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Alison Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975). 230 pp.

Alison Hanham's *Richard III and his Early Historians* will interest the many persons, lay and scholarly, who continue to be fascinated by the life and times of England's last Plantagenet king. It is not only Richard himself who generates interest ; it is as much the manner by which his actions have for centuries been mediated in chronicles, histories, plays, historical novels, and even detective stories, that exerts a pull on our imagination. Shakespeare naturally first comes to mind, but his portrait of Richard could not have taken the form it did without a tradition of Latin and English prose history which came to a climax in the two compositions, one English, one Latin, of Thomas More. More, quite properly, is central to Hanham's concerns, and her reading of his *History/Historia* provides her book with its most satisfactory chapter. But leading up to More are the others : the Italians Mancini and Polydore Vergil, the Crowland (Croyland) Chroniclers, John Rous, or Ross, the Warwickshire antiquarian, together with several minor writers, all of whom contributed some detail to the Richard III tradition. As one might expect, some of the evidence presented by these disparate pens is confusing, contradictory, obviously scurrilous, or clearly wrong. Of more interest than the differences, however, are the similarities, the general agreement on the main outline of events and deeds from 1483 to 1485. As Hanham convincingly argues, the traditional view of Richard is not, as the pro-Ricardians would have it, a creation of Tudor propagandists or, more to the point, something which sprung full-grown from the fertile imagination of Thomas More. Much of the anti-Ricardian information comes from the pre-Tudor account of Mancini, whose MS. is dated December 1, 1483. Even a Tudor historian like Polydore Vergil cannot, Hanham asserts, be dismissed as a mere party hack. In short, the view that "Richard was an excellent king and a beloved man in his lifetime and the malevolence of Tudor historians utterly falsified his reputation" (p. 126) has no basis in the evidence we have.

None of this, of course, should be interpreted to mean that the jury is out on Richard III. One thrust of Hanham's study is to demonstrate how difficult, if not impossible, it is for us to get at the real facts of the case. Her first chapter, setting out the known events of Richard's usurpation and reign, nicely illustrates the frustration of knowing deeds without knowing the motives behind them. At every turn, Richad acts (or re-acts) in a manner that can certainly be fit into a pattern. But which pattern : the bloodthirsty usurper whose ambition is his only rule, or the prudent, talented politician forced by circumstance to climb higher and faster than he had anticipated or desired? The record as we have it leaves many questions unanswered, and the hard evidence is indeed scarce. We have, for example, only two private letters that throw any light on Richard's usurpation. With so little else available. the account of a fifteenth-century tavern quarrel becomes precious and, though difficult to interpret, must serve as evidence.

The difficulty in assessing scanty evidence now nearly 500 years old might profitably be weighed against the problems involved in coming to terms even with contemporary events. A parallel, which has in fact often been made in malice, might be drawn between the notorious Duke of Gloucester and the 37th American president, Richard M. Nixon. Indeed, the fortuity of Nixon's Christian name has not only encouraged comparison with Richard III but also with that very different Shakespearean monarch, Richard II, which might suggest that Nixon's enemies were not of one mind as to which of his negative traits deserved the greatest emphasis. But whether one finds such comparisons just or unjust, my point here is to emphasize the extent to which historical evidence, even when plentiful, can be open to widely divergent interpretations. Compared to Richard of Gloucester, the career of Richard Nixon is an open book -- indeed a hundred open books. We have far more information concerning the two terms of Nixon's presidency than we have for the combined reigns of all the Plantagenet kings. Nixon himself is alive and preparing his memoirs in exile. And yet who can say that the final word is in

or will ever be in on this ambiguous figure? For most Americans, Nixon is simply a failed president whose love of power got the better of him. For many, he is a cunning, ruthless, totally amoral politician who lied, cheated, and clawed his way to the top of the heap and then, unable to control his excessive hubris, plummeted down again. But for a good number of men and women, Nixon was and remains a wise statesman, a firm leader, an espouser of conservative values -- home, flag, God -- who was betrayed by his friends and associates and harried from office by a combination of a vengeful press and the long-simmering hatred of his political enemies. No doubt some such variety of views obtained during and after the brief reign of Richard III. Had King Richard lived to write his memoirs, we would certainly have a more positive view of his life and reign. We might even have a first-hand account of his various crises : "The Truth about the Princes in the Tower," "Betrayed by Buckingham," "Friends in Need : Radcliff, Lovell, and Catesby," and so forth. Ironically, many of the major actors in the Nixon drama have expressed the vain hope that something called "History" would eventually clarify matters and justify this or that position. History, of course, is no such monolith. What we have in the case of Richard III are histories, literally in the sense of individual writings (Mancini, Vergil, More, etc.) and figuratively in the broad sense of pro-Richard history, anti-Richard history, and histories that at least attempt a dispassionate presentation of Richard's career.

In the face of such difficulties, a historian does well to remain skeptical of all accounts of Richard III's reign. Hanham however, seems excessively cautious when it comes to evaluating Thomas More's *History*, a skepticism perhaps partially based on a misapprehension of what More was doing. She calls More's work "the least authentic of the early accounts of Richard" (p. 189), a contention she doesn't really demonstrate. It seems to be based at least to some degree on the assumption that because More exhibits great narrative skills, because the *History* is undeniably a work of literature, its historical accuracy is therefore suspect. But this, I think, is to create a false dichotomy. However

much we may recognize the *Richard* as a work of art, More himself undoubtedly thought he was writing history, at least as he and his contemporaries understood that discipline. It does More less than justice to take his work away from the historians and turn it over exclusively to the literary critics. By doing so, we fall into the Tyndalian trap of denying More's veracity because, after all, he is a "poet." I find it particularly difficult to see how *Richard III* can be characterized as an ironic comment on "the whole craft of history" (p. 155), or how it can be asserted that "The authenticity of More's material was of minor importance to him" (p. 155). Certainly, More does invent speeches to put into the mouths of his characters, he recounts details of dubious historical value, and he probably re-arranges facts to fit his organizational scheme. But, as Hanham herself demonstrates, the other early historians indulged in the same or similar distortions. There can be little doubt that More had access to authentic (even if highly colored) information, although Hanham does doubt it. She even rejects the possibility that More could have learned anything from Cardinal Morton, in whose household More served as a boy, on the grounds that Morton would have been unlikely to discuss "events in which he had played an inglorious role" (p. 162). This, it seems to me, shows a rather narrow view of human nature : whatever we may think of Morton's activities, they certainly would not have appeared inglorious to him. Of course, Morton's views may have been very far from objective, but that is a matter of more concern to a twentieth than to a sixteenth-century historian.

Hanham's denigration of More as historian does not, however, take away from her generally sensitive discussion of his literary virtues in the *Richard.* Although she takes the, to me, unlikely view that More's original intention was to end the work with Richard's coronation (where the 1565 Latin version stops) and that this scheme forms a more satisfactory work, her division of the *History* into five acts has the virtue of emphasizing the dramatic structure of More's work. Her observations complement A.N. Kincaid's "The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*" (*SEL,* XII, 1972). She rightly

stresses More's ability to translate "an abstract into concrete terms" (p. 161), as in the vivid description of Queen Elizabeth's preparation to enter sanctuary. Particularly valuable is her discussion of those portions of the narrative -- the "debate" on sanctuary, the long description of Elizabeth (alias Jane) Shore -- that at first reading seem to unbalance the story. The analysis of "mistress Shore's" role in the drama is quite sensitive. More is shown weighing the vital and human sinfulness of King Edward's favorite mistress against Richard's inhuman and puritanical hypocrisy. A propos of this, she quotes from More's *Four Last Things* when he speaks of changing "those spiritual vices of pride, wrath, and envy for the beastly carnal sins of gluttony, sloth, and lechery." What Hanham fails to notice is that if we assume More intended to carry the narrative at least to Bosworth, as the longer versions of the text would indicate, More's Renaissance dramatic structure becomes embedded in a Medieval drama of Fortune's wheel. Richard's fall, in any case, seems essential to any version of the story ; without it, his reign would lack not only historical but moral and poetic completeness as well.

Hanham's literary theories carry over, I think detrimentally, into her discussion of the text of the *History of King Richard III* in a twenty-page appendix. The textual problems of More's work are undoubtedly complex and do not admit of easy solutions. In the Yale edition, R.S. Sylvester set out in great detail a theory of composition and textual transmission that Hanham is at great pains to reject. Briefly stated and simplified, Sylvester's argument takes Rastell's 1557 text of the English version to be closer to More's original intentions than the texts printed in Hardyng's *Chronicle* (1543) and Halle's *Chronicle* (1548), which represent a corrupted version of the work More composed c. 1513. The Latin version which, Sylvester theorizes, was probably composed at the same time as the English (hence neither is properly a translation of the other), is represented by MS Arundel 43, a revision, probably, of More's original Latin draft. Further revised, this text then forms the basis for the first printed Latin edition (Louvain, 1565). Complicating this picture is that none of the

extant versions seems to be complete – the Latin text ends with Richard's coronation, the English with the beginnings of the Morton/Buckingham conspiracy – and the texts printed by Richard Grafton in the Hardyng/Halle chronicles not only differ in relatively minor ways, but also agree in differing in more significant ways from Rastell's edition, particularly in the arrangement of material. Regardless of these complexities, Sylvester's evaluation convincingly accounts for the less than satisfactory textual evidence we have.

But Hanham, for reasons that have already been implicit in her discussion of the *History* as literature, launches an attack on Sylvester's findings. She begins by rejecting the theory of simultaneous composition as not "compelling" primarily because, as Sylvester had already noted, such a method is otherwise unheard of. In fact, however, the theory of dual composition is the one that best fits what we know about both texts ; that this approach is not known to have been used by others is certainly no argument against More having employed it. Surprisingly, Hanham terms the whole question of whether the Latin came before the English, or vice-versa, as a "sterile debate," and then adds to this supposed sterility by vainly trying to prove that the Latin is a "literal translation" of the English (p. 200). But the problem is in any case hardly sterile : on its resolution depends important questions of tone, of authorship, of purpose, as well as considerations of historical accuracy. We may never know the truth of the matter, but intelligent speculation has its value.

Hanham's major departure from Sylvester's textual analysis, however, lies in her giving primacy to the text of the English *Richard* found in the Hardyng/Halle chronicles. In her opinion, this text represents More's later revision of the one printed by Rastell. Her theory, needless to say, necessitates turning Sylvester's "corruptions" into authorial improvements: "The bulk of the alterations [i.e., the difference between Rastell and the Hardyng/Halle text], in my opinion, are therefore the emendations of a style-conscious author going over earlier work and striving for greater clarity and more elegant phrasing" (p. 213). When the

changes do not seem to be in the direction of greater elegance, Hanham posits the convenient supposition that More "now had in mind a wider and less sophisticated readership than his private circle" (p. 213, n. 1). It would take both more space and more expertise than I can claim to demonstrate all of the fallacies in Hanham's argument ; the reader is urged simply to compare her discussion with Sylvester's. A brief look at her stylistic evidence, which is ultimately her only evidence, might however be profitable. She compares several passages from the two versions in order to prove that the Hardyng/Halle text is "better" than, and therefore an authorial revision of, the Rastell text. The first example, one of the "clearest", comes from the early description of Richard. Rastell reads "hard favoured of visage, and suche as is in states called warlye, in other menne otherwise;" Hardyng/Halle have "hard favoured of visage, suche as in estates is called a warlike visage, and emong commen persones a crabbed face." "It seems small compliment to More to suppose that another man had to make this excellent amendment to the flat 'in other menne otherwise'," Hanham comments (p. 213). Now whether a reader prefers one reading to the other may be a matter of taste, but I would suggest that the irony of "otherwise," which leaves the matter of how else Richard's face might be described open, is both more effective and more characteristic of the work's overall ironic tone than "a crabbed face," which considerably limits the possibilities. What we have here, it seems to me, is not an author revising his own text, but an editor trying to clarify something that doesn't need clarification. Nor is her next example any more determining. Rastell has "For men use, if they have an evil turne, to write it in marble, and whoso doth us a good tourne, we write it in duste' (p. 57), whereas Hardyng/Halle reads "For [men] use to wryte an evil turne in marble stone, but a good turne they wryte in the dust." It may be true that, as Hanham says, the second version is more epigrammatic than the first, but that does not necessarily make it either better or characteristic of authorial revision. Her other examples, too lengthy to cite, similarily leave the matter at best "not proven."

Ultimately, Hanham's discussion of the text demonstrates the fallacy of beginning with a literary theory and trying to make the textual evidence fit the theory. Her preference for the Harding/Halle text grows out of her five-act division of More's "satirical drama" : she finds the arrangement of events in this version better supports her literary analysis than does the Rastell arrangement. Surely, this is putting the cart before the horse. Her discussion of the *History's* literary qualities does not, in any case, depend on choosing one text over another, or in fathoming Thomas More's real intentions, something we can never know. The dramatic nature of More's approach to historical writing remains no matter what version one chooses, and regardless of whether one sees in the *History* a five-act structure or not. Of greater importance is to recognize, as Hanham does, More's skill at scenic construction and his ability to bring his historical characters to full, dramatic life.

University of North Dakota Michael A. Anderegg

JUDGE JOHN MORE IN AUSTRALIA

John Hamilton Smith, S.J., writes from St. Thomas More College, Crawley, Western Australia :

By a coincidence, at just about the time that I saw the cover of No. 49 which featured Judge John More, I received a framed etching 21cm x 27cm of "JUDGE MORE, St. THO. MORE'S FATHER" which had been discovered in a second-hand shop here in Perth and had been presented to me by a French friend. It is just the head and shoulders. It seems to have been taken from the Holbein pen-and-ink drawing except for the clothing around the neck which in my drawing looks more like fur. It now rests next to Holbein's "Tho. Moor. Ld. Chancellour" in my study... the son looking at his father.