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The Tragic Elements in Edward II and Sir Thomas More

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Abstract

This is a study on Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (1591 or 1592) and *Sir Thomas More* (a play ascribed to Antony Munday, Henty Chettle, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare,1600 or 1601). This study proposes to analyse these plays as both chronicle dramas and tragedies. Earlier literary research tended to see these plays as mainly propaganda and didactic histories. Of course, this leaves out the aura of tragedy which permeates these plays. In intending to attend to the plays' tragic elements, this study offers a balanced analysis of these plays. The choice of *Edward II* as an early play and *Sir Thomas More* as a late one is deliberate because it reveals that the concerns of the English chronicle play are the same.

ملخص

ندرس في هذا البحث مسرحية " إدوارد الثاني " للكاتب المسرحي البريطاني كريستوفر مارلو ومسرحية " السيد توماس مور " التي يعزوها النقاد إلى كل من أنطوني مندي وهنري تشتل ووليم شكسبير وتوماس هيوود.
ويسعى هذا البحث إلى تحليل هذين العملين بوصفهما مسرحيتين تاريخيتين ومأساتين، لأن الدراسات النقدية السابقة مالت إلى رؤيتهما على أنهما مسرحيتان تاريخيتان دعائيتان وتعليميتان.
وبالطبع تبعد هذه الرؤية النقدية الأجواء المأساوية التي تتخلل هاتين المسرحيتين وتخيم عليهما ومن خلال تفحص العناصر المأساوية في هذين العملين تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً متوازناً للمسرحيتين بالنظر إليهما كعملين تاريخيين ومأساويين.
وقد اخترنا هذين العملين اختياراً متعمداً، فمسرحية " إدوارد الثاني " مسرحية تاريخية مبكرة وأما الثانية فهي متأخرة وبهذا نظهر أن اهتمامات المسرح التاريخي هي واحدة سواءً في البواكير أو المتأخرات.

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This paper addresses itself to the role which propaganda history drama played in promulgating the monarchical ideology upon which Queen Elizabeth I established her governmnent. But before looking at the use of the stage as a forum for spreading political propaganda, it is worth looking at the ideological and contextual background to the English Renaissance history play.

Over the Renaissance world there hanged a yearning for an ordered polity. This yearning was part and parcel of the conception of order or degree which lay behind all the political, historical and theological writings of that period. Expounding the conception of order, E. M. W. Tillyard writes:

> The Elizabethan conception of world order was in its outlines medieval although it had discarded much medieval detail. The universe was a unity, in which everything had its place, and it was the perfect work of God. Any imperfection was the work not of God but of man; for with the fall of man the universe underwent a sympathetic corruption.(1)

In substantiating this view, Tillyard cites Sir John Fortescue, the fifteenth-century jurist:

> In this order hot things are in harmony with cold; dry with moist.... In this order angel is set over angel, rank upon rank in the kingdom of heaven; man is set over man, beast over beast.... So that there is no worm that crawls upon the ground, no

> bird that flies on high... which the chain of this order binds not in most harmonious concord.(2)

Clearly, this "most harmonious concord' is the fruit of the cosmic order and hierarchy into which the human order was always set:

> Within the human range are seen different states from the great to the least: such as the labourers merchants burgesses knights barons counts dukes kings, and a single emperor as monarch... This well- ordered multitude leads up to a single head: in precisely the same way as we see among the elements fire the first in dignity... among the birds the eagle... and among men the emperor.(3)

The conception of cosmic order is essentially theological. This idea is stressed by Sir John Fortescue's following assertion:

> And since God hath thus regulated all creatures, it is impious to think that he left unregulated the human race, which he made the highest of all earthly creatures.(4)

The term "impious" is strongly suggestive of the doctrine of monarchy as a divinely ordained system, a doctrine best fleshed out in the homilies of the day.

The book of Homilies of the English Church, which was originally published in 1547 when Elizabeth's brother, Edward VI, was king, was a popular source of the dissemination of monarchical docrtines.(5) The Queen and her royalist followers paticularly capitalised upon the didactic and propagandist

function of two homilies: *An Exhortation, concernyng Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates* (which initially appeared in the 1547 edition) and the long *Homilie against Disobedience* and *Wilful Rebellion* (which was issued in 1571 after the Northern Rebellion and after the publishing of the papal bull which released Elizabeth's subjects from their oaths of allegiance and interdicted obedience to her laws.) (6).

In a sense, these homilies emerge as a political rationale for the system of Tudor monarchy because they propagate the doctrine of the sanctity and supremacy of kingship. The homilist constantly invokes the Bible because it had a great hold over the Elizabethans. In attempting to expound the doctrine that monarchs and governors rule through the direct appointment of God, the homilist powerfully asserts:

> As it is written of God in the Book of Proverbs "Through me kings do reign; through me counsellors make just laws; through me do princes bear rule and all judges of the earth execute judgement". (7)

The homilist also sets forth the doctrine of obedience and allegiance to kings and rulers. He cites the following passage from the *Epistle to the Romans* where St Paul enunciates the rule of obedience:

> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselvse damnation. (13 : 1-2)(8)

And in accordance with his propagandist design, the homilist vehemently denounces rebellion. His denunciation is couched in religious terms which eloquently reveal the enormity of such a "sin":

> How horrible a sin against God and man rebellion is cannot possibly be expressed according unto the greatness thereof. For he that nameth rebellion nameth not a singular or one only sin as is theft murder and such like, but he nameth the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man, against his prince his country his countuymen...(9)

And broadly speaking, English Renaissance chroniclers were didactic. They were orthodox on the sanctity of monarchy and the question of rebellion. Edward Halle's famous chronicle, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), for instance, was aimed at glorifying the Tudor dynasty.(10) This history was seen as a major work of propaganda of the first half of the sixteenth century, "whose purpose was to scotch such dormant subversive elements in the kingdom as dared to raise their heads'.(11) Halle's main theme is stated straightaway:

> What mischiefe hath insurged in realmes by intestine devision, what depopulation hath ensued in countries by civill discencion, what detestable murder hath been ensued in famous regions by domestical discord and unnatural controversy.(12)

Halle's description of civil war as the outcome of "intestine devision", "civil discencion", and "domestical discord" brings into focus the disorder and

chaos which prevail in the wake of the violation of the doctrine of order and degree upon which every polity is supposed to be founded.

In inveighing against such disorder and anarchy, Elizabethan dramatists upheld the system of royalty by asserting the sanctity and supremacy of monarchy, advocating the rule of obedience and denouncing rebellion. And in an attempt to examine the role of the theatre as a forum for political propaganda, this article seeks to discuss two English history plays which strongly set froth the principle of allegiance to kings and condemn rebellion. The first play is Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (written probably in 1591 or 1592) and the second is *Sir Thomas More*, a play ascribed to Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, Thomas Heywood, and William Shakespeare, 1600 or 1601).(13) These plays have been singled out for special exploration mainly because the first is an early history play and the second is a late one. And the following analysis of these plays shows that the political preoccupations of the English history play as a dramatic sub- genre are completely the same.

And in order to offer a thorough reading, this study proposes to attend to these plays' incessant attempts to dramatise their characters' sufferings which form the backbone of their personal tragedies. Evidently, the poignant dramatisation of their suffering is of the essence here. It reveals that these can be seen as propaganda dramatic tracts as well as tragedies which make us empathise with the pain they were surely suffering.

Edward II opens with the newly- crowned king's recall of Gaveston who was banished by Edward I, the deceased king. Obviously, Gaveston was exiled because be was a corrupt youth who would seduce Edward II from his regal duties. This idea emerges in Gaveston's following confidential address to us:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,

Musicians, that with touching of a string

May draw the pliant king which way I please. (I. i.50-2) 14)

Edward's recall of Gaveston angers the earls and the barons who, as Mortimer Junior emphasises,

Were sworn to your father at his death (i. e. Edward I)

That he should ne' er return into the realm. (I. i. 82-3)

The nobility's "oath" is an oath of allegiance to the late king who is reported to have bound them to oppose the return of Goveston to the realm. (I. i. 84) (15) With this we would note that Edward's action is a sheer breach of his very allegiance to his deceased father who strictly decreed that Gaveston should not be recalled to the realm. And, as the king's favourite, this "self-seeking upstart use (s) his emotional hold upon the king to extract titles and appointments which allow him to flaunt his supriourity over the legitimate earls and barons, and drive them reluctantly to rebellion".(16)

In attempting to broach the question of rebellion, I think it is advisable to pause and see how Marlowe presents the nobility's uprising. First of all, it has to be stressed that the lords' rebellion was triggered by the king's cruel revenge upon the Bishop of Coventry who was "the only cause of (Gaveston's) exile'. (I. i. 178) The Bishop of Canterbury laments the king's revenge upon the Bishop of Coventry:

First were his sacred garments rent and torn,

Then laid they violent hands upon him next,

Himself imprisoned and his goods asseized. (I. ii. 35-7)

The Bishop's decision to inform the pope about these reported sacrileges shocks Lancaster. This shock is dramatised in his immediate enquiry: "My lord, will you take arms against the king?' (I. ii. 39). This enquiry reveals Lancaster's awareness of the orthodox conception of rebellion as a sin. And it is this homilitic orthodoxy which lies behind the bishop's attempt to justify his call for rebllion:

> What need I? God himself is up in arms
>
> When violence is offered to the Church. (I. ii. 40-1)

Close inspection, however, shows that the Bishop is mainly driven by personal motives. He ardently wants to maintain his own property. This point unravels in the following dialogue:

Mortimer Junior:

> Then will you join with us that be his peers
>
> To banish or behead that Gaveston?

Bishop :

> What else my lords? For it concerns me near;
>
> The bishopric of Coventry is his. (I. ii. 42-5)

The personal "me" succinctly undermines his presentation of the rebellion as a crusade in defence of Church property. Hence we would note that he is using the cause of the church as a smokescreen to maintain his own possessions.

Like the Bishop of Canterbury, the nobles are driven by personal motives. Their motives take the form of their envious reactions to Gaveston, the upstatr who rose to rank and power. Lancaster, for instance, "droops" because

"Gaveston is made an earl". (I. ii. 9.11) And Warwick is "discontent" because "Gaveston is also made "Lord Chermberlain of the Realm/ And Secretary too, and Lord of Man'. (I. ii. 10, 13 - 4). When they see the king, the rebels reiterate their resentment and indignation. They assert that they cannot "brook (Gaveston's) upstart pride". (I. iv. 41) The Bishop of Canterbury warns the monarch:

> Remember how the Bishop was abused;
>
> Either banish him that was the cause thereof,
>
> or I will presently discharge these lords
>
> of duty and allegiance due to thee. (I. iv. 59 - 62)

This threat is significant because, as the Pope's legate, the Bishop can release Edward's subjects from their oaths of allegiance. But this threat is no more than a pretext for their intended rebellion.

It is in terms of the nobility's awareness of the divine injunction against rebellion that we would best appreciate their studied recourse to the practice of rhetorical disguise. They stress the point that their uprising is mainly a patriotic move "for the realm's behoof". (I. iv. 243) And the assassination of Gaveston is propored as a nationalistic goal. The "base slave' to 'be suborned' to kill Gaveston will be praised for 'that brave attempt'. 'His mane' will be enroll (ed) in the chronicle... for purging of the realm of such a plague'. (I. iv. 265 - 270) This, however, backfires because that 'base slave' is labelled as a ' murtherer', something which casts doubt on their enterprise. (I. iv. 267)

It is also in view of the nobility's awareness of rebellion as a sin that we would best assimilate their further recourse to disguise.

Then may we with some colour rise in arms,

For howsoever we have borne it out,

' Tis treason to be up against the king. (I. iv. 279 - 81)

The use of "colour' is telling because it confirms the play's condemnation of rebellion. Glossed as 'pretext' or 'pretence', the term 'colour' reveals that their rebellion is not a patriotic enterprise.(17) It is no more than a dramatisation of their personal motives, that is, their resentment and inability to stomach Gaveston's 'upstart pride'. And it is in this way that they plan to rally public opinion in favour of their action:

So shall we have the people of our side,

Which for his father's sake lean to the king;

But cannot brook a night- grown mushrump (i. e. Gaveston) (I. iv, 282 - 4)

Like the insurgent nobles, the king's self- seeking followers have recourse to rhetorical disguise. They capitalise on the prevailing orthodoxies against rebellion. Spencer encourages king Edward to turn this rebellion into a lesson:

Strike off their heads and let them preach on poles;

No doubt such lessons they will teach the rest,

As by their preachments they will profit much

And learn obedience to their lawful king. (III. Ii. 20 - 3)

This is a piece of fine straightforward didacticism, a notion enforced by the deployment of such propaganda terms: 'preach', lessons', 'teach',preachments' and 'learn'. Also, this extract powerfully creates an imagined educational

scene, a scene akin to that of the homilist and the congregation. Hence, the heads of the rebels will be placed on public poles so that the other subjects see them and 'learn obedience to their lawful king'.

In view of its dissemination of official orthodoxies on the sanctity of kingship, *Edware II* emerges as a propaganda history play. This, of course, stresses the play's moralistic and didactic intentions which some critics could not appreciate properly. In a book entitled *Christopher Marlowe: the Overreacher*, Harry Levin, for example, claims that this dramatist shows no special concern to reinforce the moralistic and propagandist function of the English chronicle play.(18) Similarly, Nicholas Brooke thinks that *Edward II* does not contain any major political morals. He writes:

> In *Edward II* no moral whatever is drawn, if it were, it would have to be that Edward's punishment fits the crime with appalling exactitude.(19)

But, in the light of the evidences presented above, we would clearly see the strangeness of these critical attitudes to the play.

Edward II, however, is not merely about the issue of rebellion. It is also about the title character's tragic awareness of his inability to act up to the expectations of his royal office. Edward II reveals his painful awareness after the exit of the lords who vehemently insist on the return of Gaveston into exile:

> I cannot brook these haughty menaces;
> Am I a king and must be overruled? (I. i. 133 - 4)

This sense of powerlessness greatly gnaws at him; therefore, he decides to eradicate it:

Brother, display my ensigns in the field;

I'll bandy with the barons and the earls,

And either die, or live with Gaveston. (I. i. 135 - 7)

This 'either... or' decision is an attempt to put an end to his growing awareness of himself as an effete monarch. This decision, which is basically a choice between nonentity/death and identity/authority, emerges as a personal struggle. It is this struggle which adds every poignancy to his dramatic career, and it is around this struggle that his personal tragedy revolves.

In the wake of Gavestone's banishment, the king, who enters 'mourning', throws his awareness of his tormenting predicament into an imagined scene of suffering:

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,

Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,

And with the noise turns up my giddy brain,

And makes me frantic for my Gaveston. (I. iv. 311 - 41)

In his edition of the play, W. Moelwyn Merchant comments on this image as follows: 'The Cyclops were Vulcan's workmen in his subterranean forge. The king's simile implies therefore both his darkness and the tragic vigour of the blows upon his heart.'(20) Adding to the tragic presentation of Edward's suffering is the gradual development of his sense of being 'haunted' by his peers ('Shall I still be haunted thus?'.) (II. ii. 154) Undoubtedly, the term 'haunted', which has tragic undertones, internalises and intensifies his awareness of being besieged by his nobles. And it is this very sense that

recurs in his other complaint that 'the earls begirt us round'. (II, ii. 222) 'Begirt', from 'begird' and 'gird', means 'surround', 'encircle' or 'enclose'.(21)

Adding further vigour to the tragic presentation of Edward's sufferings is the dramatisation of his blinkered attitude to himself. This attitude is an externalisation of his 'either... or' conception of himself, namely, either authority and identity or nothingness and death. This idea features prominently in the Neath Abbey, where Edward seeks sanctuary.The abbey scene is important because it provides him with an opportunity to re- character himself. He make (s) trial... of that philosophy.' (IV. vi. 17) 'Father', Edward says to the Abbot,

> This life contemplative is heaven,
>
> Oh that I might this life in quiet lead. (IV. vi. 20 - 1)

Here, the term 'philosophy' emerges as the mediaeval *contemptus mundi*. This is a stoical philosophy which centres around a denial of the worldly values of 'rule and empiry' and a revaluation of 'this life contemplative.'(22) But, Edward cannot reform himself because he wholly constructs himself in terms of his office. This point figures in his following cry:

> Oh my stars!
>
> Why do you lour unkindly on a king? (IV. vi. 62 - 3)

And it is as a king that he laments having to 'bear... proud commands.'

Leicester

> Your majesty must go to Killingworth.

Edward

> Must! 'tis somewhat hard, when kings must go. (IV. vi. 70, 81, 2)

Edward's movement to Killingworth Castle is a traumatic experience, an experience which he painfully undergoes. This notion is strongly indicated in Leicester's moving attempt to encourage Edward to be patient:

> Be patient, good my lord, cease to lament;
>
> Imagine Killingworth Castle were your court,
>
> And that you lay for pleasure here a space,
>
> Not of compulsion or necessity. (V, i. 1 - 4)

But, Edward cannot absorb this gnawing experience, or rather, 'this strange exchange as he puts it. (V. i. 35) Of course, this strange exchange is a movement from authority and identity towards nonentity and death. He laments that he is a king but he cannot exercise his authority:

> But what are kings when regiment is gone
>
> But perfect shadows in a sunshine day? (V. i. 26 - 7)

Edward's gnawing awareness of the disparity between 'perfect shadows' and a sunshine day' is telling because it emphasises his conception of 'regiment' as symbolic of authority and identity. And the loss of this authority, he asserts, reduces him to a mere figurehead.

> My nobles rule, I bear the name of king;
>
> I wear the crown but am controlled by them. (V. i. 28 - 9)

It is in terms of the play's preoccupation with Edward's sufferings that we would best appreciate that he gradually gains in tragic stature.

This idea occurs when he is ordered to resign. He first displays a patient obedience to 'the heavens':

> But what the heavens appoint I must obey. (V. i. 56)

Evidently, Edward's readiness to 'obey' suggests his attempt to embrace that stoic philosophy to which he has already referred. And it is in the light of his stoic attitude that we can best assimilate his following prayer upon resigning the crown:

> Now, sweet God of heaven
>
> Make me despise this transitory pomp
>
> And sit for aye enthronised in heaven. (V. i. 107 - 9)

This prayer reveals Edward's profundity of vision, a profundity which asserts itself as the fruit of his serene stoicism. This point unravels in his following exchange with Berkeley:

> Your grace must hence with me to Berkeley straight.
>
> *Edward*
>
> Wither you will; all places are alike
>
> And every earth is fit for burial. (V. i. 144 - 6)

And it is in terms of this stoic profundity that we can best assimilate Edward's conviction that 'death' ends all and I can die but once'. (V. i. 153)

But, it is to be stressed that many critics did not see Edward's profundity of thought. Muriel Bradbrook did not see Esward's depth of thought. She wrote:

> In *Edward II* there is no central feeling or theme, it is merely a history.(23)

E. D. Pendry went so far as to generalise that no 'Christian consolations' existed in Marlowe's tragedies.(24)

> To his (i. e. Marlowe's) eye his heroes die in vain. They

do not learn, we do not learn, from their mistakes; there

is nothing to compensate for loss either here or hereafter.(25)

But Edward learns. He realises that he 'transgressed... with too much clememncy'. (V. i. 122, 3) Therefore, he sends his son his best wishes and bids him rule/ Better than I.'(V. i. 121, 2)

In an attempt to avail itself of every opportunity to dramatise Edward's misery, the play moves on to stress his internalised suffering, a point emphasised by the reference to his 'pensiveness' in prison. The Messenger tells the Queen that Edward is 'full of pensiveness'. (V. ii. 25) This idea recurs in another reference to his pensive silence. ('My lord, be not pensive, we are your friends'. V. iii. 1). Undoubtedly, the dramatisation of Edward's internal suffering is intended to increase the pathos of Edward as a deposed and imprisoned monarch. This process is greatly emphasised by the play's references to his old age and frailty. Mortimer, the rebel, refers to Edward as 'an old wolf' (V. ii. 7). Kent also stresses his brother's old age. He rushes to rescue aged Edward from his foes'. (V. ii. 118) And Edward himself expresses his awareness of his own old age ('Thus lives old Edward not relieved by any...' (V. iii, 23) In his edition of the play, W. M Merchant notes the playwright's deliberate adaptation of historical matter because Edward II was in fact only forty - three at his death'.(26) It is in terms of the play's incessant attempts at dramatising Edward's misery that the deliberate adaptation of his age finds every point and pertinence. It is also in the light of the play's dramatisation of Edward's wretchedness that we can best appreciate the self- pity in which he indulges:

Within a dungeon England's king is kept,

Where I am starved for want of sustenance;

My daily diet is heart- breaking sobs,

That almost rents the closet of my heart;

Thus lives old Edward not relieved by any,

And so must die, though pitied by many. (V. iii. 19 - 24)

Edward's assertion that he will be 'pitied by many' marks a breakthrough. It suggests his attempt to console himself within the pity and 'tears' of an imagined public spectatorship, an attempt which takes shape in his scene with Lightborn, his future murderer. To Lightborn (whose 'eyes [cannot] refrain from shedding tears/ To see a king in this most piteouts state'), Edward says;

Weep's thou already? List awhile to me

And thy heart, were it as Gurney's is

Or as Matrevia', hewn from the Caucasus,

Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale. (V. v. 49 - 54)

Edward's reference to Gurney and Matreves (who have been suborned to make him droop/ And... give him ['neither... kind word nor good look') is part of the tale of his 'misery'. (V. ii. 54 - 5, V. v. 48)

This dungeon where they keep me is the sink

Wherein the filth of all the castle falls...

And there in mire and puddle have I stood

This ten days' space, lest that I should sleep,

One plays continually upon a drum. (V. v. 55 - 6, 58 - 60)

Edward's tale of his misery reveals his attempt to write his personal history. This attempt, however, culminates in his following address to Lightborn:

> These looks of thine can harbour nought but death.
>
> I see my tragedy written on thy brows. (V. v. 72 - 3)

Edward's writing of his own tragedy asserts itself as a consummation of his attempts to memorialise himself through his individual sufferings. Thus, we would note that he first starts telling his 'tale' and ends by writing it into a 'tragedy'. The idea of Edward's personal suffering turning into a tragedy suggests a change in the play's focus of attention. In terms of this change we note that the focus is now on his personal agonies rather than his earlier misgovernment as a king. This change of focus amounts to a shift from the sphere of status and office to that of person. It is in view of the paly's movement to the realm of person that we note that *Edward II* emerges as a tragedy or a personal history. And generally speaking, critics were alive to the play's dramatisation of Edward's agonies. E. M. W. Tillyard, for example, wrote:

> What animates the play is the personal theme: Edward's personal obsession, his peculiar psychology, the humour and finally the great pathos of his situation.(27)

Murray Roston is also alive to the paly's anxiety to re- present itself as a tragedy which arouses compassion:

> It is only at his deposition from the throne and his humiliating imprisonment in the cellar of a castle up to

his knees in sewage that the polarity between his past

splendour and his present degradation arouses compassion.(28)

Like *Edward II, Sir Thomas More* is imbued with the political propaganda doctrines of royalty. It opens in the heat of a debate which centres on the common Londoners' 'wrongs and the straungers insolencies'. (I. i. 114 - 115, 136 - 56)(29) The Londoners debate on whether to bear patiently or to rebel, that is, to take the law into their own hands. Sherwin emphasises the principle of obedience and loyalty to the established authorities, namely, 'the strict obedience that we are bound to'. (I. i. 100 - 1) Doll, on the contraty, voices her will to rebel by taking the law into her own hands, a will similar to that of Lincoln who bursts out as follows:

I... haue long time winckt at these viled ennormitees with

mighty impacience, and ... with losse of mine own liffe

would gladly remedie them. (I. i. 102 - 8)

Lincoln's rebellion begins with 'a <bill>' which he has 'drawne... of our wrongs and the straungers insolencies' (I. i. 114 - 5, 136 - 56). This bill is intended as a rationale justifying his uprising. And in an attempt to justify his rioting, he addresses his fellow rioters (i.e., the 'poore people) as follows,

Gallant bloods, you whose fre sowles doo skorne

To beare the inforced wrongs of aliens,

Ad rage to resolutione, fier the howses

Of theis audatious, straungers...

Shall theis enioy more priuelege than wee

In our own cuntry? Lets then, become ther slaues. (II. ii. 22 - 7)

Then he asserts that they are driven to rebellion:

Since justis kepes not them in greater awe,

Wele be ourselues rough ministers at lawe. (II. ii. 28- a)

It is in accordance with the play's incessant endeavours to intensify its propagandist and didactic purpose that we would best appreciate the presentation of Sir Thomas More as a homilist who promulgates the doctrines found in the homilies of the English Church. He first reminds the rioters of the doctrine of the sanctity of kingship by highlighting the sinfulness of their revolt. More also refers to St Paul's much- quoted doctrine of the divinity of royalty:

First, 'tis a sin

Which of th' apostle did forwarn us of

Urging obedience to authority.

And 'twere bo error if told you all

You were in arms against your [God Himself]... (II. iv. 112 - 6)

Of course they are rebelling against God because

For to the king God hath his office lent

Of dread, of justice, power and command,

Hath bid him rule and will'd you to obey. (II. iv. 118 - 20)

Having shown the rioters the enormity of their sinful uprising, More exhorts them as follows:

What do you do to your sowles

In doing this? O, desperate as you are,

Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same hands,

That you like rebels lift against the peace,

Lift up for peace; and your unreverent knees

Make them your feet to kneel to be forgiuen. (II. iv. 129 - 34)

It is to be stressed that More's 'eloquence', that is, his expostulation and explication of the homiletic injunctions against rebellion, strikes a chord among the rioters. (II. iv. 217) He harangues them and persuades them to ask for 'pardon.' (II. iv. 59, 54, 60 - 2) The rioters' disbanding suggests their awareness of the official doctrines concerning monarchy. It also lends further vigour to the play's propagandist and didactic spirit.

The play's moralistic design also asserts itself in Lincoln's dying speech. He recharacters himself by repenting his rioting and emphasising his obedience and allegiance to the king. This indicates that he emerges as a choric figure who deploys educational jargon ('learn', 'example', 'be warned'). 'Learne it now by me', Linclon didactically addresses 'all... that come to viewe mine end':

Obedience is the best in each degree. (III. I. 59, 54, 60)

Then he 'paciently submit [s] to the lawe.../ asking mercie meekly of my king.' (III. i. 61 - 2) Also, Lincoln sets himself up as an 'example' from whom others will learn:

That others by example of the same

Henceforth by warned to attempt the like

Gainst any alien that repaireth hether. (III. i. 67 - 9)

Evidently, Lincoln's repentance and his conception of himself as an 'example' suggest his attempt to brighten his name before the authorities who would chronicle him as a rioter. And it is in terms of his conception of the authorities as chroniclers that we would best appreciate his repentance and his self- recharactering within didactic and moralistic history. But it is to be stressed that his warning against attacking the aliens is tellingly ironic. This warning subtly justifies Lincoln's rioting and indicates that he has done so because of the aliens' 'vilde ennormitees.' And it is in view of this ironic warning that we can properly see his conception of the 'losse' of his 'owne liffe' as a martyrdom:

> This the old prouerbe now compleate dooth make,
>
> That Lincolne should be hanged for Londons sake. (III. i. 46 - 7)

Lincoln's alignment of his name with London stresses this awareness of fellow Londoners as his future memorialists. Lincoln's hope for honest memorialisation materialises in Doll's immediate farewell to him, a farewell which amounts to a succinct summation of his personal history:

> Farewell, Iohn Lincolne, say all what they can,
>
> Thuo liu' dst a goode fellowe, and dyest an honest man. (III. i. 72 - 3)

'Say all what they can' (with special emphasis on 'say') asserts Doll's awareness of the authorities as chroniclers who would write Lincolne down as a rioter. Hence, she writes Lincoln's personal history in view of his life as 'a good' and 'an honest man'.

The play's ironic undertones could be also seen in the presentation of Doll. Careful scrutiny reveals that Doll conceived of her career as a wholly individual procedure, a procedure towards personal fame and hisory.

George. How say ye? Doo ye subscribe, or are ye faint- hatred reuolter?

Doll ....George Bettes, ther's my hand and my hart: by the Lord, Ile make a captaine among ye, and doo some what to be talked of for euer after. (I. i. 167 - 72)

Doll's desire to be 'talkd of for euer after' finds expression in writing terms. When she next appears, she says to her fellow rioters:

We may as well make bonfiers on Maye daye as at midsommer:

Wele alter the daye in the callinder, and set itt downe

in flaming letters. (II. i. 38 - 41)

The writing terms ('alter'... 'callinder'... 'set downe'... 'letters') suggest her incessant attempts at writing her personal history, attempts which culminate in the scene of Lincoln's execution:

Now let me tell the women in this towne,

No straunger yet brought Doll to lying downe..

Nor French nor Dutche shall get a kisse of me;

And when that I am dead, for me yet say,

I dyed in scorne to be a straungers preye. (III. i. 130 - 5)

Doll's assestion of her refusal 'to be a straungers preye' subtly suggests the aliens' abuses of the privileges they enjoy. Also, it greatly ennobles Doll's career as a rioter.

The chronicling of the personal histories of Lincoln and Doll emerges as an ennoblement of these figures, an ennoblement which finds its pertinence in terms of the play's undercurrents of irony. In developing its undercurrents of irony, the play appropriates the possibilities of the theatrical practice in order to slip outside its general framework as a didactic history play.

The play's recourse to the theatrical practice can be seen in this scene where Thomas More asks his servant Randall (who 'enters... attyred like' his master and has already 'practised [his master's] shift so well') to 'act [the former's] part':

> take my seate,
>
> You are Lord Chancelor: dress your behauiour
>
> According to my carriage; but beware
>
> You talke not over much, for twill betray thee.... (III. ii. 22, 25 - 6, 34 - 7)

This theatrical 'jest' will enable Thomas More to

> See if greate Erasmus can distinguishe
>
> Meritt and outward cerimony. (III. ii. 203, 40 - 1)

"Meritt' and 'outward cerimony' are reality and unreality or, in theatrical terms, being and play - acting. But Erasmus is not taken in by Randall's play- acting. When Sir Thomas More makes his appearance, he dismisses his servant in theatrical terms:

> Foole, painted barbarisme, retire thyself
>
> Into thy first creation! (III. i. 196 - 7)

With his use of 'painted' as a term of costuming disguise as well as his earlier reference to office as an outward sign, a 'seate' (which Randall- as- actor has taken), More rounds off his playlet:

Thus you see

My loving learned frends, how far respecte

Waites often on the cerimonious traine

Of base illitterat welth, whilst men of schooles,

Shrowded in povertie, are counted fooles. (III. ii. 197 - 201)

In view of his casting of Randall as a player within the 'Merit- and-Ceremony' playlet, More emerges as another player, a point emphasised by the latter's interpretation of the playlet, that is, his exposition of the vanities of office and its concomitant pomp. The idea of More as an actor, however, culminates in the scene where he plays the role of the absent Luggins who is cast as 'Good Councell' in 'The Mariage of Witt and Wisedome'. (IV. i. 44) Again, More justifies his desire to act under the guise of his light-heartedness. 'Pardon me... I loue to be merie', More addresses his guest the Lord Mayor (and the latter's fellow audiences by implication). (IV. i. 256 - 7)

The idea of More as playing 'Good Councell' is telling in that it continues his attempts at distinguishing merit from ceremony. To 'Witt' (the title character of the play- within- the- play) More- as- actor says:

Witt, iudge not things by the outward showe;

The eye oft mistakes, right well you doo knowe;

Good Councell assures thee vppon his honestie,

> That this is not Wisedome, but Lady Vanitie. (IV. i. 272 - 5)

More plays his part wonderfully. Inclination (the Vice- figure) tells his fellow players in the play- within- the- play:

> Doo ye heare, fellowes? Would not my lord make a rare player?...
>
> Did marke how extemprically he feel to the matter, and spake
>
> Luggisses part almoste as it is in the very booke set downe? (IV. i. 295 - 6, 298 - 301)

The notion of More as acting "extemprically' is of the essence here in that it stresses his 'honestie' in the play- within- the- play as well as in the play which bears his name. (IV. i. 274)

One important question arises here- 'Why does *Sir Thomas More* seek to present its title figure as an actor or a 'stage player' (to use his own terms)?' V. iv. 79 - 80) An answer to this question could be found in terms of the play's ironic design, namely, the play's incessant attempts at slipping outside its general framework as a didactic history drama and reintroducing itself as a personal history or a 'tragedie', to use More's own term. (V. iv. 81) This process takes shape in the scene where More refuses to sign the king's articles on principle. More's refusal to sign the articles emerges as the first scene in his tragedy. This idea could be gleaned from his conception of his execution as the 'last sceane of [his] tragedie'. (V. iv. 81) Like the Lord Mayor who chronicles the poor Londoners' action as 'rebellion', the Earl of Shrewsbury (another member of the authorities therein) seeks to chronicle Thomas More in terms of his 'great offence vnto his maiestie' (to use Shrewsbury's words) is greatly undermined within the play's subtle ironic

spirit. (V. iv. 74). First and foremost, the play greatly extols More and his praxis. As we have already seen, it is More's 'eloquence' (namely, his explication of the official doctrines of allegiance to royalty) that has brought an end to the Londoners' uprising. It is also More's love for the Londoners that made him procure the king's 'free pardon':

> Sir Thomas Moore humbly vppon his knee
>
> Did begge the liues of all, since on his woord
>
> They did so gently yeeld... (III. i. 155, 148 - 50)

And it is in view of this noble feat that the play soon writes More into hisory:

> Moores name may liue for this right noble part;
>
> And whensoere we talke of ill May daie,
>
> Praise Moore... (III. i. 159 - 61)

Further corroborative evidence of the ennoblement of More could be gleaned from the aura of bereavement which surounds the scene of his execution. The Lieutenant sheds 'kinde and looving teares' (V. iv. 16). Likewise, the poor greatly mourn 'the best freend that [they] ere had.' (V. i. 13 S. D., 42 - 3)

The subtle irony which hangs over *Sir Thomas More* indicates that the play has a single vision and intention. It is in terms of the play's imaginative unity that we would best appreciate the play's attempts at ennobling such falling figures as Lincoln, Rochester (who similarly refused to sign the king's articles on principle) and Thomas More. In view of this process of ennoblement, the play emerges as a collection of tragedies or personal hi-

strories. This idea finds strong point in the presentation of More's execution as the 'last scene of [his] tragedie' and the last scene of the play. This suggests the play's redefiniton of itself as a tragedy or a series of personal histories rather than a didactic history drama. The play's redefinition of itself indicates its integration into tragedy where the focus of attention lies in the characters' personal experiences.

This integration is of great moment because it reveals the richness of *Edward II* and *Sir Thomas More*. It shows that they can be read as history plays and tragedies at the same time. But the aura of tragedy has the upper hand because what mainly remains and lasts in our minds is the poignant dramatisation of the fall of the tragic figures in these plays. At the end of *Edward II* we feel greatly struck by the title character's captivity and misery. This feeling makes us forget the play's earlier didactic accounts of his misgovernment as a king. Likewise, the pathos of the situations of the tragic figures in *Sir Thomas More* makes us empathise with them and ironise the despotic king who ordered their executions.

Notes

1- E. M. W Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Penguin Books, England, 1944, reprinted in 1969), p. 19.

2- *The Works of Sir John Fortescue* edited by Lord Clermont, 2 vols. (1869), I, 322. Quited in Tillyard, p. 19.

3- *Abridgement of de Sebonde:* Originally in Latin, and translated into French by Jean Matrin in 1550. Quotation translated from Book IV, Chapter 42, of the French version. Quoted in Tillyard, p. 23

4- *The Works of Sir John Frortescue.* Quoted in Tillyard, p. 20.

5- Tillyard, p. 26.

6- Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories* (California, 1947), p. 216.

7- Tillyard, p. 71.

8- *The Holy Bible*, The Authorised Version, 1611 (London, n. d.)

9- Tillyard, p. 71.

10- Murray Roston, *Sixteenth- Century English Literature* (The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982), p. 87.

11- Campbell, p. 68.

12- Campbell, p. 68.

13- Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 127, 209 - 10.

14- Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, edited by W. M. Merchant (London, 1967). All further citations are from this edition.

15- *Edward II*, edited by H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller (London, 1933) I. i. 81- 3 and below

16- M. Roston, p. 168.

17- Gareth and B. L. Evans, *Companion to Shakespeare* (London, 1978), p. 307.

18- Harry Levin, *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher* (London, 1961), P. 110.

19- Nicholas Brooke, 'Marlowe the Dramatist', *Stratford- upon- Avon Studies,* (Elizabethan Theater 9) (London, 1966), pp. 87 - 150, p. 103.

20- *Edward II*, edited by W. M. Merchant. I. iv. 312 and below

21- Gareth and B. L. Evans gloss '*begirt*' as coming from '*gird*', p. 319.

22- *Edward II*, edited by Merchant, IV. vi. 13 and below.

23- Muriel Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (London, 1935). Quoted in Merchant's edition of *Edward II*, p xiv.

24- *Christopher Marlowe: Complete Plays and Poems*, edited by E. D. Pendry and J. C. Maxwell (Dent, London, 1976)p. vii.

25- Ibid., p. vii.

26- See Merchant's edition of *Edward II*, V. ii. 118 and below.

27- Tillyard, p. 115.

28- M. Roston, p. 169.

29- *Sir Thomas More*, in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, edited by C. F. T Briike Oxford, 1908)