Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Alison Hanham. *Richard III and His Early Historians, 1483-1535*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. Pp. x, 230.

The character of Richard III and his reign presents one of the most difficult of historical problems, and a continuity of scholarly disagreements suggests that time may sometimes deliver rather more than truth. Alison Hanham's attempt to lay the ghosts to rest succeeds in several important respects, but will leave many readers unsatisfied in others.

Dr. Hanham's stated aim is ambitiously twofold: to investigate and reevaluate the evidence about Richard's deeds and intentions, and to establish how the literary Richard came into being (p. 1). Few will wish to quarrel with her opening narration of the "facts," which are assembled mainly from Mancini's report on the usurpation, the *Crowland Chronicle*, and other independent contemporary sources such as the Stonor Letters, the records of the Mercers' Company, and the parliamentary rolls. The old revisionary thesis of Buck, Walpole, and Markham should be knocked on the head once and for all by the evidence, which is too early to be merely the product of Tudor bias. Apart from relegating a number of things to the category of unprovable (such as the details of the murder of the princes), Hanham changes very little in the traditional account: she tentatively questions the allegedly unusual fairness and efficiency of Richard's government (pp. 16-17), has found that Mistress Shore's first name was really Elizabeth, not Jane (p. 179), and proposes a new date for the execution of Hastings — Friday 20 June 1483, rather than Friday 13 June as stated in most of the sources (pp. 24-29). One's only query is that the revised date assumes an incredibly widespread falsification of documents and surprising lapses of memory in rather too many contemporary writers (p. 68), and rests largely on a reading of Stallworth's letter of 21 June to Stonor that many will think unidiomatic and forced (p. 42).

Such quibbles, however, do not detract from Hanham's achievement in providing a lucid account of relatively undeniable facts. Even when she embarks on the first stages of the attempt to show the genesis of the liter-

ary Richard in Mancini, Rous, the *Crowland Chronicle*, and Polydore Vergil, there is little to object to and much to admire as far as meticulous attention to detail is concerned, although some might be suspicious of postulating a hypothetical "ur-text" behind both the *Crowland Chronicle* and Vergil's *Anglica Historia* in the old-fashioned way (p. 141). It is the very substantial portion of the book devoted to More's *History of King Richard III* that will disappoint many scholars.

More's *History/Historia* is without doubt one of the most difficult and complicated texts of the English Renaissance and, unfortunately, Hanham's treatment of it is so fanciful as to create a real distortion. Her argument rests on several assumptions: that More's *History* is a Lucianic and therefore irreverent parody of the craft of history (p. 150), and is thus merely a joke against historians with no attempt at literal realism (pp. 189-190); that it was More's purpose to be deliberately misleading (p. 156); that the work is a five-act comic play originally conceived as ending with Richard's accession (p. 188); and that the Grafton-Hall text (G-H) of 1543 and 1548 represents More's own revisions and additions to the "interim draft" that Rastell later printed in 1557 (Appendix, pp. 198-219). The assumption that the *History* is a parody and deliberately misleading springs partly from a simple identification of More with the jester in Book I of *Utopia* (p. 156 and note). While More may have projected one aspect to himself in the jester, it is absurd to use the jester as the sole gloss on More's general preoccupations when there is another character, "Morus," who does advocate play-acting, but of a very different kind; indeed, a comparison between Morus' advice to Hythloday and the way More represents Morton as acting in the *History* (and in *Utopia* for that matter) might have proved to the point. The assumption of parody also springs from an apparent unfamiliarity with More's English. Hanham recurrently paraphrases in a way that distorts the original (e.g., pp. 157, 158); she assumes More's meditation on the murder of the princes is parodic because of its heavy alliteration (p. 187), whereas such alliteration occurs on almost any page of his English controversies; she takes a sentence with a complex parenthetical qualification to be syntactically confused so as to reflect the illogicality of the argument (p. 158, n.4), whereas the controversies show such complicated sentences to be also typical of More's English style. Most seriously, too much of her evidence of More's mockery depends upon spurious additions in the G-H text (pp. 158-159, 187). And while Hanham does a real service in re-emphasizing the presence of Lucianic irony in the *History*, she does not tell us what sense of things this irony reflects, nor which Lucian More is following—the mocking Lucian of the fantastical *True History*, or the Lucian of the *How to Write History* who satirically exposes the abuses of contemporary historians yet nevertheless asserts the value of history and offers sage and serious advice on how to write it. The claim that the *History* is a five-act comic play, since it depends on the idea that the work

was conceived as ending with Richard's accession, is very weak in the light of the expanded English text, especially when there is no structural logic recognisable in terms of any classical or medieval dramatic theory to justify the "act-divisions" Hanham makes. Few in any case will accept that the *History* is a comedy; there is a "play" evident in the events of Richard's usurpation, but when the Londoners conclude that "these matters bee Kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the more part plaied vpon scaffoldes" one feels that More considered the drama to be tragi-comic at the very least. Significantly, there is no mention in this book of what More's own view of history may have been. The most we are told is that More did not share the Tudor view of history (pp. 194-195), whereas even a brief appraisal of what view he did hold might have set the whole matter of irony, whether comic, tragic, or Lucianic, into a proper perspective.

The elaborate textual argument in support of the idea that the G-H texts contain More's final revisions is too complicated to be rehearsed in detail here and should be compared with Sylvester's (I think superior) consideration in the Yale edition of the *History*. In general terms, however, several obvious objections spring to mind. Internal evidence forces Hanham to conclude that More's supposed revisions took place after 1527—that is, either while More was reading and refuting a flood of heretical books, or while he was in the Tower meditating on last things and writing *De Tristitia Christi* and *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*. It seems highly improbable that More would have the time or feel inclined to revise the *History* in these circumstances. Moreover, we have the authoritative statement of Rastell—who printed for his uncle until December 1533 and was thus presumably familiar with his output and style—that the G-H versions are "very much corrupte in many places, sometyme hauyng lesse, and sometime hauing more, and altered in wordes and whole sentences"—an opinion apparently concurred in by Grafton himself, who collated his text with Rastell's (printed from More's holograph) and rejected many of the earlier readings as spurious in his 1568-9 edition.

These main assumptions lead Hanham inevitably into an attempt to discredit the work's historical validity. Even though no-one would argue that More was perfectly accurate in all points—he does make errors which are rightly noted (p. 181)—he is surely more useful than Hanham allows. The usual idea that he could have gained information from Morton is attacked, and Hanham declares, without offering proof, that "such historical validity as More's narrative possesses" is due to Vergil (p. 146), dismissing the fact that Vergil's and More's names of Stanley's attackers do not coincide as merely "interesting" (p. 169). More's story that Richard swore an oath not to eat dinner until Hastings' head was off is handled with similar non-chalance. Hanham declares it "decisively disproved" on the grounds that "the councillors must have dined about 9 a.m. in accordance with custom at the time" whereas Hastings was executed about noon (p. 170). The

basis for this statement is her belief that Thomas Betson wrote in one of the Stonor letters "the clock smote nine, and all our household cried after me and bade me come down, come down to dinner at once" (p. 170). A glance at the original of this letter suggests, as in other cases, the author's inadequate grasp of late fifteenth-century English; it reads: "the Cloke smote noynne, and all oure howsold cryed after me and bade me come down; come down to dener at ones" (*Stonor Letters* [1918], II, 8). The clock struck at *noon*, not *nine*, and the reference thus proves More's story perfectly feasible, whether he gained it from Morton (who was present at the event) or not.

One must conclude, then, that in spite of this book's considerable merits in dealing with purely historical matters, it has by no means said the last word on More's *History*; nevertheless, Dr. Hanham has done More scholarship a real service in providing a study that is so provocative, and one hopes that it will induce others to explore further the meaning of More's elusive text.

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Collected Works of Erasmus, Volume 2, The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 142 to 291 (1501 to 1514), translated by R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson, annotated by Wallace K. Ferguson. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975. Pp. xiv, 374. \$25.00

This addition to Toronto's impressive edition of the *Collected Works of Erasmus* is the second volume of Erasmus' correspondence. It provides an English translation of 155 letters collected in the authoritative canon for the correspondence, the *Opus Epistolarum*, edited by P.S. and H.M. Allen (1906-1958), and adds one other letter first published by P.O. Kristeller in 1961. In a preface to the volume Professor Ferguson briefly describes the nature and origin of Erasmus' correspondence during the period 1501-1514, and characterizes the editorial problems it presents. More specific observations on such matters are left for the introductions to individual letters. Each of these is a model of scholarly economy, clarifying essential historical details and offering brief but very useful reviews of critical problems and possibilities. Footnotes contribute additional information, though much of it is necessarily selected from material available in Allen. There are, however, many valuable new additions, a considerable number of which discover previously unidentified classical allusions and locate Erasmus' use of them in other works. Such allusions, we know, delighted Erasmus, and were an important ingredient of his style. In fact it may be said that, for him, style consisted in a nice accommodation of