

Stretching the truth: festivity, re-enactment and creative invention

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Long before Ronnie and I met, he was known to me by repute, and not surprisingly, for besides respecting his publications I was aware that he had previously occupied the academic post I held at the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute. Times had changed and, with my appointment the post that had formerly been temporary was made permanent. But although Ronnie's tenure had been limited, his energy and innovative thinking had made their mark on both the postgraduate community at Stratford-upon-Avon and on the largely undergraduate English Department at Birmingham. He then moved to another temporary post, this time at Edinburgh, where the University, recognising their good fortune, wisely broke established custom by promoting him to a secure lectureship. After a highly successful Edinburgh career he returned to the Midlands, to live at Shakespeare's Stratford, contributing in many ways to the vibrancy of its celebrated institutions, and to play a leading role at Warwick University where he developed the Graduate School of Renaissance Studies, later the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance, an enterprise that he nurtured with imaginative scholarship and extraordinary vigour. It was after his appointment at Warwick that we first met, when, as new academic neighbour, he revisited the Shakespeare Institute to give a typically lively and well-judged paper focussed on Harold Bloom's illuminating but controversial notion of *Clinamen*, the swerve that distances a fresh successor from its parental predecessor. Thereafter our paths crossed repeatedly. During the 1980s I

organised a series of concerts that supplemented the core programme of the biennial International Shakespeare Conference by the performance of wide-ranging Shakespeare related music of a kind that opened up unfamiliar perspectives. Ronnie, a great lover of music, was a particularly appreciative and enthusiastic supporter of this festive and pleurably revealing innovation. It was just the sort of explorative endeavour that he advocated. But most of my contact with Ronnie was to be at, or under the auspices of, Warwick University. He frequently invited me to participate in seminars or symposia or academic conferences that proved to be immensely enjoyable as well as informative and immensely stimulating occasions. And I remain greatly indebted to him for the warm welcome he always provided, the open-mindedness he displayed, and the meticulous planning that preceded these collaborative, interdisciplinary, and productive gatherings. The publications they gave rise to stand as testimony to how fruitful they were, but successful publication came at a price, and that price was Ronnie's unremitting determination to drive each project forward, turning vision into splendid reality.

"Stretching the Truth" is offered as a small tribute to Ronnie. It is rooted, as was Ronnie's work, in Shakespearian drama, but its focus is on Renaissance courtly festivity, and in particular on the importance of a theatrical danced conjunction of a monarch and his future consort, the parents of Elizabeth I. That focus is, of course, one that impinges, in a modest way, on the field of study that became so important to Ronnie and to which he contributed so much. As he would have expected, my approach is interdisciplinary, with dance and opera and the life (and death) of a Tudor court musician contributing to my

argument, and involved as well is the glorious art of Veronese, so quintessentially Venetian that I am reminded of those magnificent academic conferences in Venice that Ronnie made possible. Perhaps the relationship between a play and its sources, and between a picture and the play scene it illustrates or a precursor that it imitates includes a degree of misreading or misprision that could be categorised as *Clinamen*. Above all, I hope the result is a pleasurable and engaging read. Ronnie would certainly have wanted that, but I regret that much scholarship that I wished to consult, and that ought to have been consulted, was unavailable to me. I wrote during the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020 when libraries were closed to readers.

Shakespeare and Fletcher's *King Henry VIII*, Act 1, scene 4, is set at York Place, Cardinal Wolsey's grand episcopal palace at Westminster, and purports to show the very first meeting of Henry VIII and one of Queen Katherine's ladies-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn (or Bullen). The genuine historical occasion in 1527 was a banquet attended by lords and by many fair ladies who may or may not have included Anne, and at which the king, with his courtier companions, all supposedly incognito, arrived disguised with masks and pretending to be envoys of a foreign court, yet extravagantly and fantastically dressed as idealised shepherds. In the play these masquers each choose a lady as dancing partner, Henry, of course, silently selecting the most beautiful. The compliment he immediately pays, "The fairest hand I ever touched. O beauty, / Till now I never knew thee" (I.4.75-76), uttered as an aside, instantly informs the play's audience that this courtly encounter marks the start of a new amatory relationship. But it is only after dancing and then unmasking that Henry inquires who his partner was, and is informed it was Thomas Bullen's daughter. He responds, "By heaven, she is a dainty one", and turning to Anne addresses her directly for the first time, finding in their having danced together a convenient excuse for kissing her: "Sweetheart, / I were unmannerly to take you out / And not to kiss you" (lines 95-96).

In actual fact the historical Anne's real debut in an English court entertainment was indeed at York Place, but five years earlier, on Shrove Tuesday in March 1522, when both she and Henry participated in the much more spectacular pageant of the assault on the *Château Vert* (Anglo 1997: 119-

21; Ives 1988: 47-49). However, it seems to have been another four years after that before Henry became enamoured of her, probably "sometime in 1526" (Ives 1988: 108). Yet even before she left France in late 1521, Henry was likely to have become aware of this remarkably accomplished young lady either at the Burgundian court of the Archduchess Margaret of Austria in 1513 or at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520 (*ibidem*: 31 and 40). But no doubt Shakespeare or John Fletcher (if he, as is now widely thought, was responsible for this particular scene) would have been as little "touched with the desire for [chronological] accuracy" as an unrepentant R. L. Stevenson was when, for the purpose of writing his historically inspired tale of *Kidnapped* – an enthralling read but "no furniture for the scholar's library" – he transposed the crucial and notorious Appin murder from 1752 to 1751, and gave the Jacobite soldier Alan Breck Stewart a memorable life that extends well beyond the historical sources (prefatory "Dedication" to Charles Baxter; Stevenson 2014: 3). With even more flagrant anachronicity, when Walter Scott wrote his 'romance' of *Kenilworth* he was content, despite all his wealth of antiquarian and historical knowledge, to have Amy Robsart, Robert Dudley's first wife, who had died in much publicised dubious circumstances in 1560, present at the Kenilworth Castle festivities of 1575, and content too to credit Shakespeare prematurely with a reputation not gained until much later (Trevelyan 1949: 204). With a similarly relaxed attitude, despite their co-authored play that spans the period 1520-1533 having been known originally as *All is True* and being introduced by a Prologue that almost pugnaciously emphasises a commitment to veracity, Shakespeare and Fletcher wrote for the playhouse and not the schoolroom. They deliberately avoided the unhistorical foolery of Rowley's Henry VIII play, *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1605), but strict adherence to historical record was not their prime concern. In this respect, like the dramatist John Marston in *The Malcontent* (1604), Shakespeare, Fletcher, and their like-minded theatrical colleagues "willingly erred" (see Marston's "To the Reader", line 6).

Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed

Indisputably the dramatist's principal source for the scene of Wolsey's banquet is George Cavendish's eye-witness account written many years after the event and then incorporated in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, revised edition 1587). There, however, the account is not, as one might have expected, placed chronologically in its appropriate regnal year, but made to provide instead the climax for a retrospective review of Wolsey's career that is prompted by the cardinal's death in November 1530. Consequently, to a reader of Holinshed, the unspecified date of the banquet is not evident. The account – the last and most extensive item in a string of assorted reminiscences, impressions, descriptions, anecdotes and snippets of information about the cardinal and his retainers that collectively constitute the review – is simply introduced by the deliberately imprecise phrase “On a time ...”, a conventional narrative opener or lead-in that reveals no more than that the relevant event happened during the years of Wolsey's prosperity (Holinshed 1587: 921). The purpose of this illustrative account is, therefore, not to chronicle a happening *per se*, but rather to provide a lively instance of Wolsey's former magnificence, and thus contribute to a general assessment of the man and to exemplify the splendour he enjoyed at the height of his power. This in turn means that a dramatist relying on chronicle material might well feel at liberty to regard the undated report as one that could be freely exploited in three ways. It could provide an episode in which Wolsey is shown to advantage as munificent host; it could thereby provide, for a play in which spectacle was to be specially important, a more manageable spectacle than the Shrove Tuesday pageantry of 1522; and it could with some plausibility accommodate the necessarily crucial encounter between Henry and Anne that chroniclers had, understandably enough, failed to put on record.

Neither Holinshed nor the chronicler Edward Hall, to whom Shakespeare had formerly been much indebted, make any explicit reference to Anne Boleyn prior to 1529, by which time the relationship with Henry had clearly been live for quite some while. To locate, for dramatic purposes, the origin of that relationship in one of Wolsey's banquets presented the dramatist with a choice, a

choice between Hall and Holinshed. Hall, but not Holinshed, describes the 1522 Shrove Tuesday feasting and assault on the *Château Vert* in some detail. After supper, as he reports, the company, including visiting ambassadors from the Emperor Charles V, moved to a brilliantly illuminated chamber at one end of which a turreted castle had been constructed. Eight allegorically named ladies of the court commanded this fortress – Beauty, Honour, Perseverance, Kindness, Constance, Bounty, Mercy, Pity – and although Hall does not say so, it is now known from other sources that “Perseuerance” was impersonated by Anne Boleyn. Yet even without that firm knowledge one might reasonably have suspected that Anne would have participated as one of the eight ladies. Below these desirable but unattainable ladies, and guarding them, were eight Children of the Chapel Royal, “[at]tired like to women of Inde”, so presumably in black-face or swarthy, and personating individually the repulsive force typical of Daunger, Disdain, Jealousy, Unkindness, Scorn, “Malebouche” and Strangeness (Hall 1809: 631). Seeking to release the ladies was a company of eight men of whom “the kyng was chief”, their assumed names being Amorous (i.e. Henry), Nobleness, Youth, Attendance, Loyalty, Pleasure, Gentleness and Liberty. Their assault on the castle was led by Ardent Desire, probably played, as Ives convincingly argues, by William Cornish, master of the said choristers (Ives 1988: 48–49). The physical assault, resoundingly reinforced by “a greate peale of gunnes” heard from without, was fought with “Dates, Oranges, and other fruits made for pleasure” thrown by the men, while “Rose water and Comfittes” weaponised the ladies. The choristers, armed with bows and balls, put up stout resistance before being driven out, and the no-longer-defended ladies could thereafter be gallantly captured by their courtly assailants. Then, but still disguised in their allegorically appropriate finery, the ladies and the men “daunced together verie pleasauntly ... and when thei had daunced their fill” were at last unmasked to reveal their true identities before proceeding to “a costly banquet” (i.e. to a luxurious dessert) that awaited them (Hall 1809: 631).

As a potential context for a dramatisation of Henry's first-time encounter with Anne, Hall's account presents obvious drawbacks. For that specific purpose the assault on the *Château Vert* is

an entertainment too overwhelmingly substantial and elaborate, and the 1522 date is improbably early. At that time or thereabouts the king's mistress was, in reality, the aptly cast impersonator of "Kyndnes", Anne's promiscuous elder sister Mary. The other Wolsey banquet, described, as already noted, in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, is unmentioned by Hall and offers an altogether better alternative. Once again there is a magnificent supper hosted by Wolsey at his riverside Westminster palace, and attended by lords and ladies of the court. But on this occasion the proceedings are interrupted by the thunderous sound of gunfire announcing the arrival at the water gate of Henry, masked, and with an entourage of masked companions and a retinue of attendants. This time, instead of genuine foreign envoys being entertained as observers, it is the king and his companions who pretend to be "ambassadors from some forren prince" (Holinshed 1587: 921). They process through the palace to the sound of drums and flutes "such ... as seldom had beene heard the like", and their entry into the presence chamber where, in princely state, Wolsey presided over the banquet, evidently created an impressive spectacle as two by two the fantastically clad and brilliantly illuminated visitors approached Wolsey and courteously, but speechlessly, saluted him. Gesture was all, since they pretended to have no knowledge of English. With them they bring "a great cup of gold filled with crownes and other pieces of gold" so that, with the cardinal's ready consent, they are able to engage the "most worthie" of the ladies by playing mumchance with them, a gambling game in which the masquers could, by remaining "mum", maintain their pretense of not knowing English, and the ladies, by throwing dice, could attempt to win coin from the cup (*ibidem*: 921). After mumchance with eventually all the ladies participating, some as winners, some as losers, it became Wolsey's turn to play. The remaining gold – "aboue two hundred crownes", i.e. recently minted gold coins worth in total more than £50 – was ostentatiously poured out and put at stake. Wolsey's throw of the dice proved lucky, and to general acclaim he won the entire amount, though whether by good chance or by predetermined arrangement is not made clear (*ibidem*: 922). Wolsey's tactful response was to declare a wish to surrender to one of the visitors (i.e. to Henry) his pre-eminent seat as host, since

he imagined that "there should be a nobleman amongst them, who is more meet to occupy this seat" than he himself. After confirmation that his surmise is correct, he is invited to single out that special person, giving rise to great hilarity when he mistakenly selects not the disguised king but one of the other disguised men. Again it is not entirely clear whether this is a contrived joke at his own expense or a genuine, but surely unlikely, blunder. However, whichever it was, the *faux pas* prompted Henry to unmask and speak out, true identities were joyously revealed, and while the banqueting table was being lavishly replenished, the masquers retired to change out of their masquing costumes before returning to the feast where the king *in propria persona* would occupy the chair of state respectfully vacated by Wolsey. "Thus", records Holinshed, concluding Cavendish's account, "passed they fourth the night with banketting, dansing, and other triumphs" (*ibidem*: 922).

To create the banquet scene staged in *Henry VIII*, 1.4., Fletcher simplified the unmasking by excluding the comic *faux pas* and allowing his Wolsey to make the right choice. Further necessary streamlining was achieved by excluding the disruptive change of costume, thereby enabling the dramatic action to flow more smoothly than it otherwise would. But the major alteration was the abandonment of the whole mumchance business and its replacement by dancing that unhistorically brings Henry and Anne together. The change is crucial, and to appreciate the full impact of this unchronicled interpolation play-readers need to remember that in theatrical performance the economical stage direction "*Music. Dance*" (line 76) expands into a significant and extended display exhibiting dance steps that require exemplary virtuosity of the kind expected of the most accomplished courtiers. Modern editions of the playtext that tag this stage direction onto the end of a verse line, where it is further subordinated by being justified to the right, and when it would have been preferable for it to have been set, as it is in the First Folio, as an independent line of print and centred, give a misleadingly weak and marginalised impression of the importance and length of the action alluded to. The mating dance of Anne and Henry is, surely, a spectacular courtship display that needs to be staged with ample regard to its significance¹. According to the Holinshed account the masquers

beg leave to view the “incomparable beautie” of the ladies “as for to accompanie them at mumchance, and then to danse with them” (*ibidem*: 921). Fletcher’s use of dance may have been prompted by this ultimate intention, for while in Holinshed interest is focussed almost entirely on mumchance, and dancing is barely mentioned at all, Fletcher ignored mumchance and made dance of crucial importance in his dramatised scene that so innovatively introduces Anne Boleyn.

In effect, while the earlier part of the scene follows Holinshed closely, the latter part of it, as it diverges from that narrative, seems more consonant with Hall’s *Château Vert* account. There dancing immediately follows the successful storming of the castle, and it is dancing in costume, as in Fletcher’s scene. Furthermore, as we now know, Anne as well as Henry, was among the dancers. Unmasking and the revealing of identities, as in Fletcher, immediately follow the dancing, and the participants in both cases then return to another room (Fletcher’s “in the next chamber”, line 102) to resume the interrupted banquet. Within this

general similarity one small but striking detail is Hall’s observation that Henry and the other assailants “toke the ladies of honor as prisoners *by the hands*” (Hall 1809: 631, *italics added*) as they led them from the castle walls down to the dance floor. Fletcher’s Henry similarly takes Anne’s hand in order to claim her as his dancing partner, and relishes as he does so “The fairest hand I ever touched” (line 75). It is not so much this physical contact in itself that is remarkable but the fact that attention is drawn to it verbally by the artifice of an aside. Although it is not recorded as such by recent editors, Henry’s appreciative exclamation has to be understood as an aside because as long as he remains masked Henry keeps up the pretence that he and his companions “speak no English” (line 65). When the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works* editors intrusively assert that his words are addressed “to Anne” they are entirely mistaken, and have failed to visualise the staging required by Fletcher’s text.



Fig. 1. Thomas Stothard, *King Henry the Eighth*, Act I, Scene IV, engraved by Isaac Taylor, 1798 (Boston Public Library, Boston, MA).

The role of the dramatist adjusting, adapting, developing and inventively supplementing his source material may be distantly replicated by imaginative responses to his work when it in turn becomes material for fresh production. A case in point is the artist Thomas Stothard's response to *Henry VIII*, 1.4. Henry's "I were unmannerly to take you out [i.e. to choose you as dancing partner] / and not to kiss you" (lines 95-96), addressed to Anne after learning her identity, was the text that accompanied his *scène galante* commissioned by the London printseller John Boydell for his Pall Mall Shakespeare Gallery, and exhibited there in the 1790s². Although the painting itself is lost, widely dispersed prints of Isaac Taylor's 1798 engraving of it, also commissioned by Boydell, have survived the depredations of time's injurious hand.



Fig. 2. Paolo Veronese, *Mars and Venus United by Love*, 1570-80, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The nature of the commission means that while Stothard was illustrating a dramatic scene he was also participating in Boydell's ambitious attempt to create a cultural fusion that united the sister arts of painting and poesy and to which historical subject matter, Shakespearian drama and the

recognition of Old Master achievement all contributed. The subject of Stothard's picture, then, is *Henry VIII*, 1.4, but the underlying compositional model is Paolo Veronese's *Mars and Venus United by Love* (Metropolitan Museum, New York), a canvas brought to London in the early 1790s by its French emigré owner François de Laborde-Méréville. Its depiction of a nude Venus clasped in an embrace with an armour-clad Mars turns Ovidian narrative into an exuberant *concordia discors* allegory that Stothard was to rework as a representation of Anne and Henry, with some of the grandeur of Veronese's vastly more magnificently realised conception ennobling the drama of their encounter.

The impressive figure of Henry with powerful, gartered left leg and gorgeously feathered hat, is, however, obviously derived from the famous portrait by Holbein, as had been Reynolds's fancy-dress portrait of Master Crewe as a pint-sized Henry VIII, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776; but Stothard gives the royal lover a softer face, modifying the mean, piggy eyes and tight lips that Holbein had depicted. Gone too is the hugely assertive codpiece that occupies the central position in the prototype, replaced significantly enough, but more delicately, by the linked hands of the pair whose love affair was now initiated. It is noteworthy, though, that Holbein's sexually emphatic central position has been retained as Stothard's erotically crucial central position, even though Stothard's picture is in other respects organised entirely differently from Holbein's. Furthermore, Stothard's portrayal of the king and his future consort, although it aligns them with the opulent magnificence of Veronese's allegorically treated Mars and Venus, also recalls in contrasting mode a satirical print by Hogarth, *Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn* (c. 1728-1729), that responded to Colley Cibber's 1727 staging of the play by suggesting a parallel between the fall of Wolsey, seen as a consequence of the liaison between Henry and Anne, and the fall of Walpole that some hoped would follow the accession of George II (Bindman 1997: 154-55). Hogarth's grouping of Anne's attendant pageboy, Anne herself, with her hand held by Henry, and Wolsey to one side of them seems to have influenced Stothard, but Henry and Anne are not centrally placed by Hogarth³. Conspicuous in the background, it is a regal Queen Katherine who occupies that position,

and who, like Wolsey and like Anne's former suitor Lord Percy, with whom Katherine converses, is to be a casualty of her husband's new infatuation. Unlike Henry, Stothard's Anne – the Venus of this Veronese-derived composition – is portrayed in a manner utterly unlike anyone, male or female, in any of Holbein's portraits. There is no similarly full-length iconic portrait of Anne that Stothard could have taken as his model. He was thus free – or obliged – to imagine her as he wished. So, in a presentation of her that entirely ignores the unbecoming personal features maliciously reported in Elizabethan times by the recusant exile Nicholas Sander, she appears almost as a pretty Hogarthian coquette responding to a seducer. The style of clothing now usually associated with her – a bodice with distinctive square-cut neckline worn with a close fitting French cap, or alternatively an angular gable hood – is not reflected in Stothard's representation that contrasts the costuming of his two principal figures, and that distantly echoes Veronese's bold juxtaposition of a voluptuously naked Venus and an armour-clad Mars. But whether Anne responds coquettishly or demurely to the king's advances is a moot point. In the play, she gives no spoken answer to him. Indeed, the only time she speaks in that particular scene is prior to Henry's arrival. But her social assurance has already been established by her confident banter with Lord Sands, and this is not the first time in the carefully crafted scene that she accepts a kiss. As in real life, "there was nobody" at the English court, as Eric Ives remarks, "with a tittle of the continental polish of Anne Boleyn" (Ives 1988: 57). Eighteenth-century readers like Stothard were similarly informed by Oliver Goldsmith that "The beauty of Anne surpassed whatever had hitherto appeared at this voluptuous court; and her education, which had been at Paris, tended to set off her personal charms ... while her wit and vivacity exceeded even her other allurements" (Goldsmith 1771: vol. 2, 353). The shimmering silk and the bows of her dress are lavish, and it is reported that Stothard, who had served a seven-year apprenticeship as a draughtsman of patterns for silk brocade and who delighted in shot silk (Bray 1851: 7 and 34; Coxhead 1906: 4-5), borrowed, for the now lost painting, the colouring of Rubens to enhance the beauty of Anne's dress (Pape and Burwick 1996: 367).

On the floor lie the discarded shepherd's crook and

mask relinquished by Henry, but, foregrounded as they are, they seem to have symbolic significance in the picture beyond their narrative justification, with our attention drawn to them by the child who eyes them so meaningfully. Are they on the ground because they have simply been dropped there, or is their "fall" (hinting at the successive falls of Buckingham, of Queen Katherine, of Wolsey, and eventually, though beyond the limits of the play, of Anne Boleyn), more metaphorical than that; and does the abandoned crook represent the abandonment of pastoral innocence? The disregarded child, a Cupid-like infant absorbed in a play-world of his own, may himself symbolize innocence not yet lost. He holds in his hand a rose (the flower associated with Venus) which he seems about to drop, like the rose that already lies on the floor by the handle of the crook. Are these further indications that the beautiful Anne Boleyn has now effectively been plucked, with the roses symbolising transient feminine beauty and feminine frailty? Certainly a process has begun that will lead to Queen Katherine's woeful rejection, and eventually to the execution of Anne herself and of those accused of adulterously and even treasonably enjoying her favours. But besides the intimation that a fall from innocence is involved, we may also observe that Henry has "fallen" in love. Prefigured also, though beyond the compass of the play, is the fall, as will be seen, of a young musician "trying to compete above his station", as Eric Ives has it (1988: 368), and fatally caught up in machinations that would ruthlessly destroy him. He too has fallen in love.

The foregrounded playful child has no precursor in either the dramatic scene being illustrated or in its historical sources, and there is absolutely no reason to think that Henry's pastoral masquing companions could have included shepherd lads of very tender years, or that the child is mature enough to serve as Anne's page, even supposing that Anne merited the services of a page. The child is Stothard's addition, and introduces an allegorical mode that can seem strangely out of place in a picture that purports to represent an imaginatively reconstructed historical event. To understand his presence it is necessary to refer to Veronese's allegory where a winged Cupid, the child's compositional precursor, ties the ribbon that symbolically unites Mars and Venus. Veronese's design moreover includes a pair of

cupids: this one, facing towards the viewer, and on the left of the picture; the other one, with his back to the viewer, and placed on the right, and becoming, in Stothard's adaptation of the design, Wolsey's pageboy, or possibly a rather diminutive gentleman usher. However, there is no textual warrant for either figure, and their presence in Stothard's picture is purely to fulfil the pattern established by Veronese.

To one side of the central couple are courtly revellers, with a bevy of fair ladies emphasising the glittering nature of this social occasion, though Stothard makes no attempt to depict Henry's entourage of male companions or individually to identify named male guests and functionaries. By courtly convention, it is the presence of the ladies that makes "this heaven of beauty" (line 59) the avowed destination of Henry and his companions. On the other side of the picture is a watchful Cardinal Wolsey, corpulent, worldly, and fleshly despite his ecclesiastical dress of scarlet cassock, mozzetta and biretta, and lace trimmed white rochet. Positioned like Mars's tethered horse in Veronese's picture, and accompanied by the Veronese-derived pageboy, he waits, monitoring the encounter, and is just about to propose withdrawing to the banquet in the privy chamber, where Henry will escort the new conquest. Stothard's Wolsey shows no sign of realising that the relationship he observes will imperil his own future, and in this respect is markedly different from Hogarth's scowling and gloomily introspective Wolsey-Walpole who evidently foresees that misfortunes must now engulf him. But while Stothard's pictured dramatis personae are ignorant of what the future holds in store for them, the viewers of the picture have the historically informed knowledge supplied by hindsight that makes possible dramatic irony. It is impossible to see Wolsey observing this fateful meeting without reflecting on how Wolsey's power and prosperity will decline as Anne's influence increases, his conflict with "A knight's daughter ... A spleeny Lutheran" (3.2.94-99) eventually precipitating his fall from favour. Thus the dance that brings Henry and Anne together also initiates a reversal of the cardinal's fortunes. Fletcher too introduces in the final exchanges of the scene ambiguities that look to the future. Wolsey's "Your grace, / I fear, with dancing is a little heated", an observation that prompts Henry's "I fear too much" (lines 99-101), says more than it speaks, its discreet

meiosis bordering on prescience; but drenched with dramatic irony is Henry's "Sweet partner, / I must not yet forsake you" (lines 103-4) addressed benignly enough to Anne. For although spoken as polite gallantry, an infatuation that will extend beyond the immediate occasion is also implied, and, reaching still further into the future, with macabre prolepsis the ominous words 'not yet' and 'forsake' chillingly foreshadow Henry's eventual abandonment of his one-time "Sweet partner".

In a minstrels' gallery above the revellers are performers who have provided dance music and fanfares. One of these musicians, a handsome young man, who distinctively looks down at Anne, seems to be Stothard's portrayal of the non-Shakespearean, non-Fletcherian but real life Mark Smeton (or Smeaton), like the king, encountering Anne for the first time perhaps, and similarly smitten by her.



Fig. 3. Musicians at York Place. Detail enlarged from Isaac Taylor's engraving.

Currently employed in the cardinal's household, he was later to become one of Anne's musicians, and to confess to Thomas Cromwell, probably under torture or through trickery, to having "known the Queen Carnally Three times". But although he publicly acknowledged guilt from the scaffold, "Masters, I pray you all pray for me for I have deserved death", there is more than one way of interpreting this expression of remorse, and, as Bishop Burnet pointed out in a scrupulous and influential account of Anne's prosecution and wrongful conviction, he was never made to

confront Anne with the outrageous confession that had instantly sealed his own fate (1689: 202). Eighteenth-century histories that were readily available to Stothard were heavily dependent on Burnet's work, David Hume, for instance, recording that

Smeton was prevailed on, by the vain hope of life, to confess a criminal correspondence with the Queen; but even her enemies expected little advantage from this confession: For they never dared to confront him with her; and he was immediately executed (1759: 1.206).

Tobias Smollett similarly notes that Smeton "was supposed to have been inveigled into this confession with a promise of pardon" and deduces that "Smeton, in all probability ... had bore false witness" (Smollett 1759: vol. 6, 37). What emerges is that Mark Smeton was the only one of the five men convicted of adultery with Anne who pleaded guilty, yet he seems to have been a devoted, possibly lovelorn admirer of the queen he served. On one occasion, though, he had presumed to take a step beyond what was fitting for a mere employee in a royal household. According to Anne, Mark "was never in her Chamber, but when the King was last at *Winchester*; and then he came in to play on the Virginals." After that, so she claimed, the only time she spoke to him was

on Saturday before *May* day, when she saw him standing in the Window, and then she asked him, why he was so sad; he said, it was no matter: she answered, you may not look to have me speak to you, as if you were a Nobleman, since you are an inferior person. No, no, Madam, said he, a Look sufficeth me (Burnet 1689: 199).

The incident is recounted by Goldsmith (1771: vol. 2, 380), by Hume (1759: 204), by Paul Rapin (1759: vol. 6, 418) and by others.

The identification of Smeton, if he it is, as one of the musicians in Stothard's picture appears to be confirmed by the close interest in the encounter between Anne and Henry that he is shown to take, and because, as the only background figure to be given full-face treatment, identification seems to be intended. His facial features reveal him, much as he is imagined in Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall*, as a "gapey-faced", "goggle-eyed lover" surreptitiously observing from his servants' vantage point the doings of courtly high society (2009: 345, 506, 598). Stothard draws extra attention to him by means of the light reflected

from the curve of the vault that springs behind his head, but the position that he occupies in the composition derived from Veronese also makes him an interesting successor to Veronese's background figure of a sculpted satyr, a satyr that like Stothard's musician looks down at the figures below, eying them with a statue's unremitting gaze. The chimerical, hybrid form of a satyr along with the statuesque combination of an animate bodily shape and inert stone material sculpted into that shape provide a suggestive parallel with Smeton's disparate combination of narrative importance and social inferiority. Eric Ives, describing him as *declassé*, sees Smeton as a man who "belonged nowhere" in the social hierarchy, neither one thing nor the other (Ives 1988: 367). Above the equally ambiguous figure of the sculpted satyr the leafy canopy of a tree presents a feature that Stothard will develop into the canopy of the chair of state that Wolsey surrenders to Henry (1.4. 77-84), and that here pointedly directs attention to Smeton. Somewhat at odds with authentic sixteenth-century musical practice, Stothard's Smeton is shown playing a horn, of which we glimpse only the mouthpiece and the crook – the tubing that connects the mouthpiece to the main body of the instrument. This constitutes perhaps the strongest evidence that the performer is indeed Mark Smeton, for the musically surprising choice of instrument seems to allude with intrusive dramatic irony to Mark's reckless cuckolding - cornuting - of Henry that would have occurred had Anne really been guilty of the charges brought against her, incredible charges which Henry deludedly chose to believe. Because the instrument is largely hidden from us, a clandestine affair or a future yet to be revealed or even an accusation of dubious veracity seems to be implied. The careful alignment of the concealed bell of the instrument directly above Henry's head adds a deliberate finesse that recalls similarly contrived cornutings in pictures such as Hogarth's "Evening" (*Four Times of the Day*) where the horns of a cow famously cornute Hogarth's cuckolded dyer by being exactly positioned above the wretched man's bared head (Shesgreen 1973: xxiii and plate 44). Such allusions could be made not only verbally and pictorially but also musically by means of the French horn (*cornò*), as they are in the orchestration of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786); threateningly as in Figaro's Act I cavatina *Se vuol ballare*, and tormentingly as at

the end of Figaro's final Act IV aria *Aprite un po' quegli occhi*. Similarly, in *Così fan tutte* (1790), the words *sempre ascoso* ("for ever hidden") in Fiordiligi's Act II aria *Per pietà* are supplied with a snidely revealing gloss by the orchestra's French horns⁴. The performer alongside Stothard's horn player is, as Anne is said to have been (Ives 1988: 37), a lutenist, his head obscured by the canopy of Wolsey's chair in a manner that may allude to Anne's fate of decapitation or to the report of Smeton's alleged torture by means of a knotted cord tightened around his eyes (Ives 1988:369). Rather as the dramatist, with some slight stretching of the truth, had manipulated the historical record by inserting an imaginary and fateful first encounter of Henry and Anne into the established framework of an otherwise straightforwardly re-enacted York Place festivity, so, in turn, for the purpose of creating an engaging history painting that offers more to the viewer than servile illustration of a received text, Stothard has added his own distinctively new component. As textual illustration the inclusion of a group of musicians makes suitably visual the sound of festive music at York Place, but the identification of one of these musicians as Mark Smeton goes beyond that conventional objective, and enables Stothard to insert a subplot of his own devising, one that counterpoints Henry's experience with that of a minor, background figure, and that brings significant narrative enrichment to the picture. But because this is done without the least suggestion of any encouragement from the playtext, and because the addition is presented anyway as subsidiary graphic detail, its sharp relevance and its slyly transgressive dramatic irony are easily overlooked. And by being merely suggestive and unassertive it avoids provoking the wrath of Professor Dryasdust who regularly deplores such fanciful assaults upon either historical veracity or the integrity of a canonical text. But by the end of the eighteenth century the time was ripe for Mark Smeton to move from the shadows of historical marginality into greater prominence. Three decades later, given a contralto role in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* (1830), he was to be memorably put on stage, his well-intentioned ineptitude making him pivotal to the plot of Felice Romani's tragic libretto.

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Notes

1 Alan Brissenden (2001: 104 and 135) suggests that a stately pavan followed by a nimble galliard, or else a lively coranto, or possibly an even more energetic volta would be appropriate.

2 A two-volume *Collection of Prints, from Pictures Painted for the Purpose of Illustrating the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare, by the Artists of Great-Britain*, was published by John and Josiah Boydell in 1803. This collection of 100 prints is reproduced in *The Boydell Shakespeare Prints*, with an introduction by A. E. Santaniello (1979). Fourteen essays, many illustrations, a *catalogue raisonné* of the prints and much other information is gathered in Walter Pape and Frederick Burwick's *The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery* (1997).

3 Hogarth's representation of Anne, Henry and Wolsey may be indebted to images of Henry II holding by the hand his mistress Fair Rosamond, and of the kind reproduced by Sheila O'Connell (1999: 20), but such woodcuts could just as easily be taken to depict Henry VIII as to depict Henry II.

4 To confirm the point, both graphically in the score and expressively in performance, the horn-like tips of a crescent-shaped *fermata* sign are then poised mid-word over the central syllable of *ascoso*.

