptive behaviour when he returned to England, and the later death of Henry VI. 50 Later propaganda drives indicate that Edward’s personal life was plagued by scandal, or at least could be interpreted in such a way. The passage above served to reinforce a version of Edward that kept in line with contemporary expectations of kingship, rather than the frequently irresponsible womaniser Edward seems to have been.

Other chronicle-style signs appear in the Arrival. Comments on natural phenomenon are of particular significance for this text as they centre on two storms. The first was the one that accompanied Edward as he arrived in England:

The Kynge gate made course towards the north parties. The same night folowinge, upon the morne, Wenesday, and Thursday the xiiiij daye of Marche,


50 Edward’s deceptive behaviour involved his claims, upon landing at Ravenspur, that he intended nothing more than to reclaim the inheritance of his father: the duchy of York. See Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV, p. 151. For the murder of Henry VI, see below.
fell greate stromes, wynds and tempests upon the sea, so that the sayde xiiij daye, in great torment, he came to Humbrehede, where the other shipps were dissevered from hym, and every from other, so that, of necessitye, they were driven to land, every fere from other.\textsuperscript{51}

This can be contrasted with the account given of Margaret of Anjou’s attempts to enter England:

And trew it was that she, hir sonne, the Countes of Warwike, the Lords, and other of theyr fellowshipe, entryd theyr ships for that entent the xxiiij of Marche, and so continuuyd theyr abode in theyr ships, or they might land in England, to the xij day of Aprell, for defawlt of good wynd, and for grete tempests upon the sea, that time, as who saythe, continuynge by the space of xx dayes.\textsuperscript{52}

While Edward had been caught in his particular tempest, he managed to conquer it, arriving in England safely, despite the fact that his other ships had been scattered. For Margaret, it seems as though the weather was acting against her, preventing her and her followers from landing in England during a particularly crucial time. The use of weather as a distancing device for chroniclers would not be required in such an overtly propagandistic document. So perhaps the author adopted this structure in order to reinforce the critiques already made about the Lancastrians.

Edward’s reclamation of the English throne was carried out through military conquest. The battle of Barnet, against the forces of Warwick carries with it an element of the weather symbolism that was used earlier, because of the fog that allegedly arose whilst the fighting was going on.\textsuperscript{53} The passage concluding the battle is particularly telling in combining both the symbolism of the weather, and the religious elements previously mentioned:

This batttayle duryd, fightynge and skirmishinge, some tyme in one place and some tyme in an other, right dowbtefully, becawse of the myste, by the space of thre howrs, or it was fully achivyd; and the victory is gyven to hym by God, by

\textsuperscript{51} Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{52} Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{53} For other references to this fog, see ‘Warkworth’s Chronicle’, p. 38.
the mediacion of the moaste blessyd virgen and modre, owr Seint Mary; the
glorious martire Seint George, and all the saynts of heven, mayntaynge his
qwarell to be trew and rightwys, with many-fold good and contynuall prayers…

Doubts over the state of the realm expressed through the mist are then removed by Edward’s victory. As was the case with most medieval battle topoi the victory was granted to Edward by God, Mary and St George, although it is interesting that St Anne, so prominently featured before, does not make an appearance here. The need to remove all doubts in the realm following this particular battle expressed itself in the carrying of the bodies of the earl of Warwick, his brother the marquis of Montague and other lords to the city of London, where they were:

Openly shewyd to all the people; to th’entent that, aftar that, the people shuld not be abused by feyned seditiows tales, which many of them that were wonnt to be towards th’Erle of Warwyke had bene accustomyed to make, and, paradventure, soulw have made aftar that, ne had the deade bodyes there be shewyd, opne and naked, and well knowne; for, dowbtles ells the rumore shuld have bene sowne abowte, in all contries, that they bothe, or els, at the leaste, th’Erle of Warwyke, was yet on lyve, upon cursed entent therby to have cawsyd new murmurs, insurrections, and rebellions, amongst indisposed people…

This passage reinforced the need to display one’s dead political opponents to the general public, to ensure that people realised that they were actually dead and to prevent the spread of rumours to the contrary. The lessons of Thomas Ward in the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V had been well learned. The issue of audience also arose here. Edward needed to deal with both domestic and international supporters of Warwick. Aspersions were cast upon those who had favoured Warwick, and their propensity for disseminating “feyned seditiws tales.” This formed part of the general information war that had been embarked upon between Edward and Warwick two years previously. Edward’s victory allowed him to confirm that Warwick’s information campaign had been nothing but lies.

---

54 Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV, p. 166.
56 See above, Chapter Six, p. 206.
The demise of Henry VI was also an important factor to be taken into account by the Arrival. The author stated that:

> the sayde partie [the Lancastrians] was extincte and repressad for evar, without any mannar hope of agayne quickening; utterly despaired of any maner of hoope or releve. The certaintie of all whiche came to the knowledge of the sayd Henry, late called Kyng, being in the Tower of London; not havynge, afore that, knowledge of the saide matars, he toke it to so great dispite, irre, and indingnation, that, of pure displeasure, and melencoly, he dyed the xxij day of the monithe of May.  

The ruthless suppression of the active elements of the Lancastrian party seemed to be offset by the death of Henry VI due to emotional strain. This is perhaps the most important part of the Arrival: the denial that Henry VI had been murdered. While a cover story was invented, it was not a particularly convincing one. Though he did not accuse anyone outright, it is fairly clear that Warkworth believed that Henry had been murdered. Messages conveyed through the diplomatic channels were less evasive; Venetian ambassador to the French court, Sforza De’Bettini reported:

> King Edward has not chosen any longer to have the custody of King Henry, although he is as it were guiltless and a personage whose affairs are not such as to cause much suspicion. The Prince, his son, and the Earl of Warwick have perished. All his most powerful adherents have shared the same fate, or are in the Tower of London, where he himself is a prisoner. King Edward has had him put to death secretly, and is said to have done the like by the Queen (Margaret of Anjou), the consort of King Henry. He has, in short, chosen to crush the seed. It seems that on account of this cruelty the people of England made some demonstration of a rising against King Edward, but there being neither head nor tail, the thing was soon suppressed, and thus King Edward remains pacific King and dominator of that realm of England.

57 Three Chronicles of the reign of Edward IV, p. 185.
58 ‘Warkworth’s Chronicle’, p. 43.
59 Calendar of State Papers: Venice, p. 128.
While the attempt to rewrite Henry’s murder as death by melancholy had failed the overall tone of the Arrival section had been successful. Edward has decisively resumed control, and this message was moving through Europe.

Aside from diplomatic channels, how did the messages contained within the Arrival move to an international audience? There were several different versions of the Arrival. The original seems to have been designed more as an official pamphlet hastily put together after the death of Henry VI. The pamphlet contains the bare bones of the story outlined in the longer Arrival, and lacks many of the elaborate, propaganda elements of that work. In this sense, the “Short Arrival” bears more resemblance to a bill than a history. However, Green noted that on the basis of internal evidence: “the 'Short Arrival' is quite plainly written for a non-English audience” One of the key aims of Edward IV was to get the central message of the “Arrival” to a continental audience. The long Arrival may have been intended to foster long-term, positive attitudes towards the regime from within England.

The Arrival of Edward IV, with its different versions were important at showing the incorporation of Yorkist propaganda into history, and the dissemination of that history to both a domestic and an international audience. The attempt to construct Edward as a pious king did not succeed in the long-term. The primary reason for this, it could be argued, was the rise of conflicting viewpoints during the usurpation of Richard III, particularly Richard’s vitriolic character attacks on his brother. These viewpoints will form the background for the next history to be examined: the “Life of Henry VI” by John Blacman.

“Life of Henry VI” by John Blacman has been the subject of debate as to whether the text was written prior to or during the reign of Henry VII. The debate has been fuelled by miscalculations on early editions of the work. The problems began with Archbishop

---

60 Both J.A. Thomson and Richard Firth Green have argued that this shorter version actually predates the longer one dealt with above.
Sancroft’s annotation that the work had been prepared during the reign of Henry VII as part of the move to have Henry VI canonised.\textsuperscript{62} This mistake informed the commentary of Charles Kingsford and K.B McFarlane, who dismissed Blacman as an “unreliable hagiographer.”\textsuperscript{63} Lovatt argued the work was written prior to the reign of Henry VII, before recanting this view in a later article. The contention I intend to set forth when analysing this history was that it was state influenced, and probably written against the backdrop of the reinterment of Henry VI in the reign of Richard III. Histories for Richard’s reign do not exist, due primarily its brevity.\textsuperscript{64} When reviewing the broad scope of Richard’s propaganda the \textit{Life of Henry VI} seems to fit into this program. Lovatt believed that Blacman wrote: “in order to encourage the almost clandestine cult of Henry VI which had developed spontaneously after his death.”\textsuperscript{65} This possibility is due primarily to clues contained within the text itself.\textsuperscript{66}

The \textit{Life of Henry VI} was constructed more as a hagiography than actual biography. Blacman seems to have known Henry VI personally, possibly through association with King’s College, Cambridge. The text opened with a prayer and contained a passage outlining Henry’s pedigree.\textsuperscript{67} The vague outline of his royal pedigree fuels the argument that this text was written prior to the reign of Henry VII, as a Tudor sponsored source

\textsuperscript{64} Excluding chronicle sources.
\textsuperscript{66} Lovatt would later go on to write that the possibility that Blacman didn’t die in 1485, which was in his original work the primary argument for the pre-Henry Tudor dating of the work. However, this information was not certain. Roger Lovatt, “A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited” in A.J. Pollard (ed.) \textit{Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval History}, St Martin’s Press: New York, 1984. p. 177
\textsuperscript{67} “Now of his most noble descent, how he was begotten according to the flesh of the highest blood and the ancient royal stock of England. And how in the two lands of England and France he was crowned as the rightful heir of each realm, I have purposefully said nothing, as of a matter plainly known to all, and not least known because of that most unhappy fortune which befell him against all expectation in aftertimes.” M.R James (ed) \textit{Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman’s Memoir}, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1919, p. 25.
would contain a more specific outline, and a connection to the Tudors themselves. The most detailed passage concerning Henry VI’s lineal claims came at the end of the Blacman’s work:

Henry was asked during his imprisonment in the Tower why he had unjustly claimed and possessed the crown of England for so many years, he would answer thus: “My father was king of England, and peaceably possessed the crown of England for the whole time of his reign. And his father and my grandfather was king of the same realm. And I, a child in the cradle, was peaceably and without any protest crowned and approved as king by the whole realm and wore the crown of England some forty years and each and all of my lords did me royal homage and plighted me their faith, as was also done to other my predecessors”.  

This genealogy lacks the detail of others that have been examined in other texts. The plea itself was the fairly standard Lancastrian propaganda line that was used throughout the Wars of the Roses. Its use here, however, does not necessarily contradict the possibility of an underlying Yorkist or even Ricardian propaganda purpose.

Despite the text’s task in dealing with a royal figure, there is very little political content in this work. Henry was presented as a saintly, religious figure, rather than as a king. Two passages in particular reflect this contrast between Henry as a king and as an icon of piety:

To God and the Almighty he rendered most faithfully that which was His, for he took pains to pay in full the tithes and offerings due to God and the Church: and this he accompanied with most sedulous devotion, so that even when decked with the kingly armaments and crowned with the royal diadem he made it a duty to bow before the Lord as deep in prayer as any young monk might have done. 

Further along, a similar point was made:

---

68 Henry the Sixth, p. 44.
69 Henry the Sixth, p. 26.
he went always with bared head, even when riding on a journey: so that many
times he would let his royal cap drop to the ground even from his horse’s back,
unless it were quickly caught by his servants.\textsuperscript{70}

In making the religious side predominant, Blacman seemed to offer a subtle critique of
Henry’s kingship. Appearance was a vital component of medieval kingship.\textsuperscript{71} In the first
passage, Henry’s kingly appearance takes second place to his religious devotions. In the
second, the dropping of the royal cap indicates a disregard for the trappings of kingship.
These passages recall the section of the ‘Vitellius A XVI’, which stated that Henry: “was
a good and goostly man, and set litell by worldly matters.”\textsuperscript{72} He was a good \textit{man}, not a
good king. Blacman emphasised strongly the lack of regard for appearance:

It is well known that from his youth up he always wore round-toed shoes and
boots like a farmer’s. He also customarily wore a long gown with a rolled hood
like a townsman, and a full coat reaching below his knees, with shoes, boots and
foot gear wholly black, rejecting expressly all curious fashion of clothing.\textsuperscript{73}

This passage effectively stated that Henry had stepped outside of his class by embracing
the fashions of the lower orders; and could be a damning critique, particularly when
placed against the contemporary expectation of kingship outlined in Chapter Three. The
passage acts in two ways, both as praise and critique. Yet these opposing discourses serve
two masters, both of whom are linked: the cult of Henry VI, and pro-Ricardian
propaganda.

Henry’s construction as a saintly figure rather than a good king was in stark contrast to
the religious elements that were attached to his father, whose religiosity expressed itself,
textually, in constant testing by God and the pursuit of a just war against the French.
Henry VI, in this text, is the opposite, shying away from any hint of militaristic, or indeed
political activity. This ran counter to the didactic texts of the time, which confirmed that
both the ability to wage war and maintain justice were essential components of

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Henry the Sixth}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{71} See above, Chapter Three, pp. 99-101.
\textsuperscript{72} ‘Vitellius A XVI’, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Henry the Sixth}, p. 36.
kingship. Henry’s inability to maintain his rule over his inherited territories was also noted by Blacman:

The same prince when in the end he lost both the realms, England and France, which he had ruled before, along with his wealth and goods, endured it with no broken spirit but with a calm mind, making light of all temporal things, if he might but gain Christ and things eternal.

This rewriting of the devastating losses of French territory in the 1430s and the 1440s, reads as a critique of Henry in the light of contemporary expectations concerning military abilities. However, it also reinforced Henry’s saintly qualities, in that the kingdoms were worldly possessions that he did not need. In a sense, these lines gave a boost to the Yorkist seizure of the throne from Henry: the Yorkists had overthrown a man who cared little about being king.

Henry’s lack of interest in political matters also emerges strongly through Blacman’s work. In a similar way to the exposure to their respective kings of Adam of Usk, and the writers of both the Gesta and the Arrival, Blacman himself had some contact with Henry VI. Henry’s apathy to the political process is best reflected in a conversation that the two men supposedly had:

There came all at once a knock at the king’s door from a certain mighty duke of the realm, and the king said: “They do so interrupt me that by day or night I can hardly snatch a moment to be refreshed by reading of any holy teaching without disturbance.” A like thing to this happened once at Windsor when I was there.

This rejection of the demands of the state fits into the subtle critiques of Henry that run throughout Blacman’s text, even whilst highlighting his saintly qualities. In much the same fashion as the author noted the contrast between Henry’s piety and fashionable, kingly attire, so too does this passage emphasise the intrusion of the outside into the internalised world of Henry’s devotional practices.

---

74 See above, Chapter Three, pp. 91-94.
75 Henry the Sixth, p. 33.
76 Henry the Sixth, pp. 37-38.
The deposition of Henry was the most politically charged passage in this text. Nevertheless references to the process are accorded some degree of ambiguity. In regards to the overthrow of Henry himself, Blacman constructs a story revolving around treason and betrayal:

what need of more? It is certain that the men among whom and towards whom the king was so kind and merciful proved at the last wholly ungrateful to him, as the Jews to Christ. For whereas God’s right hand had raised him to so glorious a place these [murderous ones], as has been said, conspiring together with savage rage, deprived even this most merciful king of his royal power, and drove him from his realm and governance, and after a long time spent in hiding in secret places wherein for safety’s sake he was forced to keep alive, he was found and taken, brought as a traitor and criminal to London, and imprisoned in the Tower there; where, like a true follower of Christ, he patiently endured hunger, thirst, mockings, derisions, abuses, and many other hardships, and finally suffered a violent death of the body that others might, as was then the expectation, peaceably possess the kingdom.77

This section of Blacman’s work contained a loaded political point. Those who rose against Henry had proved to be ungrateful of the king’s kindness and generosity. While this would seem to be a condemnation of the Yorkists, no names are mentioned, save for one. A later anecdote recalls Henry answering a question concerning his final imprisonment. His answer was:

The kingdom of heaven, unto which I have devoted myself always from a child, do I call and cry for. For this kingdom, which is transitory and of the earth, I do not greatly care. Our kinsman of March thrusts himself into it as is his pleasure.78

That Edward IV was the only identified person in this particular section dealing with the overthrow and “violent death” of Henry VI is highly significant, and forms the final piece of the puzzle, at least in terms of purpose and intent.

77 Henry the Sixth, pp. 40-41.
78 Henry the Sixth, p. 42.
Roger Lovatt acknowledged that the text could have been written prior to the reign of Henry VII, possibly in the reign of Richard III. I believe on the basis on the internal evidence of the text that this is a certainty, and forms part of a broader rewriting of the fifteenth century. There is only one reign in which Henry VI’s murderer could be acknowledged as Edward IV, but not as Richard III, and that is in Richard’s reign. There is the possibility the text was written in the reign of Edward IV, but such passages as those contained on pages 40-42 ran counter to the state line on how Henry had died, and would be considered treasonous. If Blacman was writing in the reign of Edward IV, he could have shrouded Henry VI’s end in more ambiguity than he chose to, as John Warkworth did. If Blacman was writing in the reign of Henry VII, then the Tudor line on the death of Henry VI would most likely have been followed: the murderer was Richard. To accuse the late father of the queen of such a crime would be problematic. This brings us to the reign of Richard III. Does allowing the denigration of his elder brother in such a way make sense given what we already know about Richard’s own propaganda? The answer is in the affirmative. In the opening weeks of his campaign to claim the throne, the possibility existed that Richard had accused his brother of being illegitimate. Richard ensured the bastardisation of his brother’s sons, and Richard’s parliament was a litany of complaints against the corruption of his brother’s reign. Would an accusation of the murder of a dynastic rival be too unrealistic to be included in these propagandistic discourses? Edward IV may have become to Richard’s reign what Richard became to Henry VII’s. The question then stands to what purpose Blacman’s text would be written. Earlier notions that it was a Tudor-sponsored document written during the attempted canonisation of Henry VI in the 1490s must be rejected. However, as a text written against the backdrop of the reinterment of Henry VI in the reign of Richard III, the point of the work makes sense. Here, we can see the broader Ricardian reinterpretation of the fifteenth century carried out through text. Richard’s immediate predecessor, Edward V, vanished, both physically and textually. Richard’s older brother, Edward IV, was turned into a king whose moral characteristics had been hopelessly corrupted by the influence of his dubious in-laws, the Woodvilles. In addition, as now outlined in Blacman’s text, he was also a murderer. Henry VI is portrayed as a saintly

79"Warkworth’s Chronicle", p. 43.
man, who was nevertheless hopelessly out of touch with the qualities needed for successful kingship. When these factors are combined with the anti-Lancastrian propaganda of the Yorkists concerning Henry IV, and Henry V’s own use of propaganda to replace, in a textual sense, his father with the figure of Richard II, we can see a line being drawn from Richard II, to Henry V, to Richard III. This final point is speculative, but nevertheless provides a possible public relations purpose that Blacman’s work might have fulfilled.

The final state influenced history examined, Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia*, is significant for this study for a number of reasons. It is the best example of a state-sponsored history that we have from this period, albeit from the early sixteenth century. While information for the other historical writers dealt with is fragmentary, we do know about the life of Polydore Vergil. Additionally, his work is a vital source for the early Tudor period, containing the most detailed accounts of events such as the Lambert Simnel revolt. Finally it was Polydore Vergil’s work that put an intellectual seal of approval on the early Tudor propaganda drives. The influence of this work is incalculable. Vergil’s work inspired sixteenth century chroniclers such as Edward Hall and Ralph Holinshed, whose works were drawn upon by William Shakespeare. The impact on popular culture of Shakespeare’s works does not need to be outlined here, but this, combined with the Tudor histories produced throughout the sixteenth century, influenced up until the present day the historiography of the fifteenth century.

A selective approach to the material must be taken in dealing with Vergil’s work, which covers the history of England from the Roman foundations until the reign of Henry VIII. I intend to examine the period from the end of Richard II’s reign until the end of Henry VII’s, with a special emphasis on the Wars of the Roses. There are two reasons for doing so. Firstly, most of the work prior to the period of Edward IV was taken from other sources. Additionally, the examination of how Vergil constructed the fifteenth century

---

80 Except for Adam of Usk, see above.

81 This in itself was hardly an uncommon practice for the time. See *Anglica Historia*, p. xviii.
will form an important overlay to the political issues discussed in Chapter Two, as well as how the Tudors imagined the past in order to place an appropriate interpretation on their seizure of the throne.\textsuperscript{82} This narrative, sometimes referred to as the “divine cycle of vengeance”, that will be the focus here.\textsuperscript{83}

Vergil’s account of the usurpation of Henry IV and the reign of Henry V was not radically different to the histories and chronicles already constructed in the fifteenth century. Since Vergil was writing under the Tudors, his work became a curious mixture of both Lancastrian propaganda messages and almost pro-Yorkist sentiments. The deposition of Richard II was presented as a popular move, with references to “all the people” saluting Henry IV as their king. The reasons given for Henry’s succession to the throne are also interesting: “for that he was heir apparent to the inheritance of Edmund earl of Lancaster who as it was commonly reported was the older son of King Henry III”.\textsuperscript{84} Over a century later, then, the “Crouchback” story still survived and could be used. Also noteworthy is the accusation that Henry IV had Richard II put to death.\textsuperscript{85} While Vergil himself does not expressly use the term, this was the start of the topos of the “divine cycle of vengeance” through which later generations of English kings would be punished. Henry V emerged from Vergil’s pages in the same guise as in the \textit{Gesta Henrici Quinti}, as a king who “had purposed to do many noble exploits” and was concerned with “thadministration of justice within his realm.”\textsuperscript{86} The use of prophecy also came into play with the birth of Henry VI, who would have “hard fortune and destiny” in the course of his life.

\textsuperscript{82} Gransden, \textit{Historical Writing in England}, p. 439.
\textsuperscript{83} There are a variety of manuscript and partial printed editions of Vergil’s \textit{Anglica Historia}. The three that I will draw upon are the two editions edited by Henry Ellis, \textit{Polydore Vergil’s English History} and \textit{Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History}; the \textit{Cronicle of Polydore Vergil}, an English translation preserved as British Library Royal 18 CVIII-18CIX; and finally Denys Hay’s edition, \textit{The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil A.D 1485-1537}.
\textsuperscript{84} BL Royal 18 C VIII-18CIX, f. 218.
\textsuperscript{85} BL Royal 18 C VIII-18CIX, f. 219.
\textsuperscript{86} BL Royal 18 C VIII-18CIX, f. 225a.)
These sections conform to the state-influenced histories for which Lancastrian kings themselves were responsible. Significantly, the figures of Edmund Mortimer and Richard, earl of Cambridge are given clear dynastic ties within this section of the text. Mortimer’s line of descendants is described, down to Elizabeth of York.\(^{87}\) Richard of Cambridge’s descent from Edward III was also detailed, and that:

Richard the earl, well knowing this, is reported to have sought for the kingdom, not without just cause, which afterward his son Richard duke of York did demand, not secretly, but openly.\(^{88}\)

Richard seeking the kingdom “not without just cause” showed how Tudor propaganda played upon the writing of history. The Yorkist line could not be denigrated excessively if Henry VII and Henry VIII wanted to draw upon the positive elements of both sides of the dynasty. This section illustrates the point perfectly, in that Henry V is portrayed as a great king, yet Cambridge, traitor though he may be, did have legitimate grievances against the Lancastrian line.

Vergil began the history most relevant to the Tudor propagandist cause with the reign of Henry VI. The opening years of his account of Henry VI’s reign deal with the continuation and conclusion of the war in France. In keeping with the Yorkist propaganda elements preserved in this text, Humphrey of Gloucester emerges most strongly fitting in with the broad Yorkist notions of “Good Duke Humphrey” that proved to be a millstone for the Lancastrians in the 1450s.\(^{89}\) The duke of Bedford was represented as a creditable political figure skilled in public relations matters. Upon the victory of the earl of Salisbury in taking the castle of Maion:

the fame of this geere was spread over all Fraunce, by reason wherof some were stricken in feare, some in hevines; but in England, upon the receipt of letters of victory, which the duke of Bedford sent very often, all men did leape for joye, that

---

\(^{87}\) BL Royal 18 C VIII-18CIX, f. 209.
\(^{88}\) BL Royal 18 C VIII-18CIX, f. 228.
their governors in warre and captaines had vanquished in plaine field, and had gotten so many townes at once…

Significantly, almost a century after these letters had been sent, the fact that Bedford was known for doing so continued to play a part in the writing of English history. Thus the propaganda of early Lancastrian leaders was recorded into histories that themselves acted as propaganda. The recording of the effectiveness of these letters could also have acted as a reminder to the Tudor regime of the importance of effective control of public opinion.

As Henry VI came to manhood and began to play a part in the governance of the kingdom, Vergil was careful not to draw a sketch of Henry that was too critical. When dealing with the crucial period of the mid 1440s, an elaborate description of the man was given:

King Henry was a man of milde and plaine-dealing disposition, who preferred peace before warres, quietnes before troubles, honestie before utilitie, and leisure before business; and, to be short, there was not in this world a more pure, more honest, and more holye creature. There was in him honest shamfastnes, modestie, innocencie, and perfect patience, taking all humane chances, miseries, and all afflictions of this life in so good part as though he had justly by some his offence deserved the same. He ruled his owne affections, that he might more easily rule his owne subjectes; he gaping not after riches, nor thirsted for honor and wordly estimation, but was carefull onely for his soules health; such thinges as tended to the salvation thereof he onely esteemed for good; and that very wisely; such againe as procured the losse therof he only accompted evil.

These characteristics mirror those described both by contemporary chronicles and state-influenced histories such as Blacman’s *Henry the Sixth*. The assertion that Henry believed that in ruling his own “affections” he might more effectively rule the kingdom seems to be linked to didactic material that demanded a rigorous approach to one’s

---

90 *Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History*, p. 11.
91 *Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History*, pp. 70-71.
personal and household affairs in order to rule properly. The religiosity of Henry was set against the descriptions of Margaret of Anjou. Vergil wrote that Margaret was:

a woman of sufficient forecast, very desirous of renowne, full of policie, councell, comely behaviour, and all manly qualities…but she was of the kinde of other women, who commonly are much geven and very readie to mutabilitie and chaunge.

The juxtaposition of these two figures is significant. Henry’s religious qualities disqualified him for effective kingly rule. Margaret’s qualities were worthwhile, but contravened her womanly nature. Added to this her involvement in the arrest and death of Humphrey of Gloucester, and a critique of Lancastrian government during this time is obvious.

The start of the Wars of the Roses saw Vergil constructing a version of the fifteenth century that more closely followed the propaganda lines of the Lancastrians, particularly in regards to the ambitions of the duke of York:

because he should not seeme to practise any thing against the king, he published openly, under pretence of revenging common injuries, that he woulde persecute with weapon certaine of the kinges wicked counsellers who afflicted dayly the poore English people, where no neede was, with detriments innumerable, and spoyled the realme. Many mo thinges did he sowe amongst the common sort, that his drifte might not appere to his adversaryes.

The duke of York’s ambitions were masked by a deceptive approach in regards to publishing his political program. Vergil’s work acts to undercut earlier, Yorkist texts, such as the duke of York’s propaganda bills and the city based chronicles into which some of them were entered. This critique falls into a long line of fifteenth and early sixteenth century analysis of public relations manipulation. Vergil moved beyond blunt state critiques concerning slanderous and seditious lies, and progressed to an acknowledgment that appeals to the common weal hid more ambitious motives. While

92 See above, Chapter Three, p. 96.
94 *Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History*, p. 87.
the “common people” are referred to earlier on, the specific targets of York’s messages were described as “the common sort”. This technique was similar to previous efforts in which the appeal to the “the people” or the “commons” was critiqued by changing the name of the group, whether to the “common sort” in this case or the “ryff raff” of the Cade rebellion. Vergil’s text reinforced the impression that the ambition of the duke of York was the starting cause of the Wars of the Roses. The other main cause was the end of the fighting in France. Vergil wrote of the final loss of English territory in France:

This, finally, was the ende of forreyne warre, and likewise the renewing of civill calamitie: for when the feare of outwarde enemy, which as yet kept the kingdome in good exercise, was gone from the nobilitie, such was the contention amongst them for glorie and soveraintie, that even then the people were apparently devided into two factions, according as it fell out afterwarde, when those two, that is to say, king Henry, who derived his pedigree from the house of Lancaster, and Richard duke of Yorke, who conveyed himselfe by his mothers side from Lyonell, sonne to Edward the Thirde, contended mutually fore the kingdom. By meane whereof these two factions grewe shortly so great through the whole realme that, while thone sought by happ or nap to subdue thother, and raged in revenge upon the subdued, many men were utterly destroyed, and the whole realme brought to ruine and decay.95

The attribution of the internal conflicts in England to the cessation of outer conflicts with France proved to be an enduring interpretation of why the Wars of the Roses started. Such a statement could also be used as a piece of propaganda to justify further foreign conquests. Vergil constructed a dynastic conflict that divided the whole kingdom, a theme that reinforced propaganda outlining an England in chaos and ruins, riven by civil conflict that was saved by the Tudor dynasty and returned to greatness.96

95 Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History, pp. 93-94.
96 This theme would be referred to again in his work, for example in his account of the intra-Yorkist conflicts of the late 1460s, p. 126.
The dual usurpations of Edward IV (in 1461 and 1471) form key parts of Vergil’s analysis. The assessment of Edward previously made by Vergil continued and was expanded on:

Edward was much desired of the Londoners, in favor with the common people, in the mouth and speeche of every man, of highest and lowest he had the good willes. He was, for his liberalitie, clemencie, integretie, and fortitude, prayed generally of all men above the skyes.97

Edward’s popularity with the commons was a strong part of Yorkist propaganda. Vergil recycled these themes in a message that would have found favour with Henry VII, who was married to Edward IV’s eldest daughter, and with Henry VIII. The split with the earl of Warwick also establishes the notion, previously espoused both in Warwick’s own propaganda and in international diplomatic circles: “that king Edward had obtaynyd the kingdome by thearle of Warwekes meane, as well was knowen to all men.”98 This is one of the earliest identifications of Warwick in the Kingmaker role. The Readeption also introduced Henry Tudor, in a pivotal scene with Henry VI, in which Jaspar Tudor introduced the boy to the king:

Whan the king saw the chylde, beholding within himself without speache a pretty space the haultie disposition therof, he ys reportyd to have sayd to the noble men ther present, ‘This trewly, this is he unto whom both we and our adversaryes must yeald and geave over the domynion’. Thus the holy man shewyd yt woold come to passe that Henry showld in time enjoy the kingdom.99

This use of prophecy fulfilled three functions. It linked Vergil’s work to other fifteenth century texts that sought to explain political events in terms of prophecy.100 Secondly, it reinforced the saintly qualities of Henry VI, described as a “holy man”, one who had been touched by God and presumably could predict the future. This in turn fed directly into the cult of Henry VI, and Henry VII’s efforts to canonise him. Thirdly, it helped construct a fictional genealogy for Henry VI's more successful namesake, Henry VII.

---

97 Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History, p. 110.
98 Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History, p. 117.
100 Such as The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, see above.
The denigration of Richard was the most important part of Tudor propaganda, and forms the most significant section of Vergil’s work. This process began at the end of the Readeption, where Vergil outlined the end of the house of Lancaster, establishing in part the notion of the divine cycle of vengeance: the sins of the fathers affecting the sons. He wrote:

Yeit it may be peradventure that this came to passe by reason of thinfortunacy of the howse of Lancaster, which wyse men thought eaven than was to be adscrybyd to the rightewousnes of God; because the sovereignty extortyd forceably by Henry the Fourth, grandfather to king Henry the Sixt, cowld not therby be long enjoyed of that family, and so the grandfathers offence redowndyd unto the nephews [sic].

The crimes of Henry IV were visited upon his grandson through Richard. Vergil had already outlined Richard’s responsibility in the murder of Edward of Lancaster after the battle of Tewkesbury, in direct contradiction to other sources claiming that Edward had been killed during the battle. From the point of the Readeption onwards, Vergil’s use of the official Tudor line becomes more apparent. In dealing with the death of Henry VI, Vergil wrote:

The contynuall report is, that Richerd duke of Glocester kill yd him with a sword, whereby his brother might be delyveryd from all feare of hostylytie. But who so ever wer the killer of that holy man, yt is apparent ynoughe, that as well the murtherer as the procurers therof sufferyd punysshement for ther offences...

Vergil provided some degree of obfuscation to avoid directly identifying the killer. This strategy can be traced not only to the chronicle writers of the fifteenth century, but to the accusations of “shedding innocents’ blood” levelled against Richard in Henry VII’s first parliament. While the innocents in question were not identified, no one would doubt who was being referred to. While Vergil may use the term “contynuall report”, he implied no doubt the murderer would receive savage retribution. This was the start of the Tudor myth concerning Richard III, that he was guilty of a series of crimes that predated his

101 Three Chronicles of Polydore Vergil’s English History, p. 154.
103 Three Chronicles of Polydore Vergil’s English History, pp. 155-156.
usurpation of the throne, each part of the myth reinforcing the other to create a lifetime of villainy.

The usurpation of Richard III and the circumstances surrounding it led to Henry Tudor’s rise to power. Part of Vergil's denigration of Richard was the critique of his physical appearance:

little of stature, deformyd of body, thone showlder being higher than thother, a short and sowre cowtenance, which semyd to savor of mischief, and utter evidently craft and deceyt. The whyle he was thinking of any matter, he dyd contynually byte his nether lyppe, as thowgh that crwell nature of his did so rage agaynst yt self in that little carkase.104

This reduction of Richard to a deformed caricature was part of the Tudor campaign to separate Richard from the Yorkist family. It was Richard who was targeted and made the perpetrator of multiple crimes. The foremost was the usurpation and death of the princes in the Tower. Here, Vergil’s work was influenced by Tudor propaganda and proved influential on future histories. The key part this textual construction of Richard III, apart from his alleged deformities, were his motives. Upon the death of Edward IV Richard: “Began to be kyndlyd with an ardent desyre of soveraigntie.”105 This was hidden through his own manipulative behaviour, which in itself is an interesting commentary by Vergil on Richard’s loyalist propaganda during this time:

He differryed the devise thereof presently unto an other time, and the meane while sent most looving letters to Elyzabeth the queen, comforting hir with many words, and promysing on his behalf (as the proverbe is) seas and mountanes, and, to increase the credit of his carefulness and naturall affection towards his brothers children, cawling togythers unto York thonorable and worshipfull of the countrie therabowt, he comandyd al men to sweare obedience unto prince Edward; hymself was the first that tooke the othe, which soone after hee was the first to vyolate.106

The notion of Richard’s deceptive nature was a way of critiquing not only Richard himself, but also how he had attempted to manipulate the public. Contradictory evidence to the Tudor line could have fitted into this notion quite well, with the potential for positive views of Richard to be dismissed as another part of his own propaganda.  

Vergil attributed a number of crimes to Richard, but his responsibility for the murder of the nephews takes centre place in this text: “he determynyd by death to dispatche his nephewys, because so long as they lyvyd he could never be out of hazard.” This hazard, however, could not be avoided:

But king Richard, delyvryd by this fact from his care and feare, kept the slaughter not long secret, who, within a few days after, permitted the rumor of ther death to go abrode…whan the fame of this notable fowle fact was dispersyd throughg the realme, so great griefe stroke generally to the hartes of all men, that the same, subdewing all feare, they wept every wher, and whan they could wepe no more, they cryed owt, ‘Ys ther trewly any man lyving so farre at enemytie with God, with all that holy ys and relygyouse, so utter enemy to man, who wold not have abhorryd the myschief of so fowle a murder?’ But specyally the quenes frinds and the chyldrens exclamyed against him, ‘What will this man do to others who thus cruelly, without any ther desert, hath killyd hys owne kynsfolk?’ assuring themselves that a marvalous tyrany had now invadyd the commanwelth.

The significance of this passage is twofold. Firstly, the picture of Richard’s tyranny was reinforced. Secondly, Vergil outlined how the information concerning the nephews spread: that it was Richard himself who disseminated it. This is an interesting subversion of how this information was conveyed, as Vergil also mentions the spread of the story overseas. Given that the main proponents of the rumour would have been anti-Ricardian, pro-Tudor supporters, Vergil’s comments were a way for the Tudors to distance themselves from the political muckraking of the 1480s.

108 Three Chronicles of Polydore Vergil’s English History, pp. 187-188.
The other major crimes attributed to Richard during his reign are his role in the death of his wife, who was dispatched “with sorowfulnes, or poyson”, which then allowed him to pursue his niece, Elizabeth. The recording of these crimes, which were rumours in Richard’s day, further aided Vergil’s construction of Richard as being someone utterly beyond redemption. In the case of the alleged attempt at an incestuous relationship, Vergil was using Richard’s own sorts of moral accusations against him.

The death of Richard III and the crowning of Henry Tudor represented, for Vergil, a major turning point in English history. In the opening parts of his account of the reign of Henry VII, Vergil tied up the loose ends from the reign of Richard, such as Elizabeth of York, the niece that Richard had intended to marry. Her attitude was significant:

To such a marriage the girl had a singular aversion. Weighed down for this reason by her great grief she would repeatedly exclaim, saying, ‘I will not thus be married, but, unhappy creature that I am, will rather suffer all the torments which St. Catherine is said to have endured for the love of Christ that be united with a man who is the enemy of my family’. [my italics]

This passage further demonstrates that part of the Tudor rewriting of the late fifteenth century was to separate Richard III from the rest of the Yorkists. As identified by Elizabeth, he was not part of the family, and so could be denigrated without compromising the notion of the united dynasties.

Henry’s concern after Bosworth was the potential for further unrest. Here, the contrast Vergil presents between “the people” and others was pronounced. One of Henry’s first steps was to seize the earl of Warwick:

For indeed, Henry, not unaware of the mob’s natural tendency always to seek changes, was fearful lest, if the boy should escape and given any alteration in circumstances, he might stir up civil discord.

This passage can then be contrasted to one a little further along:

---

110 *Three Books of Polydore Vergil’s English History*, pp. 211-212
111 *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 175.
112 Hays, *Anglica Historia*, p. 3.
113 *Anglica Historia*, p. 3.
Henry meanwhile made his way to London like a triumphing general, and in the places through which he passed was greeted with the greatest joy by all. Far and wide the people hastened to assemble by the roadside, saluting him as king and filling the length of his journey with laden tables and overflowing goblets.\footnote{Anglica Historia, p. 3.}

This populist picture of Henry riding through the kingdom whilst the people cheered him on ignored the reality of Henry’s position: that he had defeated an anointed king largely through the support of foreign troops. Contrasting this passage to its predecessor, Vergil employed similar techniques to the chroniclers who would praise the actions and beliefs of “the people”, under certain circumstances, while reclassifying those whose actions they disagreed with. In this case, those who stood with Henry VII’s state are “the people” whilst those who would stand against the state are the mob. This “mob” has been the motivating factor behind the changes that bedevilled England. What “the people” are represented as desiring is stability, represented by Henry Tudor. This point is reinforced in the passage dealing with Henry’s entrance into London and his assumption of the crown:

he summoned a parliament, as was the custom, in which he might receive the crown by popular consent. His chief care was to regulate well affairs of the state and, in order that the people of England should not be further torn by rival factions, he publicly proclaimed that...he would take for his wife Elizabeth daughter of king Edward...Then at length, having won the good-will of all men and at the instigation of both nobles and people, he was made king...\footnote{Anglica Historia, p. 5.}

There are several elements within this passage. The point is reinforced that Henry’s claim to the throne was by popular acclaim, rather than battlefield victory. That he had “won the good will of all men” was an important fabrication, particularly when combined with the notion that his chief role was to prevent further civil strife. Vergil wrote his work during a time when the king, Henry VIII, had no direct heirs, then female heirs, and the passage serves as a warning against the renewal of multiple claimants for the throne. The support of “the people” is also underlined by the support of the nobility. The final
supporting point of Henry’s kingship, according to Vergil, was something a little more mystical:

Thus Henry acquired the kingdom, an event of which foreknowledge had been possible both many centuries earlier and also soon after his birth. For 797 years before, there came one night to Cadwallader, last king of the Britons (as we have recorded in the third book of this history), some sort of an apparition with a heavenly appearance; this foretold how long afterwards it would come to pass that his descendents would recover the land. This prophecy, they say, came true in Henry, who traced his ancestry back to Cadwallader.\(^1\)

This combination of the denigration of Henry’s predecessor, popular appeal and political prophecy stemming from a mythical British past were the cornerstones of Tudor propaganda and in the construction of the reign of Henry VII, we can see how these propagandistic concerns became part of a broader interpretation of the fifteenth century. These elements were in place from the start of the textualisation of Henry’s reign in order to justify the rightness of his position against those who would try to undermine it.

As outlined in Chapter One, there were several threats to Henry’s rule. The pretenders Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck and the various de la Pole brothers had varying degrees of success in attracting foreign and domestic support. What is significant was how Vergil portrayed these various figures, and those who supported them. This particular turbulence was foreshadowed early through Vergil’s account of the sweating sickness that plagued the kingdom soon after Henry’s arrival. After a lengthy passage on the nature of the sickness and how it could be treated, Vergil writes:

It must certainly not pass unremarked that this disease, hitherto unknown, only began to rage at the beginning of Henry’s reign; although it abated its violence shortly afterwards, it again developed at the end of his reign…it was popularly supposed to presage that harshness which Henry employed in his government. But it may be that the sweating sickness portended something else: that Henry should only reign in the sweat of his brow, which was certainly the case. For from the very start of his reign he began to be harassed by the treachery of his opponents

\(^1\)\textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 5.
and, assaulted frequently thereafter by the forces of his enemies and the insurrections of his own subjects, he evaded peril not without effort.  

This sickness had been reported in several chronicles, usually framed as a subtle critique, as Vergil stated here, of Henry’s rule. As well as foreshadowing the turbulence that would confront Henry, this passage also serves as a reinterpretation of what other sources had stated about the start of Henry VII’s reign. In a sense Vergil sought to control alternate interpretations, leaving his work to be the only true history of these events. This attitude emerged with his interpretation of the first major uprising: that of Lambert Simnel. It seems that the emphasis on Lambert Simnel himself that emerged in state-influenced works such as Polydore Vergil’s text were largely absent from more independent chronicle sources, which seem to emphasise the roles played by the mercenary leader Martin Schwartz and especially John de la Pole.  

The introduction of the Simnel uprising continues several of the propaganda lines that have already been outlined. Vergil wrote that:

> Meanwhile, from something petty and feigned there arose a major disturbance.

For indeed from the time when Edward, having overthrown Henry VI, arrogated to himself the kingdom of England, men were so nourished on sectionalism that they could not later desist from it, and so confounded their divine and human obligations by every conceivable means that, blinded by partisan devotion, led not by reason but by evil and distorted partiality, they were distracted into a thousand factions. This mischief, which was largely subdued by Edward after the destruction of almost all the descendents of Henry VI, was renewed by his brother Richard, who by his example suggested to others the stirring up of new factions and the embarking on other schemes whereby they might acquire for themselves power or privileges.

---

117 Anglica Historia, p. 9.
120 Anglica Historia, p. 13.
This notion that the chaos of the fifteenth century would continue into the reign of Henry VII seem to contradict the earlier notions that Henry’s reign would see an end to faction and strife. Uprisings, however, were attempts, nothing more, with the implication that they would be swiftly dealt with. It is amusing that Vergil contends that Richard III continued to cause trouble in Henry’s reign, despite his death at Bosworth. The plot of this “petty and feigned” disturbance has already been dealt with at length.\(^{121}\) In Vergil’s account, it was Margaret of Burgundy, admittedly one of the sponsors of the Simnel revolt, who assumed a large part in the planning and organization. The demonisation of Edward IV’s and Richard III’s sister became a long running theme of Tudor historical texts. Vergil’s work seems to have been the first such example:

The woman Margaret was not indeed unaware that the house of York had been almost utterly destroyed by her brother Richard, but she was not satisfied with the hatred which had almost obliterated the family of Henry VI, nor mindful of the marriage which, as we have shown, finally united the two houses of York and Lancaster. She pursued Henry with an insatiable hatred and with fiery wrath never desisted from employing every scheme which might harm him as a representative of the hostile faction. Consequently, when she learnt of the new party which had recently arisen against Henry, although she considered the basis of it to be false (as indeed it was), she not only promised assistance to the envoys, but took it upon herself to ally certain other English nobles to those already active in the new conspiracy.\(^{122}\)

The role that Margaret plays here, and even more so in the Perkin Warbeck affair was, one historian has argued, exaggerated by the Tudors in order to mask the participation of more significant foreign powers.\(^{123}\) In regards to Lambert Simnel, it was Henry’s opportunity to indulge in further denigration of those Yorkists who had not been reconciled to the new Tudor regime. And while John de la Pole’s motive is attributed in one line: “the earl…planned to seize the throne himself in the event of victory,”\(^{124}\) it

---

\(^{121}\) See above, Chapter One, pp. 49-54.

\(^{122}\) *Anglica Historia*, p. 17.


\(^{124}\) *Anglica Historia*, p. 23.
lacked the impact of sources such as the Calais Chronicle where Simnel’s involvement is not mentioned at all, and the entire focus of the revolt was the placement of de la Pole on the throne.  

When the battle of Stoke finally occurred the vicious fighting saw the deaths of the leading members of the conspiracy, with Simnel himself being sent to work in Henry’s kitchens as a turnspit.

Further denigration of Margaret would follow with the Perkin Warbeck affair:

Margaret, so ungovernable is a woman’s nature especially when she is under the influence of envy, cherished such a deep hatred of King Henry, that it seemed she would be content with nothing short of his death. Actuated by her wrath, the woman continually sought to evolve a device by which she could engineer his destruction. Since to achieve her purpose she could not rely on armed force, she proceeded by craft and cunning.

The conspiracies that plagued Henry in the 1490s here are being constructed as more the wrathful vengeance of an embittered woman, than the vast diplomatic undertaking that they actually were. In this sense, we can see a direct analogy between what the Yorkists wrote in the 1450s and 1460s concerning the dominance of Margaret of Anjou over Henry VI’s government, and what Vergil would write about another Margaret decades later. Margaret of Burgundy’s role in the conspiracy was greater textually than it was in reality. Here, in Vergil’s work, she was credited with the training of Warbeck before sending him to Ireland, in a reversal of Warbeck’s journey from Ireland to Burgundy. The Warbeck conspiracy also allowed Vergil to indulge in resurrecting previous themes concerning civil conflict:

Meanwhile, the rumour of Richard, the resuscitated duke of York, had divided nearly all of England into factions, filling the minds of men with hope or fear. For there was no one who was not deeply concerned over such an affair. Each, according to his disposition, anticipated either peril or profit.

---

126 Anglica Historia, p. 25.
127 Anglica Historia, p. 63.
129 Anglica Historia, p. 67.
A similar theme had been employed to describe the state of England during the civil conflicts of the Wars of the Roses. This thematic element could be reused to describe the dangers of new conflicts, even if such a description were patently untrue. By presenting a potential uprising as being more dangerous than it was, the early Tudor historians also seemed to employ the strategy of early Lancastrian historians and propagandists who, as Strohm argued, exaggerated threats to their own rule in order to maintain a tighter grip on the minds of the public.\textsuperscript{130}

The various rumours and foreign negotiations in support of Warbeck ran parallel to other rumours and seditious utterances that were moving through England:

This punishment of dark treason [the execution of William Stanley] was made most opportunely. For already at that time men began to bend their minds to revolution, so that not only did many nobles make secret plans to overthrow the king, but also persons of the lowest birth everywhere maligned the king himself with scandalous writings and rhymes composed in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{131}

The dissemination of seditious vernacular writings had been, throughout the accounts of the fifteenth century, attributed generally to the lower classes. Perhaps there was in this account a touch of the intellectual snob about Vergil, who was writing in Latin. At the same time it reflected the broader concerns of the state about the control of information, and which classes were distributing such writings. The nobility, whilst being included in the general theme of treason in this passage, are nevertheless excluded from the vernacular writings, seemingly implying that production of such work was a lower class pursuit.

The Warbeck affair ended in the late 1490s. The final execution of Warbeck, as well as the earl of Warwick was the subject of some critique by Vergil of the harshness of the sentence passed upon the latter:

\textsuperscript{130} Strohm, \textit{England’s Empty Throne}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 79.
The entire population mourned the death of the handsome youth…But truly the wretched lot of the Yorkist house was such that Earl Edward had to perish in this fashion in order that there should be no surviving male heirs to his family.\textsuperscript{132} This passage seems to reflect a notion of God’s judgement on the entire house of York. Whilst not part of the traditional divine cycle of vengeance idea, it seems to blame the crimes of the house of York for Edward’s fate.

The final years of Henry’s reign saw the death of two of his sons and the flight of Edmund and Richard de la Pole to Burgundy.\textsuperscript{133} Yet this conspiracy was not dealt with in as much depth as Lambert Simnel or Perkin Warbeck, its most important point being the members of the conspiracy that remained in England, including Sir James Tyrell, who was accused not only of conspiring with Edmund de la Pole, but also of having murdered the princes in the Tower in 1483. The crushing of this latest conspiracy provided a way for Vergil to rewrite the final few years of Henry’s reign:

Evil fortune blighted Henry in this manner so that he, who already excelled other princes in his many virtues, should not also be pre-eminent in subduing all vices. The king wished (as he said) to keep all Englishmen obedient through fear…he began to punish all offenders who had committed any crime prohibited and forbidden by the laws of the realm or municipal regulations.\textsuperscript{134}

Part of this rewriting of the final years of Henry VII’s reign was to give justification to the actions of Henry VIII in the opening years of his reign, which included the execution of a number of his father’s leading ministers. This critique of Henry VII, however, is muted by the attribution of these qualities to the threat of rebellion from the disaffected Yorkist elements, particularly Margaret of Burgundy. If not for them, Vergil implies, the end of Henry’s reign would not have been as it was. His final analysis of Henry VII consisted of the usual platitudes offered by medieval historians and chroniclers whose monarchs had just passed on. Generally good qualities are attributed to him, with the

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{133} A move that allowed yet another chance for Vergil to criticise Margaret of Burgundy, see \textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Anglica Historia}, pp. 127-129.
exception of his avarice. It is the quality of justice that emerges as the strongest associated with Henry:

He cherished justice above all things; as a result he vigorously punished violence, manslaughter and every other kind of wickedness whatsoever. Consequently he was greatly regretted on that account by all his subjects, who had been able to conduct their lives peaceably, far removed from the assaults and evil doing of scoundrels.\textsuperscript{135}

This passage fulfils two purposes. Firstly it conveys how Henry VII was able to fulfil one of the primary duties of kingship according to contemporary expectation: maintaining justice. The passage also played on specific Tudor propaganda requirements, that other fifteenth century monarchs, in the chaos and confusion of the civil strife in which they were involved, were not able to carry out the justice required by their English subjects. This point about the stability brought by the Tudors was reinforced even more strongly in the opening paragraph to the reign of Henry VIII:

In earlier books of this work we have explained at sufficient length how King Richard II entirely lacked male heirs, and how not long after the whole population of England was split into two factions, Lancastrian and Yorkist, and how a bloody struggle ensued for over a hundred years, indeed until our own day, until at last the houses of Lancaster and York were united.\textsuperscript{136}

This paragraph forms the summary of the Tudor historical position and remained vastly influential for hundreds of years. The notion that the civil conflicts started with the deposition of Richard II and did not end until the accession of Henry VII was a powerful reinterpretation of fifteenth century English politics, particularly since it served as a warning about the dangers of civil unrest and attempts to overthrow the king, something that was to remain an important point for English rulers throughout the sixteenth century.

The use of state-influenced histories in fifteenth century England served a number of functions. These histories turned the propaganda messages of the moment into the historical messages of the future, most clearly in the histories of the reigns of Henry V

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Anglica Historia}, p. 149.
and Henry VII. The latter Henry had a particular advantage in that he was the first English king since Henry IV both to remain on the throne and to have his heir inherit. The cycle of usurpations that consumed the royal lines of fifteenth century English monarchs had to be reinterpreted by each successive generation of usurpers, a way of manipulating and influencing longer-term attitudes of target audiences not just within England, but across Europe as well. Not all of these historical methods were successful, yet it was the messages of the Tudors, the final winners of the fifteenth century conflicts, who had their “history” endure the longest.
Conclusion

*My conscience hath a several thousand tongues*
*And every tongue brings in a several tale*
*And every tale condemns me for a villain*

(The Tragedy of Richard III, Act V, Scene III)

Thus spoke Shakespeare’s Richard III, a fictional character based upon a textual construction that was based on the political propaganda of a previous century. Yet the statement of this fictional Richard contains a great deal of insight into fifteenth-century English politics. Whether it was the rumours that had grown “uncustomarily powerful” in the reign of Henry IV, the “advertisements” of Somerset that so concerned the duke of York in 1452, or the rumours surrounding Richard III’s incestuous relationship with his niece, the exchange of information and disinformation, was an important part of English politics during this period.

These politics, as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, were turbulent when approached from the viewpoint of the dynastic struggles that gripped the upper circles of power in the early 1400s, the mid-1450s, the late 1460s and the mid-1480s. These changes in dynasty, as demonstrated by the diplomatic correspondence examined in Chapter One, led to a changing perception of English kingship: that the throne was inherently unstable. Contributing to this perception were the individuals who attempted to claim the crown. The prolonged sponsorship of the impostor Perkin Warbeck shows that foreign powers were interested in the state of English politics and were increasingly willing to play a part in influencing the outcomes of the conflicts that involved “pretenders” to the throne. This answers the question that was asked in the introduction concerning the circumstances that led for the need for propaganda, and which parties in England used it.

One of the key parts of these dynastic conflicts was the use of information, by both sides, to influence and manipulate fifteenth-century target audiences. While the foreign courts that played a part in sponsoring or supporting various sides were examined in Chapter
One, the domestic audience has been the main focus of this thesis. Defining who comprised this audience, and what they believed, proved to be simultaneously one of the most crucial and the most problematic elements of the thesis. In Chapter Two I argued there was certainly a construction of a textual audience during the fifteenth century, referred to in a variety of media as “the people” or “the commons”. This group was appropriated by the propagandists on either side of the conflicts of this period, appearing in propaganda addressed to “the people”, or written on their behalf, or to demonstrate that their support was behind whoever disseminated the message in question. The actual group was seen in the revolts and rebellions of the fifteenth century, most notably in the year 1450, when the Jack Cade rebellion stormed London not only with force of arms, but accompanied by bills demanding government reform. This form of textual propaganda had existed from the very beginning of the fifteenth century, as seen in the demands made by Archbishop Scrope in the 1405 rebellion against Henry IV. The analysis of the contemporary expectations of kingship and good governance outlined in Chapter Three shows that the information exchange in this period moved amongst classes and between regions. The themes and critiques present in these bills incorporated widespread contemporary notions of good government, the ability to maintain justice and the common weal, and the importance of stability in the realm. Despite the doubts of modern political theorists as to the existence of medieval nationalism, propagandistic literature, especially in the reign of Henry V and the troubled period 1483-5, also appealed heavily to a contemporary sense of the English nation.

Chapters Four and Five showed how themes of good and bad rulership were adopted by the kings of the period, including those pretenders who were successful in gaining power: Henry IV, Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII. Justifications for usurpation featured strongly in the propaganda of these kings, particularly as all were responsible, in varying degrees, for the deaths of their predecessors. The denigration of these predecessors featured heavily in the propaganda associated with the usurpations. This propaganda drew upon the contemporary expectations of kingship that were outlined in the didactic tracts of the time. As Chapter Five showed, these themes transferred into what was termed the “positive” propaganda of each king. Other concerns, such as the war in
France, played a part in constructing these messages, which then drew upon the nationalism that was outlined in Chapter Three.

Chapter Six examined how the state countered, or attempted to counter, the propaganda that opposed the messages of the state, and how both these strands were disseminated. This chapter was in many ways crucial to the central questions asked at the start of the thesis concerning not just propaganda, but the perception of propaganda in fifteenth century England, especially the question concerning the awareness of the need to disseminate propagandistic messages. Through the examination of proclamations against sedition and the letters that circulated through England during points of crisis, we have seen that the control of political information was of vital importance to the various factions in this period. Central to the claims of the state was what I have termed the truth topos, set against the untruth of the rumours and bills issued against it. These claims of truth implied a state monopoly on the veracity of information. Chapter Seven examined the messages that were present in these critiques of the state, demonstrating once again the movement of thematic material between didactic literature and the propagandists of the period, and the persistence of many propagandistic topoi throughout the fifteenth century. Yet it is also clear that the fifteenth century witnessed a number of innovations in the thematic content of propagandistic messages. These included the attacks on opponents’ morality by Richard III and the claim of kingship before claiming the throne promoted by Henry Tudor, dual discourses that were subsequently appropriated by the impostors who followed.

Chapter Eight analysed a series of state-influenced histories, showing how the political ideas of the fifteenth century moved from propaganda statements to texts with more longevity and intellectual purpose. This analysis addressed the series of questions asked in the introduction concerning the movement of information from propaganda bill to historical text. Not only did this chapter show how these messages were preserved, but it also demonstrated the textual longevity of propagandistic statements such as the Edmund Crouchback story. As well as demonstrating this point, the histories provided an insight into how the people of the fifteenth century imagined their recent past.
Propaganda during the fifteenth century formed an important part of the political process. While it was one part amongst many, it can be seen from the evidence presented in this thesis that political action during this time was, by necessity, accompanied by written messages. While these propaganda processes have been examined in part, I have tried with this thesis to bring into focus the trends of the whole period, to highlight the consistency and the innovation of propaganda, from the dissemination of truth to the assassination of character. Clearly, the disseminators of these messages felt that it was not only important that their voices be heard, but that there was an audience to hear them. These messages would resonate with this particular audience, with their beliefs in regards to kingship and good governance. The information present in such propaganda documents would be entered into the chronicles of the time, becoming part of the broader literary culture that had been rising since the late fourteenth century, and then in turn become part of the state-influenced histories.

At the start of this thesis, I outlined the works of a number of medieval historians who have examined propaganda during the fifteenth century. These works have proved invaluable for this study, yet their limited focus on certain points of propaganda, methods of dissemination and points of political crisis mean that a broader synthesis, a work examining the whole period, is a logical progression in the on-going debates concerning fifteenth-century propaganda. Such a synthesis enables us to appreciate individual propaganda campaigns and messages in their longer-term context. Clearly, fifteenth-century propagandists learned from their predecessors and influenced their successors. Their frequent reliance on long-running themes and stories (such as the Edmund Crouchback tale) suggests that they thought they were addressing an audience sufficiently educated in political messages to interpret such references as the disseminators would wish. Analysing the whole field of fifteenth-century propaganda also shows how ephemeral propaganda tracts became part of historical texts produced during and shortly after this period. In doing so, I have attempted to make a contribution not just to the understanding of fifteenth-century propaganda, but fifteenth-century historiographical analysis as well.
I opened the introduction with a quote from Thomas Hoccleve, in which he advised the future Henry V--“wynneth your pepele voice.” In writing this thesis, I have shown how this process was carried out. In doing so, I have hoped to add to a debate on later medieval English propaganda that is exciting not merely from a medieval perspective, but from a universal one, that can see the themes of their time, of the concerns for peace and good governance, reflected in our own.
Bibliography

Manuscripts:

BL Add. MS 18738

BL Add. 48031A (Yelverton 35)

BL Royal 18 CVIII-18CIX

Primary Sources:


Genet, Jean Phillipe (ed.) “Three Consideracions Right Necesserye to the Good Governaunce of a Prince” in *Four Political Tracts of the Later Middle Ages*, Camden Society: London, 1977,


Hinds, Alan (ed.) *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan Volume I: 1385-1618*, His Majesty’s Stationary Office: London, 1912


Monro, Cecil (ed.) *The Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Beckington and others/written in the reign of Henry V and Henry VI from an ms. Found at Emral in Flintshire*, Johnson Reprint Corp.: New York, 1968


Sayles, G.O (ed.) Select Cases in the Courts of the King’s Bench under Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V, Selden Society: London, 1971


Smith, Lucy Toulmain (ed.), *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar* by Robert Ricart town clerk of Bristol 18 Edward IV, Johnson Reprint: New York, 1965


**Secondary Sources:**


Crook, David “Central England and the Revolt of the Earls, January 1400” in Historical Research, 64, 1991. pp. 403-410


Green, Richard Firth ‘The Verses Presented to King Henry VII: A Poem in the Skelton Apocrypha’ in *English Language Notes*, 16:1, 1978. pp. 5-8


Hicks, Michael *English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, Routledge: London and New York, 2002

Hicks, Michael *Edward V*, Tempus: Gloucester, 2003


Jones, W.R “The English Church and Royal Propaganda During the Hundred Years War” in *Journal of British Studies*, 19:1, 1979. pp. 18-38

317

Kingsford, Charles English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century, Burt Franklin: New York, 1913


Kohn, Hans “The Origins of English Nationalism” in Journal of History of Ideas, 1, 1940


Pugh, T.B, Henry V and the Southampton Plot of 1415, Alan Sutton: Gloucester, 1988


