Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

J.R. Lander. *Crown and Nobility 1450-1509*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976. Pp. x, 340. \$23.50.

Crown and Nobility 1450-1509 is in substance ten collected papers first published by Professor Lander between 1956 and 1973 and reprinted here in their original form. They are prefaced by a long new essay setting his own work over this period in the context of what he considers to have been most significant among the many other reappraisals of aspects of the age of the Wars of the Roses which have undoubtedly been a notable feature of English historical studies since the second world war. The volume thus presents a wholesale slaughter of sacred cows of an earlier generation: the existence of any Yorkist party in the fourteen fifties, the king-making of Warwick, the political influence of the Wydeville tribe, the cruelty of Edward IV contrasted with the calculated mercy of Henry VII, the destruction of the ancient peerage by the wars, the uniqueness of the political and social disorders of the age, the unmitigated evils of "bastard feudalism," etc. Inevitably there is a sense of *déjà vu*; indeed much of Lander's work has already been absorbed into a new orthodoxy which now rejects the traditional cardinal date of 1485 as the threshold of modern history and begins text-books and general surveys at 1450. But the exercise is made very well worth while because an important overall theme which has not hitherto been convincingly expounded binds the collection together: the mutual dependence of Crown and nobility in what has traditionally been considered the most turbulent and irresponsible period in the history of the English aristocracy. In the words of Bishop Russell's sermon prepared for the opening of parliament in 1483 "the politic rule of every region well ordained standeth in the nobles." These kings may have sought to control the nobility, but never to destroy them. Eighty four per cent of peerage attainders during the period were reversed and sixty eight new peerages created between 1439 and 1509. Lander in addition now shows how the nobility for their part were extraordinarily loyal to Henry VI and generally indifferent to his successors, or at least avoided deep commitment to them. After reading this book it is impossible to sustain belief that the Wars of the Roses were caused by the senseless turbulence of the English aristocracy.

Apart from the new introductory essay entitled "Aspects of Fifteenth-century Studies" which will provide a very useful historical revision for undergraduates and their tutors the most valuable of the reprinted essays are chapters 5, 7 and 8 in

which Lander between 1958 and 1961 first revealed the true significance of the numerous attainders and forfeitures of the period, identified the personnel and role of the Yorkist Council which previously had been thought hardly to have existed at all and demonstrated the marked continuity of personnel from the Lancastrian Council right through to the early-Tudor Council. Still as valuable as when it first appeared in 1963 is his study of the kindred and affinities of York, Neville and Wydeville (chapter 4). In this he shows how the extensive network of marriage alliances brought off by two generations of the Neville family yet engendered no corresponding political group and marshals evidence indicating that this was also true of the Wydevilles. As with the duke of York in the fifties Warwick's personal resentment and excessive ambition in the sixties could not unite even his own family circle, let alone the mass of the nobility, in active treason.

One or two of these reprints are of lesser value. The 1967 re-examination of the treason and death of "false, fleeting, perjurd Clarence" appears inconsistently to revive Stubbs's view of the callous, ruthless and unprincipled Edward IV, suggesting that Clarence died for a treason he did not commit, on a charge trumped up by the king himself (chapter 10). These speculations unfortunately involve discrediting the testimony of Warkworth's otherwise useful chronicle which is here perforce written off as a mere jejune continuation of the Brut. The 1961 new look which Lander gave to the duke of York's second protectorate of 1455-6 (chapter 3) is even less convincing. Unlike all modern historians from Stubbs to McFarlane Lander believes that Henry VI was not insane or even seriously ill for a second time on this occasion and that the protectorate was a political coup successfully engineered by York and his friends in the Commons. Such a belief appears to contradict the view expressed elsewhere in this volume of the absence of any Yorkist party before 1459 and certainly poses the awkward question why York had been unable to achieve such a triumph in the previous six months consequent on his successful assassination of his political opponents at St. Albans. In fact historians from Stubbs to McFarlane seem to have been principally and justifiably relying on the quite specific statements in the Latin of the roll of parliament and the patent roll that York was made protector in November 1455 because of "the sickness with which it has pleased our most high Saviour to inflict our person" ("infirmiteque qua altissimo Salvatore nostro personam nostram visitare placuit impendimentum prestante") and because arduous involvement in affairs of state would be likely to prevent "our swift recovery of health" ("celeri sanitati recuperande obstaculum"). Even without the Paston Letter rumours reported in London in late October that the king was ill again at Hertford these unequivocal official statements which are unaccountably not cited by Lander appear to destroy his case. If indeed, as seems most probable, Henry VI's renewed illness in 1455 was the real reason for the second protectorate and for the resignation of the conduct of government to the Council which went with it, then another point made by Lander in this chapter takes on a new significance: there is in fact no definite evidence of the king's subsequent recovery.

The book highlights a number of interesting paradoxes most of which do seem to have been inherent in the structure of fifteenth-century English society. It is certainly legitimate to set against the violence of gentry life for the Pastons the tranquillity of the Stonors'. Traditional strictures on the evils of the overmighty

subject and indentured retaining do have to be offset by the fact that "bastard feudalism was local government" and Lander's point that where aristocracy was weak disorder was only the greater is a telling one. But his picture of fifteenth-century England as an inward-looking community basically apathetic towards foreign adventures and steadily growing more so hardly convinces when one considers the implications of his most valuable statistical survey of Edward IV's 1475 French expedition (chapter 9) which is revealed as the largest and best financed so far of the century. Royal patronage generously dispensed is correctly seen as the cement of political order and yet this was incompatible with that effective royal finance which contemporaries declared to be a necessity for stable monarchical rule, that is, unless the parliamentary and tax-paying classes would relax their increasing financial stranglehold on the monarchy. This paradox is well illustrated by the final chapter on Henry VII's attempt in his last years from 1502 to impose a regime of "bonds, coercion and fear," followed by a backlash of resentment dangerous to the monarchy which his successor had to face and accommodate. This certainly revealed the limitations on the Crown's freedom of action and its dependence on other sections of the community besides the nobility.

Within the limits set by its title this volume of collected essays thus provides stimulating insights into the realities of political power in that perverse but fascinating age. Even those of Professor Lander's fellow academics who are already familiar with them will be grateful to have them now all conveniently to hand under one cover. They certainly deserve to be made available in this new form to a wider readership beyond the restricted circle which benefitted from them when they first appeared in historical periodicals and *Festschriften*.

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André Berthiaume. *La découverte ambiguë. Essai sur les récits de voyage de Jacques Cartier et leur fortune littéraire*. Montréal: Cercle du livre de France, 1976. Pp. 210.

Au "mythe" d'un Jacques Cartier découvreur de pays et planteur de croix, André Berthiaume substitue volontairement le mythe d'un voyageur d'autrefois qui nous raconte aujourd'hui ce qu'il croyait vrai et que nous cherchons, par scepticisme accompli, à "psychanalyser." Les historiens ne seront pas d'accord mais ils seront vraisemblablement obligés à relire Cartier. Les nouvellistes seront heureux. Au lecteur de choisir.

C'est en détournant l'historiographie de ses fonctions scientifiques acquises que André Berthiaume entend renouer avec le passé. Il vise moins à retrouver la réalité disparue qu'à la relier à un présent affectif. Tel un artiste de la mémoire vivante qui défie le temps. Cette réinvention du récit en faveur des Amérindiens mérite qu'on s'y arrête. Il ne s'agit pas de lecture objective, l'auteur n'y croit pas; pensons plutôt à la perception de notre propre mémoire à la recherche de son histoire. Le danger est grand, autant que l'avantage d'une lecture qui renouvelle les points de vue en soupçonnant les motivations reçues.

Le danger aussi est de renier, en se distanciant volontairement, la tradition savante des études sur Cartier qui, elle, et de façon générale, préfère la première vérité du