

# WEATHER, WAR AND WITCHES: SIGN AND CAUSE IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH VERNACULAR CHRONICLES<sup>1</sup>

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The comparative popularity of fifteenth-century texts in their own time and in ours affords some illuminating contrasts. Margery Kempe's spiritual autobiography may never have been copied more than twice in the medieval period; yet thousands of modern readers know her story from the three printed editions that have appeared since 1936.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, few historians (and even fewer general readers) study the vernacular chronicles of fifteenth-century England, many of which have been printed only once.<sup>3</sup> Yet these works, constituting, according to one modern critic, 'the most remarkable historiographical development of the fifteenth century', were overwhelmingly popular with their contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> Countless versions were produced. The editor of *The Brut* listed over 120 surviving fifteenth-century manuscript copies of this chronicle alone. Fifteenth-century London chronicles were so extensively and frequently rewritten, exchanged and recopied as to baffle modern editors searching for unilinear manuscript traditions.<sup>5</sup> Few of the manuscripts can be traced to established monastic libraries. It thus seems likely that their readership was largely secular and comparatively popular.<sup>6</sup> Caxton thought it worth his while to issue his own version of *Brut* in 1480, at the request of 'dyuerce gentilmen'.<sup>7</sup>

Evidently fifteenth-century readers found the chronicles more significant than do historians. Yet the mental distance of five hundred years cannot alone explain the fall of fifteenth-century chronicles from favour. Their popularity had waned markedly within very few years of the end of their century. The last major fifteenth-century chronicle — Robert Fabyan's *The New Chronicles of England and France* — was printed posthumously by Pynson in 1516.<sup>8</sup> Sixteenth-century writers, whatever their own historical presuppositions,<sup>9</sup> consistently derided the works and methods of fifteenth-century chroniclers. Their censure followed two well-defined paths.

First, fifteenth-century authors were accused of inattention to the causes of historical events, and hence failure to produce unbiased history. The early sixteenth-century writer of Hearne's fragment, for instance, deliberately dissociated himself from his predecessors who 'foresee not the causes precedent and subsequent . . . giving credence to such as write of affection, leaving the truth that was in deed.'<sup>10</sup> The *Mirror for Magistrates* echoes this judgement with uncanny precision. In a passage alleging that both fear and favour impede true historiography, the author declaimed

Vnfruytfull Fabyan folowed the face  
 Of time and dedes but let the causes slip  
 Whych Hall hath added . . .

Causes, the author adds virtuously, are the 'chiefest things/That should be noted of the story wryters'; those neglecting them are 'vnwurthy the name of Croniclers'.<sup>11</sup> Hall himself, despite his debt to the chroniclers, would admit no good of their methods — Fabyan and the authors of *Brut* were the only English-language historians of any merit, and even they were 'men worthy to be prayed for theyr diligence, but farre shotynge wyde from the butte of an historie'.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the chroniclers were judged to be mere annalists of trivial and popular events. John Foxe, looking for mud to stick against the chronicle accounts of Sir John Oldcastle as a traitor rather than a proto-Protestant martyr, wrote:

If ye would shew out of them [the chronicles] the order and course of times, what years were of dearth and of plenty, where kings kept their Christmas, what conduits were made, what mayors and sheriffs were in London, what battles were fought, what triumphs and great feasts were holden . . . &c: in such vulgar and popular affairs the narration of the chronicler serveth to good purpose, and may have his credit, wherein the matter forceth not much whether it be true or false<sup>13</sup>

More pithily, Thomas Nashe, in *Pierce Penilisse*, satirised the 'laie Chronigraphers' of his own day, 'that write of nothing but of Mayors and Sheriefs, and the deare yeere, and the great Frost'.<sup>14</sup>

Similar criticisms can be discerned behind the conscientious objectivity of modern commentary. Gransden, for instance, acknowledges that medieval historians were capable of the critical assessment of historical causes, but believes that

The strength of the tradition of English medieval historiography lay . . . in contemporary reportage — eyewitness accounts, accounts based on oral evidence and on documents, put together piecemeal in chronological order to create a serial, episodic narrative.

History so produced was necessarily somewhat incoherent; and though 'On a limited scale causality can unify', she comments that

the workings of divine providence are only exceptionally demonstrated with enough consistency and frequency to give unity. Similarly, natural causation is far too rarely mentioned to serve the purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Orthodox viewpoints from the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries thus suggest that the chronicles were naive, unstructured reports, vividly recounting such trifles as civic processions, temporary tragedies, and the weather. Does close reading of the chronicles confirm these views? Admittedly, the authors include many accounts, often brief but striking, of storms, comets, plagues, deaths, frosts and a variety of miraculous events. The following sequence from the *Short English Chronicle's* version of the year 1463-4 is not untypical:

Also this yere was a grete drouthe, the whiche duryd from myddes of Marche till the morne after Mydsomer day that never reyned. And this yere whete was worthe iij d. a bussell, and all maner of vetaille grete chepe, and wyne grete chepe, and grete skarssete of money. Also this yere was a grete pestilence thorowe all the realme.<sup>16</sup>

Severe frosts and storms are noted.<sup>17</sup> Fabyan commented on the year 1426-7, 'This yere was unresonable of wederynge, for it reyned mooste contynuelly from Ester to Myghelmasse'.<sup>18</sup> For 1442, the *Great Chronicle* recorded a 'huge & wondyrfull thundyr wt Inestymable lygthnyng, In tyme whereof the shaftt of Seynt paulys Stepyll by ffury of the said wedyr was sett on ffyre'.<sup>19</sup> The sighting of comets provoked lengthy and colourful reportage. Warkworth devoted a whole printed page to a comet of 1472, which

arose in the southe este . . . and kept his cours flamyng westwarde overe Englonde; and it hade a white flaume of fyre fervently brennyng, . . . And some menne seyde that the blassynges of the seide sterre was of a myle length.<sup>20</sup>

Accounts of more esoteric visitations were also abundant. The author of *An English Chronicle* related that before the battle of Mortimer's Cross in 1461 'were seen iij sonnys in the fyrmament shynyng fulle clere'. Observers were 'agast', but Edward IV, rightly interpreting this as a 'good sygne' of the Trinity's support, won the ensuing battle.<sup>21</sup> Two versions of *Brut* report that at Agincourt, St. George himself fought for the English 'and was seyne abouen in þe eyre'. Another version, for the year 1471, recorded enigmatically the sighting in the Thames of 'many whyrlepolys, & . . . a whale, þat signyfyed not good'.<sup>22</sup>

Yet listing the chronicle descriptions of weather and omens does not in itself justify an assessment of their narrative as trivial or unstructured. On the contrary, the chroniclers' use of the words 'sygne' and 'signyfy' in their accounts of triple suns, whales and whirlpools should alert us to the possibility of more profound meanings attached to apparently ephemeral subjects. The whirlpools for the author — and presumably the audience — were not mere occurrences, but *signs*.

The crucial importance of signs in fifteenth-century historiography cannot, I think, be appreciated without an understanding of fifteenth-century views of the nature of the world. Authors and readers of the chronicles, I believe, felt that they inhabited a meaningful universe, where every event, natural or supernatural, might be charged with vital significance. This perception is fundamentally alien to twentieth-century ways of thought. We have lost the sense that natural events have meaning. We know that they have causes and effects — modern discourses, from school curricula to weather reports, are devoted to meticulous explanations of the reasons for and influences of such varied phenomena as high tides, the habits of bees, and climatic change. In this system, natural events give evidence of underlying trends (such as depletion of the ozone layer); but they derive from no agent, and imply no communication. Hence they cannot be signs in the Barthian sense.

In direct contrast, nature, to fifteenth-century minds, was necessarily loaded with significance. Both scientific and religious orthodoxy affirmed that God communicated his will to human beings by signs embedded in His natural creation. Caxton's translation of the medieval encyclopaedia, the *Mirroure of the World* said of eclipses:

Yf ye wyl vnderstande them well . . . ye shal not fare the wese ne the lasse auaylle you; ffor to knowe it may moche prouffyte to euery persone; ffor suche demonstraunces ben signefycacions of grete werkes & thynges that ofte happen & falle . . . as somtyn scarcete and deffaulte of goodes, or of a grete derthe or warre, or deth of kynges or prynces that falleth in the world, as [astronomers] may enquire and serche by their science & reson.<sup>23</sup>

This was so because nature was God's instrument, subject to His intentions as the tool is to the worker's:

Nature werkyth in lyke wyse, whan she is emplyed, as doth the axe of a carpenter whan he employeth it in his werke; ffor the axe doeth nothyng but cutte. And he that holdeth it addressith it to what parte he wylle, so that in thende by the axe the werke is achieuid and made after thentente of the werker. Ryght so nature maketh redy and habandonneth where as God wylle.<sup>24</sup>

Fifteenth-century observers were evidently keen to read the messages conveyed by God through Nature; so enthusiastic, in fact, that the pious author of the tract *Dives and Pauper* feared that concentration on the message would divert attention from its author. The power of God, as Pauper informed Dives, stood in danger of being downgraded because

Þese dayis meen doon so mechil wurshhepe to sonne, moone and sterrys þat for to wurshepyn þe sterrys and þe planetys and þe craft of astronomy þey welyn puttyn god out of his maieste, out of his kyngdam and his lordshepe

Such over-eager astronomers erred precisely in the fact that they ascribed to the stars that primary causal power which properly belonged only to God:

as þey seyn, þer shal noo man ne womman been heyl ne seek, fol ne fayir, ryche ne pore, wys ne fool, good ne wyckyde but be þe werkyng of þe bodyis aboutyn . . . þere shal fallyn noo myschef ne wele neythir to persone ne to comounte but be here wyttys and be þe cours of þe planetys.

Instead, Pauper insisted, God could compass all destinies without planetary assistance. Disease and foul weather should rightly be seen neither as causes of other events, nor as results of purely natural causes (such as planetary influence), but as signs of God's displeasure:

ȝyf ony persone or comoute trespase aȝens hym, he may chastysyn hem be hungyr, be moreyn, be sekeness, be tempest, be swerd, be pouert, be loose of catel and qhat wyse he wele . . . askyngge þe planetys noo leue ne counseyl of astronomerys.<sup>25</sup>

In brief, the author thought that astronomers mistook 'tokens' for causes. So vital to his teaching was the distinction between sign and cause that he provided his readers with an exemplary list of phenomena which might be signs, but not causes, of subsequent events.<sup>26</sup>

Fifteenth-century writers never doubted that natural events had natural causes. The *Mirroure of the World* correctly explained eclipses as due to the occlusion of one heavenly body by another from a terrestrial viewpoint.<sup>27</sup> However in their scale of values, knowledge of causes was of little intrinsic value; instead, correct understanding of natural events served the more important purpose of enabling the observer to ascertain God's wishes. Accurate knowledge of the workings of nature was essential here, because not all natural occurrences were significant. God made His signs detectable by temporarily diverting nature from its usual courses. Hence, the author of *Dives and Pauper* anathematized any attempt to divine the future by the occurrence of summer thunderstorms; it was 'hey folye and opyn wycheecraft, for it is kyndely þyng [i.e., natural] in somyrtyme for to þondryn'. Only when 'gret þondyr fallyth in wyntertyme. . . aȝens kende [i.e., against nature]' could it be read as 'tokne of þe heye offens of God and tokne of venȝance comyng but men amendyn hem.'<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the eclipse announcing the death of Christ was, according to the *Mirroure of the World*, instantly recognizable by good astronomers as ominous, for

thenne was the mone vnder therthe at the fulle as moche as she myght be, whiche thenne in no wyse myght empeshe the lyght of the sonne; & the day at that tyme was as derke and obscure as it had ben propre nyght, whiche by nature at that tyme shold haue be bryght & pure.<sup>29</sup>

Such radical departure from nature plainly demonstrated that Christ 'was and is by right lord and kyng of alle the world, and may deffete and desolve it, and ordeyne at his good playsyr'. It also allowed St. Denis (transformed for the occasion into a master of pagan astronomy) to read the eclipse correctly as a sign of the death of the ruler of the universe. His right distinction of the significant, from the normal, eclipse enabled his speedy conversion.<sup>30</sup>

The relationship between sign and cause in fifteenth-century English thought was thus rich and complex. Divine communications operated alongside natural causes which they confusingly resembled. Yet humans, by keeping an informed watch on the universe, might hope to read the signs of the times correctly, regulate their behaviour accordingly, and so mitigate the more drastic manifestations of divine displeasure. As the author of *Dives and Pauper* pointed out, God's works were unaffected by the planets, but His judgements would alter according to the changing conduct of human beings.<sup>31</sup>

The chroniclers' determination to record such unusual occurrences as droughts, unseasonable storms, and unprecedented appearances of heavenly bodies already seems more comprehensible. In their view, all such events might be divine messages, perilous to ignore. However, the particular meanings of extra-natural events, and their function in the narrative, remain to be considered.

The author of *Dives and Pauper* lists many kinds of 'wondrys' which might convey direful messages to God's people.<sup>32</sup> Since space does not allow consideration of all, I shall analyse only two sets of potentially ominous events which occur fairly frequently in the chronicles — comets and thunderstorms.

Our understanding of the particular significance of comets is enhanced by a discussion in *Dives and Pauper* of the meaning of the great comet of 1402. *Dives*, seeking a more specific significance for comets than *Pauper's* general interpretation that they were signs of God's wrath, is told that 'clerkes'

seyen that whenne it appereth it signefieth moreyn or chaungyng of som gret prince or destruccioun of som cuntre or chaungyng of som reme or gret werre or hunger or wonderful tempest.<sup>33</sup>

This range of significations, I suggest, allowed the chroniclers to use comets to add meaning and structure to their narratives by infusing their story with implicit comments on the spiritual, political and ethical ramifications of events.

The comet of 1402, for instance, figures in seven vernacular chronicles.<sup>34</sup> Four of these link it, by skilful structuring of the narrative, with the Percy rebellion against Henry IV and in particular with the battle of Shrewsbury. That this is intentional is demonstrated by the ingenuity the writers displayed in coping

with the problem that the comet appeared some months before the battle, which took place in July 1403. In one version of *Brut*, the account of the comet is immediately followed by the sentence 'Anon after fell a debate betwene De Kyng and Sir Henry Percy'. This interchange, related with a wealth of probably apocryphal detail, ushers the reader inexorably towards the battle, which follows 'on Saynt Mary Mawdeleyne even next folowyng the yere of owre Lord IM CCCC iij'.<sup>35</sup> Though technically chronologically accurate, this account glosses so easily over the months between the comet and the battle that a superficial reading might give the impression that the one almost immediately preceded the other.

Another version of *Brut*, and the *Great Chronicle*, omit the debate, but make the battle immediately follow the appearance of the comet, thus incorrectly placing Shrewsbury in 1402.<sup>36</sup> The *Grey Friars' Chronicle* puts both battle and comet in 1404.<sup>37</sup> Since fifteenth-century chroniclers were not generally careless with dates, this implies that the authors gave higher priority to the correct juxtaposition of omen and event than to mere chronological precision. The comet and this particular battle were to be kept together. A consideration of the specific implications of comets explains why. A comet, that sudden intruder into the procession of the fixed stars, symbolized more than war in general. It was both harbinger and allegory of disturbances in natural order and upheavals in earthly hierarchies. No wonder that destruction of countries was implied by its advent. The battle of Shrewsbury, according to the chroniclers, constituted just such a reprehensible offence against natural and political order in at least two ways.

In the first place Shrewsbury was civil war, or as *Gregory's Chronicle* put it

one of the wyrste bataylys that evyr came to Inglonde, and unkyndyst, for there was the fadyr a-yenst the sone and the sone ayenste the fadyr, and brother and cosyng a-yenste eche othyr.<sup>38</sup>

The term 'unkyndyst' clearly shows that such internecine strife was thought to constitute a radical reversal of nature. Secondly, it was (according to some chroniclers) occasioned by revolt against a lawful king. *Brut* blames the battle on the 'fals treson' and 'wikket steryng' of Sir Thomas Percy.<sup>39</sup> In these accounts, then, the comet provided, for any alert fifteenth-century reader, a powerful clarification of the meaning of the event in ethical and political terms. It is noteworthy that another chronicler, who did not prefigure the battle with the comet, used an alternative miraculous sign to similar effect. John Capgrave's *Abbreuacion of Chronicles* reads, for the year 1402:

In þis somyr . . . , fast by þe townes of Bedforth and Bikilliswade, appered certeyn men of dyuers colouris, renning oute of wodes and fytung horribly. This was seyne on morownyngis and at mydday, and whan men folowid to loke what it was, þei coude se rite nawt.

In þat same tyme Ser Herry Percy þe Jonger began to rebelle ageyn þe king.<sup>40</sup>

Here again, the unnatural quality of the ghostly battle appropriately prefigures the rebellion — against natural order — of Sir Henry Percy.

Comets, then, could connote precise shades of meaning in the chronicle accounts; yet the associations of comets permitted the chroniclers to choose exactly how they were to be integrated into history. Individual writers determined what should be classed as the political and social upheaval and destruction foretold by the comet, exactly what evils had aroused God's wrath, and whether the change of prince was warranted or not. The writer of *An English Chronicle*, for example, juxtaposed the first battle of St. Albans (1455) with Halley's comet of 1456. However, in his view, the 'mortalle debate' in this battle was not primarily a rebellion of the supporters of the duke of York against an innocent king. It was a quarrel between York, the earl of Salisbury, and the earl of Warwick on one hand, and the duke of Somerset on the other. Somerset, he alleged, had 'euer excited and stered the kyng ageyns thaim', despite York's devotion to 'the commune profyte of the londe'. It was Somerset's 'malice' which drove the Yorkists to battle, which ceased immediately 'the seyde duke Edmonde and the lordes were slayne'. The appearance of the comet may, in his narrative, foreshadow at long range the deposition of Henry VI, with which the chronicle ends. But responsibility for the national misfortune and war which it connotes was, it seems, intended to be laid at Somerset's door.<sup>41</sup>

Even kings were not immune from such implicit reproach. In his account of the years 1402-1403 the author of *An English Chronicle* divorces the comet as far as possible from the Percy revolt. Instead, the comet directly precedes, and thus presumably renders particularly meaningful, the sentence

And aboute this tyme the peple of this land began to grucche ayens kyng Harri, and beer him hevvy, because he took thair good and paide not therfore; and desirid to haue ayeen king Richarde.<sup>42</sup>

This is followed by a detailed account of the examination of a group of friars who questioned the authority of Henry IV's reign, on the fair legal grounds that Richard II's abdication was made under duress, and that Henry was suspected of Richard's murder. The eventual death of the friars is put in the context of governmental anti-clericalism — the author claims that 'a knyght [in the king's council] that loued nevir the chirche' urged their execution.<sup>43</sup> Here the comet

seems to be used as a sign *against* the king; the reversal of good order and national destruction which it signifies can be identified in the king's excessive taxation of the people he was bound to protect, and his cavalier attitude toward the church.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Warkworth's long account of a comet of 1472 must be seen in the context of his generally anti-Yorkist stance. This example is particularly interesting in that no other chronicler of the period mentions the comet, though if it were only half as spectacular as Warkworth alleged, it could hardly have gone unnoticed.<sup>45</sup> This leads one to suspect either that Warkworth invented a sign to suit his purposes, or that other chroniclers suppressed any mention of an inconveniently ominous occurrence. In Warkworth's narrative, the comet is preceded by the death of Henry VI. Warkworth certainly considered this to be murder; not only does he say that Henry was 'putt to dethe', he recounts the story that when the body was displayed in London, it 'blede new and fresche', evidently in token of foul play. Following this Warkworth recounts the brutal and rapacious legal measures taken against the rebels in Kent. He alleges that 'many dyverse menne of the cuntre were hanged and put to dethe', and that innocent men were so heavily fined that they were forced 'to selle suche clothinge as thei hade, and borowede the remanent, and laborede for it aftyr warde'. His comment on these events is nicely ambiguous — 'Lo, what myschef groys after insurreccion!'

The appearance of the comet is directly followed by another display of the king's unreasonable demands on his subjects; Warkworth lists in relentless detail the resumptioms, fees and taxes granted at the ensuing parliament.<sup>46</sup> Obviously the comet — together with a group of other omens reported in the following years — signified, to Warkworth's mind, much that was amiss in the realm. Yet his conventionally pious claim that the omens were 'tokenes . . . for amendynge of mennys lvyynge' must be balanced against a consideration of the structure of his narrative, which strongly implies that the comet appeared as a sign of Henry VI's untimely death, and that it was King Edward's life and rule in particular which required amendment.<sup>47</sup> The comet thus functions in the narrative to provide a safely unstated, yet damning, interpretation of Edward IV's excessive taxation and brutally corrupt justice. Like the comet, Edward's actions disturbed the right order of the world; ideal kings were expected to be the fount of justice and to show mercy.<sup>48</sup> Comets signified destruction of the realm; it might fairly be inferred from Warkworth's narrative that Edward's demands were ruining his people. The only overt interpretation of the significance of the comet is safely generalized. Yet fifteenth-century readers must have appreciated the implication that comets foretold the fall of kings.

Fifteenth-century thunderstorms, like comets, were charged with a wealth of profound meanings. Most simply, storms could directly implement God's judgements. John Mirk, in his *Festial*, relates the story of a mother of one of St. Andrew's disciples, consumed by a guilty passion for her son, who successfully accused the son of raping her, and St. Andrew of conniving at the act. Both were sentenced to death

Then Saynt Andraw prayde bysily to God for help. Þen anon com a hydewes Þondyr þat made all hom aferde, þat þay wern all fayne to fach Andraw out of pryson. And þerwyth com a bolt of layte, and brant þe modyr to colys yn syght of all men.<sup>49</sup>

At one stroke, the sinner was punished, the prisoners freed, and the onlookers converted to Christianity.

Storms might also convey God's wishes in less fatal, but no less compelling, terms. In a story somewhat reminiscent of St. Andrew's, Margery Kempe recounts that when she was imprisoned at Leicester on suspicion of Lollardry, Christ assured her in a vision that he would procure her release. The next day, He sent 'sweche wederyng of leuenys, thunders & reynes contynuyng þat al þe pepyl in þe town wer so afrayd þei wist not what to do'. Swiftly recovering from their stupor, however, they released Margery and her companions, and had them sworn innocent; whereupon 'a-non þe tempest sesyd, & it was fayr wedir, worschepyd be owre Lord God.'<sup>50</sup> Margery Kempe also described storms which occurred in Rome while she was visiting St. Brigid's house — she supposed them to be 'tokenys' of God's will that St. Brigid might be more highly honoured by the citizens and pilgrims.<sup>51</sup>

Fiends, too, could cause storms. Mirk twice relates that when Christ went to harrow hell, 'a brest of Þondyr' frightened fiends floating in the air into falling to earth, where they 'rerythe warres; þey makyþ tempestys in þe see . . . ; þay reryth wyndys and blowyþ don howsys, stepuls, and trees'.<sup>52</sup> The view that witches could raise hailstorms and lightning was explicitly known to chroniclers. John Hardyng, describing Henry IV's campaign against Owen Glendower, says

The kyng had neuer, but tempest foule and raine,  
As long as he was ay in Wale grounde  
Rockes & mystes, wyndes & stormes euer certaine,  
Al men trowed, that witches it made that stounde;<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the occurrence of thunder in different months was thought to foretell events in the ensuing year. The very vigour with which the author of *Dives and Pauper* inveighed against the practice of thunder-divination suggests its popularity.<sup>54</sup> It was perhaps not uncommon to keep, as Robert Thornton and Robert Acle did, a memorandum of the significance of thunder in each month.<sup>55</sup>

For various reasons, then, thunderstorms were subject to intense scrutiny. There is a tendency in the chronicles for thunderstorms to be associated with actions against the national interest, in particular rebellion, treachery and heresy. Hardyng's account of the witch-raised storms which broke above Henry IV in Wales, for example, is set in the context of the king's abortive attempts to dislodge Owen Glendower from the 'ful great part' of Wales which he occupied.<sup>56</sup> Hardyng, too, directly prefaces his account of the 1414 rising of Sir John Oldcastle, 'heretike', who 'Confedered with lollers insapient . . . That sembled were, by great insurrection', with the comment that Henry V's coronation took place 'With stormes fel, and haylestones great also'.<sup>57</sup> This is a particularly telling example of the ways in which chroniclers could manipulate reports of omens to structure their narratives. None of the other chronicles record a storm at Henry V's coronation; the nearest version says only that it was 'a fulle wete day of rayne'.<sup>58</sup> Apparently Hardyng exaggerated (or invented) the storm for his own purposes. By inserting into his account a sign of rebellion and heresy he bridged the awkward gap between the triumphant coronation and the threatened revolt, and provided a narrative context appropriate to the allegations of heresy against Oldcastle. A third layer of meaning may also be embedded in the text. The coronation, and hence Hardyng's storm, took place, as he carefully emphasized, on 9 April. According to Thornton's predictive chart, April thunder presaged 'pat seme ȝere to be Frutfull & mery, And also grette dede off wekkyde men'.<sup>59</sup> Such a portent falls suspiciously pat to its situation, allowing Hardyng to pay a gracefully oblique compliment to the good omens attending the king's first regnal year, while simultaneously deprecating the ensuing Oldcastle rebellion.

Further examples in the chronicles of the connection between treachery, rebellion and thunderstorms cluster round the figures of Perkin Warbeck, Lambert Simnel and Lord Audley. Recounting the executions for treason of Warbeck and Simnel, the *Grey Friars Chronicle* says that 'the same daye was grete flooddes, wynddes, thunder, lytnynges, wyche dyd moche harme and hurte in dyvers placys and countres in Ynglonde'. The *Great Chronicle* prefaces Warbeck's arrival in 1497 with a preternatural storm of hail in Bedford.<sup>60</sup> The author of MS Vitellius A xvi places an account of the same hailstorm directly after Lord Audley's execution.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, according to *Brut*, a thunderstorm followed the deaths of two heretics, executed in London in 1439-1440.<sup>62</sup> Even the execution procession of four 'strong, errant theves, robberyng and quellyng the Kynges peple' was marked by 'suche wedryng from the skye, þat folke were sore adredde and agast, it was so horrible and grete, what of rayne, thondere and lightnyng and hayll.'<sup>63</sup>

All these cases embody a range of possible meanings. Thunder might sound over the head of a good king, such as Henry V, persecuted by wicked (and possibly heretic) enemies. In this case, the thunder itself might be a portent of rebellion, or a weapon of witches, or a token of God's judgement against the evil-doers. Storms might break out at the appearance in public of radically rebellious people, as at the execution of thieves, traitors and heretics. Again, the narratives allow a certain ambiguity here; thunder might be raised by the heretics themselves, or sent by God in sign of His displeasure. These various topoi could be fruitfully combined. An account in one continuation of *Brut* of the trial of Eleanor Cobham, duchess of Gloucester, for witchcraft in 1441 illustrates the point.

The sequence begins with a picture of Henry VI riding through the city on his return from Essex. The king 'was not so sone passed the Cite, bot þat it hayled, rayned and eke lightned. . . whereof the peple were sore agast, and aferd of the grete tempest'.<sup>64</sup> The chronicler carefully notes the date — 'the xvth day of Iuyll'. In Thornton's thunder-prediction chart, this storm would signify, among other things, the fall of a 'great synner'.<sup>65</sup> However, the explicit comment on the storm is:

And so it was spoken emonges the peple, þat þer were som wikked fendes and spiritis arered out of helle by coniuacion, forto noy þe peple in the Reame, and to put them to trouble, discencion and vnrest. And þen was it knowen þat certeyn clerkes, and women þat ar called 'wicches', had made their operacion and their craft to destroy men and women . . . Wherof Dame Alianore Cobham . . . was named principally of these actes and fals dedes forto destroy the Kyng, whom God saue and kepe!

An account of the trial of Eleanor Cobham and her associates follows. Readers attuned to natural communications would hardly be surprised to learn that Eleanor was judged to do penance for 'trespasse þat she had doon ayenst God and holy Chirche, and for the fals sorcery and wicchecraft þat she vsed'. Indeed, the terms of the narrative render it practically inevitable that when she was taken out of Westminster on her way to detention in the Isle of Man

þere was such wedryng of thonder, lightnyng, hayll and rayne, þat the peple were sore adredde and agast of the grete noyse and hydous of þe weder þat sodenly was doon and shewed þere at their passage at þat tyme.<sup>66</sup>

Thunderstorms encircle the narrative, infusing it with the appropriate shade of heresy and treason, warning of witchcraft practised against the king, foretelling the fall of the witch herself, and identifying her when she appears in public.

This association of thunderstorms with a known sorceress raises questions about the chroniclers' representation of Margaret of Anjou. Since fifteenth-century chronicles were evidently often written almost contemporaneously with their subject matter, overt criticism of the wife of the ruling monarch would have been neither tactful nor prudent.<sup>67</sup> Yet the connotations of Margaret's appearances in the chronicles are persistently pejorative. The *Grey Friars Chronicle*, for instance, relates for 1445:

Thys yere on Candemas evyne was gret thunder and tempest, that Powlles stepulle on the sowth-west syde mervelusly was sett a fyre, and the stepull of Kyngstone up Temse brent, and many men slayne. And qwene Margaret was crownyd.<sup>68</sup>

This account is confirmed by the author of *Vitellius A xvi* — 'vpon the Candelmase Evyn befor [the arrival of Margaret] by a grete tempeste of Thundir and lightenyg at afir none the Steple of Seynt Pawlis chirche was sette on fire'. This author also remarks sourly on the fact that the marriage entailed the delivery to Margaret's father of 'the duchy of Angoo and the Erldom of Mayn, whiche was the key of Normandy.'<sup>69</sup> The coincidence between the thunderstorm — significantly centred on the principal church of London — and the arrival of a queen whose marriage was to prove so expensive to England, is highlighted by the narrative organisation. Perhaps, too, both authors and readers remembered the gloomy prognostication of thunder in February — that many rich men would die.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, for the year 1463, *The Great Chronicle*, *Gregory's Chronicle*, Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles*, and *Vitellius A xvi*, all report that the ship in which Margaret and her supporters were escaping from Edward IV's forces was sunk by a sudden tempest. She herself was lucky to escape in a fishing boat.<sup>71</sup> The presence of the queen, the disastrous effects of her marriage for England, and a February thunderstorm are all brought together in the narrative of *Bale's Chronicle* for the years 1449-1450:

than wer all þe Englisshmen dryven and sent oute from ffrauce Normandy and Angeoy and cam into þis land in greet mysery and poverte be many compaynes and felawships and yede into severall places of þe land to be enherite and to lyve upon the almes of the peple. But many of them drew to theft and misrule, and noyed sore the cominalte of þis land spirituell and temporell and many of þeym afterward hanged.

Item, the Wednesday the xxv day of ffeverer was greet wedering of rayne and wynde and atte nyght the king's place at Eltham þe Quene beyng present þer sodenly was on fire<sup>72</sup>

Why should Margaret of Anjou be such a focus of storms in the chronicles? Two interpretations are possible, and both are presented for the readers' inspection in the *Great Chronicle's* account of her difficulties in crossing the channel to England in 1471:

they [Margaret and Prince Edward] had lynn at an havyn In Fraunce abydyng there ffor a conveyent wynde ffrom þe begynnyng of November last past, ffor the which was much straunge talkyng In london & othir placys, saying that It was agayn the wyll of God, that she shuld come any more In England that had cawsid soo much sorw wтын It beffore tymys, and othir said which bare to hyr good wyll that It was doon by soom sorcery or wycchcraft.<sup>73</sup>

As often in the chronicles, the omens are ambiguous. Yet the very range of meanings allowed the writers free play with connotation and association. Ruling kings and their wives were hard to criticize overtly. Yet Warkworth, without voicing explicit disparagement of Edward IV, managed to manipulate his tales of comets, droughts and other omens to imply the worst about the king's policies. Similarly, considering the chroniclers' expressed views on the high political costs of the French marriage,<sup>74</sup> we may suspect that they inserted tales of thunderstorms into their texts to signify God's displeasure with Margaret of Anjou, or even to portray her as a witchlike figure, raising storms and destruction over all England.

This brief account of the functions of comets and thunder in the narratives of vernacular chronicles provides only the beginning of a complete analysis. Nevertheless the evidence suggests that reports of weather and omens appear in the chronicle narratives not in witness of a lack of causal structure, but to create a significant discourse. Far from being trivial, these accounts added multiple layers of meaning to the text, enabling fifteenth-century writers and readers to assign moral, ethical and political significance to the reported events and actions, and to render intelligible the otherwise bewildering course of contemporary history.<sup>75</sup> In fifteenth-century terms such understanding was vital; the whole future of a realm could stand or fall by God's daily judgement. The right reading of the signs of the times was thus a matter of both duty and interest to every careful citizen. Vernacular chronicles provided a virtual textbook on how the relationships between sign and contemporary history might best be understood.

This reading of the chronicles does not explain why their methodology should so rapidly have fallen out of favour. Signs and prognostications retained their power in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thought, despite some attempts at

rationalization.<sup>76</sup> It is not entirely clear, then, why historians of the period should so ostentatiously have criticized the historical narratives constructed around natural omens. The full explanation must await examination by scholars with far greater understanding of the sixteenth century than my own;<sup>77</sup> but some possible explanations may be hypothesized, and others criticized.

The growth of humanist historiography is sometimes advanced as a cause for change in historical methods in the sixteenth century.<sup>78</sup> This theory perhaps raises more problems than it solves. Humanists, too, saw history as 'the manifestation of God's will on earth'; 'prodigies and portents' were important elements of their works, along with considerations of natural causes.<sup>79</sup> Why should they denigrate the works of fifteenth-century authors whose views on this matter agreed with their own? Furthermore, humanist history as represented by the works of Titus Livius of Forlì and Pseudo-Elmham was available to English audiences from the 1440s onwards. Why was its influence on fashionable historiography so delayed? The paucity of vernacular versions of humanist history before 1514, (when Titus Livius' biography of Henry V was translated) provides further evidence, but no explanation, of this tardy response.<sup>80</sup>

More plausible hypotheses might centre round the specific role of historiography at the court of the later Tudor monarchs. Culture at Henry VIII's court was notoriously centralized.<sup>81</sup> Polydore Vergil dedicated his *Anglica Historia* to Henry VIII, because, he claimed, his entire hope centred on the king.<sup>82</sup> Court history presumably served the purposes of kings, which were rarely furthered by encouraging freedom of thought among the populace. In this milieu, the methods of fifteenth-century vernacular chroniclers — often, apparently, city burgesses independent of court influence — were totally inappropriate. Their narratives passed unsupervised from hand to hand, endowing all who were literate in their native tongue and capable of scrutinizing the weather with the power to interpret and analyze politics. It could even be thought that portents, as the chroniclers portrayed them, might be self-fulfilling. Malcontents accustomed to reading omens might find, in the appearance of a comet or a thunderstorm, justification for their own political actions. History which laid stress on a scholarly interpretation of natural causes rather than the God-given significance of omens might seem a safer vehicle for elitist Tudor propaganda. This theory receives slight support from the fact that the two fifteenth-century vernacular chronicles which, according to Gransden, most nearly approach humanist history in their attitude towards natural causation, were produced under direct government patronage.<sup>83</sup> It may also help to explain why the interpretation of signs and wonders survived in the cultural underworld of sixteenth-century newsletters, despite its decline in court historiography.<sup>84</sup>

Again, the transformation of historiography can be seen as part of the attempt by sixteenth-century monarchs to emphasize the salutary difference between their own and preceding regimes. History under crown patronage should demonstrate the new dynasty's virtues in form as well as content. Polydore Vergil, Fox concludes, was employed by Henry VII specifically to write a new kind of history, plainly distinct from those chronicles which he carefully stigmatized as 'varii, confusi, ambigui, sine ordine'.<sup>45</sup> From the supposedly Olympian heights of Tudor humanism, historians simultaneously documented the horrors of civil war, while implicitly and explicitly denigrating the structure within which these undesirable events had originally been narrated.

These are no more than suggestions towards an explanation of the changing historiography of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England. What is clear, however, is that we need no longer accept the verdict of Tudor historians on fifteenth-century writers. Acknowledgement of the perceived role of sign and cause in the fifteenth century enables us to find in the contemporary vernacular historiography an understanding of late-medieval political and spiritual *mentalité*. The fifteenth-century chronicles, structured by an intense awareness of the relationship between heavenly signs and human events, reveal themselves as signs of their own times.

## ENDNOTES

1. A version of this paper was delivered at the Perth Medieval and Renaissance Group's symposium, 'Nature, Culture and Power in Medieval and Renaissance Europe', (10 August 1991). I am indebted to the participants for providing more helpful comments and suggestions than can be individually acknowledged.
2. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. S. B. Meech and H.E. Allen, London, Early English Text Society, original series, 212, 1940, intro., for an account of the manuscript. Two modernized editions are by W. Butler-Bowden, London, 1936, and B.A. Windeatt, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985.
3. The early issues of the Camden Society still provide the only published versions of many chronicles. *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, intr. K. Dockray, Gloucester, 1988, is a convenient reissue of three Camden Society editions — *A Chronicle of the first thirteen years of the reign of King Edward the Fourth*, by John Warkworth, orig. ed. J.O. Halliwell, 1839 (hereinafter, *Warkworth's Chronicle*), *Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, orig. ed. J.G. Nichols, 1847, and *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV*, orig. ed. J. Bruce, 1838. C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford, 1913, is still cited as a standard work. A. Gransden's monumental *Historical Writing in England II; c 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, Ithaca, New York, 1982, gives an informative account. (see esp. chs. 8 and 9).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 222 and 227-230; Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, pp. 70-110; *The Great Chronicle of London*, eds. A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, London, 1938, intro., pp. lxix-lxxiii.
6. N. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd ed., Royal Historical Society, London, 1964, listed only 54 manuscripts of any fifteenth-century historical writing definitely held in the libraries he studied. Many of these manuscripts were brief, or of very local interest. The London chronicles are represented by only one manuscript, and *The Brut (The Brut or the Chronicles of England)*, ed. Friedrich W.D. Brie, London, Early English Text Society, original series, 136, 1908, Kraus repr., New York, 1971 (part ii hereinafter *Brut*) appears in three English and one Latin versions. I have found no further examples in the *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: Supplement*, ed. A. G. Watson, London 1987.
7. *Chronicles of England, Westmynstre, 1480*, The English Experience No. 508, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum facsimile, Amsterdam, 1973, p. ii.
8. See R. Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, London, 1811 (reprint of the 1516 edition).

9. See the survey of early Tudor historiography in D. Hay's introduction to *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil A.D. 1485-1537*, Camden Society, third series, 74, London, 1950, pp. xxiii-xl.
10. 'Hearne's Fragment', ed. J.A. Giles in *The Chronicles of the White Rose*, London, 1845, p. 22.
11. *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. L. B. Campbell, Cambridge, 1938, p. 198.
12. Quoted in H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475-1557*, (Cambridge, 1969), p. 128.
13. 'A Defence of Lord Cobham against Nicholas Harpsfield', *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, 4th ed., Rev. J. Pratt London, 1887, vol. iii, pp. 373-74.
14. Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless*, London 1592, Scolar Press Facsimile, Menston, 1969, p. 18.
15. Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 454 (n. 3), 458-9, and 456.
16. In *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. J. Gairdner, London, Camden Society, new series, 28, 1880, Johnson repr. 1965, p. 80.
17. Fabyan, *New Chronicles*, p. 571; cf. MSS Julius B ii and Cleopatra C iv in C.L. Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London*, Oxford, 1905, pp. 68 and 137.
18. Fabyan, *New Chronicles*, p. 598; cf. *Brut*, pp. 435, 442 and 500, and Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London*, p. 131.
19. *Great Chronicle*, p. 177.
20. In *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, p. 44. For briefer mentions of comets, see for example MSS Julius B ii and Vitellius A xvi, in Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London*, pp. 63 and 166; and *Brut* p. 599.
21. *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI*, ed. J. S. Davies, London, Camden Society original series, 64, 1856, Johnson repr. 1968, p. 110; cf. also *William Gregory's Chronicle of London*, in *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J. Gairdner, Camden Society, new series, 17, 1876 p. 211 (hereinafter, *Gregory's Chronicle*), and *Short English Chronicle* p. 77.
22. *Brut*, pp. 557, 596 and 603.
23. *Caxton's Mirrour of the World*, ed. O. H. Prior, Early English Text Society, Extra Series cx 1913 for 1912, p. 143 (my emphasis).
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4; see also *Dives and Pauper*, ed. P. H. Barnum, vol. 1 pt i, Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society, 1976 pp. 120-122, where the author likens the relationship of the sphere of the stars and God to that between the grindstone and the smith, the axe and the carpenter, or the clock and the clockmaker.

- 25 . *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
- 26 . *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2. 'For instance, soot falling down a chimney - a sign, but hardly a cause of impending rain'.
- 27 . *Mirrou of the World*, pp. 141-2.
- 28 . *Dives and Pauper*, p. 183.
- 29 . *Mirrou of the World*, p. 142.
- 30 . Since the ninth century St. Denis had been identified with Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34; see entry under 'Denys' in D. H. Farmer, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford, 1978). He could thus be presented as living at the time of Christ's death. However neither the biblical account nor the writings of the neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius warrant the *Mirrou of the World*'s ascription of astronomical expertise to this already conglomerate character.
- 31 . *Dives and Pauper*, p. 122.
- 32 . *Dives and Pauper*, p. 147.
- 33 . *Dives and Pauper*, pp. 148-9. Dives promptly agrees that war, hunger and tempest had indeed followed the appearance of the comet, and that destruction of the king and the realm seemed likely in the near future.
- 34 . *Brut* (two versions), pp. 548-9 and 363; *Great Chronicle*, p. 85; *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, ed. J. G. Nichols, Camden Society, original series, 53, 1852, p. 10 (hereinafter *Grey Friars Chronicle*); *Gregory's Chronicle*, p. 103; MS Julius B ii, in Kingsford, *Chronicles of London*, p. 63; *Short English Chronicle*, p. 52; *An English Chronicle*, p. 23.
- 35 . *Brut*, pp. 548-9.
- 36 . *Brut*, p. 363; *Great Chronicle*, p. 85. The latter includes both battle and comet in the mayoral year 1401-1402.
- 37 . *Grey Friars Chronicle*, p. 10.
- 38 . *Gregory's Chronicle*, pp. 103-4.
- 39 . *Brut*, pp. 549 and 364.
- 40 . *John Capgrave's Abbreviacion of Chronicles*, ed. P. J. Lucas, Early English Text Society, Oxford, 1983, p. 221; note that *Dives and Pauper*, p. 147, lists as one of the common signs of God's displeasure 'meen in þe eyr armyd or fyghtyngge'
- 41 . *An English Chronicle*, pp. 71-72.
- 42 . *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 43 . *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26; quote from p. 25.

44. Note that the mid-fifteenth century English translation of the political tract 'The III Consideracions Right Necesserye to the Good Gouvernaunce of a Prince' asserts that 'greete blame and hate of God, greet synne, cursyng and malediccion' rests on any prince who lives 'upon the goodys of his pover subgites' - *Four English Political Tracts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed., Jean-Philippe Genet, Camden Society, 4th series, 18, London, 1977, p.184.
45. *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp. 22-23; see above, n. 20.
46. *Warkworth's Chronicle*, pp. 21-23.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24; the other signs included drought, pestilence, the ominous running of wells known to foretell war, and headless men crying in the air. Note the similarity between Warkworth's expressed opinion of their significance and the carefully orthodox views expressed by the author of *Dives and Pauper* (see above, nn. 28 and 33).
48. *Four Political Tracts*, pp. 196-202.
49. *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk), ed. T. Erbe, London, Early English Text Society, 1905, p. 7.
50. Meech and Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 113-4; cf. also p. 119.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 95; and see the more general interpretation of unseasonable storms in *Dives and Pauper*, (above, n. 28).
52. *Mirk's Festial*, pp. 150 and 259.
53. J. Hardyng, *The Chronicle from the Firste Begynnyng of Englande. 2 Parts*, London, 1543, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum reprints, Amsterdam 1976, fol. 200.
54. *Dives and Pauper*, pp. 183-4; 'God vsyth nouȝt þe Þondyr as an horn to blowynhisconseyl aboutyn þe world' is the author's conclusion.
55. See *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse edited from Robert Thornton's MS*, ed. G. G. Perry, London, Early English Text Society, original series 26, 1867, 2nd Kraus repr. 1981, p. 114. This list is complete except for the months of August and September, lost in a tear in the manuscript. *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle*, ed. Cameron Louis, New York and London, 1980, pp. 314-5 and 495-6 lists prognostications in Latin for thunder in the months January to July. Most vary little from the predictions in Thornton's manuscript, though June and July are distinctly different. See also Curt F. Buhler, 'Astrological Prognostications in MS. 775 of the Pierpont Morgan Library', *Modern Language Notes*, 56, 1941, pp. 351-355, for some general information on thunder-books, and a late fifteenth-century version of the significance of thunder under the signs of the zodiac.
56. Hardyng, *Chronicle*, fol. 200; see above, n. 53.
57. *Ibid.*, fols. 207-208.

58. *Gregory's Chronicle*, p. 107; cf. *An English Chronicle*, p. 39, *Grey Friars Chronicle*, p. 12, *Brut*, p. 594, *Short English Chronicle*, p. 54, Capgrave, *Abbreuiacion of Cronicles*, p. 238.
59. *Religious Pieces*, p. 114; Acles's chart similarly predicts a fruitful year, but with mortality among thieves and the population generally (*Commonplace Book*, p. 314).
60. *Grey Friars Chronicle*, p. 26; *The Great Chronicle*, p. 281.
61. Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London*, p. 216.
62. *Brut*, p. 476.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 483. An association between thunder and insurgency also occurs in John Benet's *Chronicle*, a Latin work apparently written by a secular priest; the account of the execution of Thomas Cheyne/Bluebeard is followed by the record of the 'mirabile fulmen' which set on fire the king's manor of Eltham ('John Benet's *Chronicle for the years 1400-1462*), eds., G. L. and M. A. Harriss, *Camden Miscellany*, vol. xxiv, Camden 4th series, 9, 1972, p. 197.
64. *Brut*, pp. 477-478.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 477, and *Religious Pieces*, p. 114; Acle's *Commonplace Book*, pp. 314-5 omits this detail.
66. *Brut*, pp. 477-482.
67. Cf. Gransden's account of the sources and style of the London chroniclers — *Historical Writing*, pp. 235-238.
68. *Grey Friars' Chronicle*, p. 18.
69. Kingsford, *Chronicles of London*, pp. 155-6; cf. *Great Chronicle*, p. 177 and *Gregory's Chronicle*, p. 185.
70. *Religious Pieces*, p. 114; *Commonplace Book*, p. 314.
71. *Great Chronicle*, p. 199, *Gregory's Chronicle*, p. 218, *New Chronicles*, p. 653 and Kingsford, ed., *Chronicles of London*, p. 177.
72. *Robert Bale's Chronicle*, in R. Flenley, ed., *Six Town Chronicles*, Oxford, 1911, p. 155; note that this is the same thunderstorm reported in *Benet's Chronicle* (above, n. 63), but here placed in a different context.
73. *Great Chronicle*, p. 214.
74. See above, n. 69. A version of *Brut* calls it 'A dere mariage for þe reame of Englonð' (p. 511).

75. In this sense, the function of portents in the chronicles is to construct an intelligible narrative, in the same way as (according to Gallie) explanation can function in modern historiography. See W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, London, 1964, ch. 5, esp. pp. 105 and 117. (I owe this reference to Professor Conal Condren).
76. K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 745-751.
77. See, however, D.R. Woolf, "Genre into Artifact: the Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XIX, 1988, pp. 321-354. The author argues persuasively that all types of historical chronicle (including monastic chronicles, and the later productions of Stow and Hall) declined in the later-sixteenth century, due to the rise of print culture, which made newsletters an adequate substitute for some of the functions of the chronicle, and an increasing socio-cultural stratification, which divided the erstwhile market for chronicles. However the analysis is not geared to explain the particularly savage repudiation of fifteenth-century chronicles by early sixteenth-century writers.
78. See, for instance, Gransden, *Historical Writing*, ch. 14.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 427.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-219.
81. A. Fox, *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, Oxford, 1989, ch. 1.
82. Hay, ed. *Anglica Historia*, intro, pp. xxviii-xxix.; cf. Thomas Elyot's dedication of his *Dictionary* of 1538 to Henry VIII, in which he claimed that the king was 'myn onely mayster, and styer of the shyppes of all my good fortune' — Fox, *Politics and Literature*, p. 14 (emphasis mine).
83. See Gransden's account of the *Historie of the Arrivall* and *The Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, in *Historical Writing*, pp. 261-265 and 427.
84. See the study of sixteenth-century newsletters in M. Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England, 1476-1622*, 2nd ed. London, 1966, esp. ch. 6.
85. 'Inconsistent, jumbled, untrustworthy, lacking order' — Fox, *Politics and Literature*, p. 17.