

Some Posthumous Representations of Richard III

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THE POSTHUMOUS reputation of Richard III during the century after his death, up to the writing of Shakespeare's play about him c.1583, has received a good deal of attention from scholars. One of the chief themes for discussion has been the question of Richard's physical deformity — the generally-accepted view at the moment being that one of his shoulders probably was a little higher than the other, and that this slight malformation was exaggerated in descriptions of him which were written after his death. (Physical deformity, of course, gave added colour to the Tudor notion of Richard as a monstrous villain.)'

In connection with this exaggeration of Richard's deformity by Tudor writers, some extremely interesting visual evidence has been discussed. Most importantly, there is the panel-portrait of Richard in the Royal Collection, dated now by tree-ring analysis to c.1518-23: X-ray photography of this portrait has shown that, at some time after it was first painted, it underwent some alterations, including the deliberate making higher of Richard's right shoulder.² And secondly, there are two further panel-portraits which show Richard with a still more deformed shoulder, and holding a broken sword. Of these two portraits the better-known is that belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of London, which has been dated by tree-ring analysis to c.1533-43.³ The other, reproduced here in Plate 1, was sold in Brussels in 1921, and its present location is unfortunately not known. The two portraits are very similar to each other, and both the dating of the Society of Antiquaries panel and the style of the paintings indicate that they must be associated with the 'Cast Shadow' workshop, which is known to have been producing series of royal portraits during the later part of Henry VIII's reign, from c.1530 onwards.⁴ It has been shown that the artists of the 'Cast Shadow' workshop based their likenesses of kings on portraits in the Royal Collection, and their likeness of Richard III was evidently no exception to this. The



1 Richard III. Panel, 33 x 27cm. c.1530/40. (Sold at the Cardon sale, St Gudule, Brussels, 27th — 30th June 1921; present location unknown)



2 Richard III. From John Rastell, *The Pastyme of People: the chronicles of dyuers Realmys and most specyally of the Realme of Englonde* (London, 1529). By permission of the British Library

portraits showing Richard holding a broken sword are clearly related to the Royal Collection portrait mentioned above, even though they are rather freely adapted from it. The workshop-artists do not seem to have minded that, in reversing the image, they made Richard's left shoulder the deformed one instead of the right! They also changed the king's pose in order to incorporate the broken sword; and in the portrait reproduced in Plate 1 Richard's left arm does not have a hand, but is made to terminate in a kind of lump.

The purpose of this article is to add to this discussion by presenting some further visual evidence dating from the sixteenth century. This evidence takes the form of printed representations which are reproduced here — to the best of my knowledge — for the first time since they were originally published. They are of importance, firstly, for the information they provide about the way in which Richard III (and the other mediaeval kings) was visualized by people in the Tudor period, and secondly, for the light which they shed on the meaning of the broken sword in the two panel-portraits mentioned above.

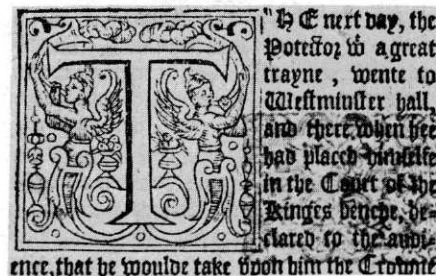
To begin with the more specific point, what exactly was the meaning of the broken sword? The fact that Richard III was depicted in two panel-portraits carrying a broken sword needs to be seen in conjunction with the fact that, in several sixteenth-century printed representations, he was shown carrying a broken sceptre. Of these printed representations the two earliest date from the same period as the panel-portraits. The first occurs in John Rastell's *The Pastyme of People: the chronicles of dyuers Realmys and most specyally of the Realme of Englonde* (London 1529), (Plate 2), and the second in a book which was produced in Antwerp with the title *Alle de Coninghen in Enghelant*; this book is signed on the last page with the cutter's initials, P.V.D., and dated 1534 (Plate 3).⁶ Later on in the century these prints were followed by at least two more; firstly that in Gyles Godet's *Genealogie of Kynges* (London 1560-62) — a work which, as a whole, is clearly related to the Antwerp book of 1534 — (Plate 4), and secondly that which occurs at the beginning of the chapter on Richard III's reign in the first edition of Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London 1577) — an image which is clearly related in turn to Godet's (Plate 5).⁷

The relevance of these printed representations of Richard to the question of the meaning of the broken sword becomes apparent when one considers that, in sixteenth-century royal iconography, the sceptre and the sword were virtually interchangeable. One must say 'virtually' interchangeable because, in fact, their significance was not exactly the same, and more will be said about this below; but essentially they were both symbols of royal power. In view of this, I would suggest that the broken sceptre and the broken sword are also likely to have been intended to have the same basic significance, namely that Richard's royal power had been broken.

Within the context of the series of kings and queens in which these printed representations occur, the broken sceptre seems to have a further significance, namely that Richard's royal power had been broken by his being defeated in battle. Most of the kings and queens in these series are shown holding sceptres; those kings who were particularly renowned in warfare —



3 The Yorkist kings. From a series of kings entitled *Alle de Coninghen in Enghelant* (Antwerp, 1534). By permission of the British Library



5 Richard III. Figure at the head of the chapter on Richard's reign in Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*, 1st edn. (London, 1577), Vol.2, p.1386. By permission of the British Library

i.e. William I, Edward I, Edward III, Henry V and Edward IV — tend to be given swords instead of sceptres; and those kings who were deposed — *i.e.* Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI and Richard III — tend to hold their sceptres with the heads pointing downwards. But the only king besides Richard who is shown with his sceptre broken is Harold, who was defeated and killed at the battle of Hastings. (Harold appears in Gyles Godet's series, which in fact goes back as far as Noah! The other series begins with William I.)

It would seem very likely that the broken sword was also intended to have this further significance — the sword, of course, being easier to 'read' with this meaning than the sceptre because, as an implement of warfare, it symbolizes the ruler's military power.⁸ That this was certainly the case later on in the sixteenth century is shown by a further printed representation of Richard, namely that which occurs in Hendrick Goltzius's *Antiquissima Nobilissimaque Anglorum Regum origo atque successio* (Haarlem 1584).⁹ This full-length figure (Plate 6) shows Richard dressed in armour; with his left hand he draws a dagger from its sheath, as if to defend himself; but he has already been pierced through the heart by a lance whose broken shaft lies on the ground; and in his right hand he holds, point downwards, a broken sword. Clearly these features refer specifically to the battle of Bosworth, and again, within the context of the series of kings and queens in which this figure occurs, the broken sword is unique. The majority of the kings in the series, which extends from William I to Elizabeth I, are shown brandishing swords in their right hands, evidently to indicate that they were successful rulers. Those who were deposed (including, this time, Edward V, but not Richard III) are distinguished by the fact that they hold their swords, sheathed and point downwards, in their left hands. Only Richard III — the only king to lose his royal power as the result of defeat and death in battle — is shown with his sword broken in his right hand.

With regard to the information which these printed representations provide about the way Richard III was visualized by people in the Tudor period, there are perhaps two main points to be made.

The first is that in none of these representations is the likeness of Richard related to the standard portrait-type of him which is known from numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century panel-portraits, and for which the portrait in the Royal Collection appears to have been the source.¹⁰ Nor is the likeness related to any other authentic image such as, for example, the figures of Richard which occur in the Rous Rolls.¹¹ In Goltzius' series none of the likenesses of the kings before Henry VIII is derived from an authentic source; in Holinshed's series no likeness before that of Henry VII is derived from an authentic source; in Godet's series it is the same (except that Godet's Edward V is derived from an authentic image of Edward VI); and in Rastell's series and the Antwerp series of 1534 none of the likenesses at all seems to be derived from an authentic source, with the possible exception of the Henry VIII in the Antwerp series. Where all these unauthentic likenesses came from, if they were not simply made up by the artists concerned, is by no means entirely clear. With some of the Richard III's, however, it is possible to offer some suggestions.

Holinshed's Richard (Plate 5), as has already been noted, clearly relates back to Godet's image of him (Plate 4). In addition to the obvious similarities, in pose and costume, between the two figures, it can be remarked that Holinshed's Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I also clearly relate back to Godet's images of these rulers. (Some of Holinshed's earlier kings, too, have certain points in common with those in Godet's series, but are without any close similarity to them.)

Godet's work, again as has already been mentioned, bears a general relationship to the Antwerp series of 1534. This can be seen not only from the clear similarity in format between the two sets of figures, with their accompanying verses and heraldic devices, but also from the iconographic similarities which exist between many individual figures, and from the fact that the verses in Godet's work are so closely similar in meaning to those in the Antwerp series as to be virtually translations of them.¹² (It seems quite possible, in fact, that both of these series were derived from an earlier English work, now lost. The lost work would, like the Antwerp series, have begun with William I, and the figures would have been accompanied by verses. Godet only uses verses with his figures from William I onwards; his figures of earlier rulers — which were presumably invented by himself — are accompanied by paragraphs in prose.)

Lastly here, Rastell's likeness of Richard (Plate 2) has much the same general appearance as several of the other kings in his series,¹³ and may have been based on some purely imaginary kingly type.¹⁴ However, Dr. Tudor-Craig has suggested to me in conversation that this type could in fact have been derived from contemporary representations of Henry VIII. Certainly the type, with its full moustache and beard and hair down to the bottom of the ears, is paralleled very closely in some drawings of Henry which date from the 1520s and '30s.¹⁵

The earliest printed representation of Richard III I am able to find in which the likeness is related to an authentic source occurs in a work, evidently by Thomas Tymme, entitled *A Booke, Containing the True Portraiture of the Countenances and attires of the kings of England* (London 1597). Tymme's image of Richard (Plate 7) is clearly based on the standard portrait-type — and his images of the other fifteenth-century kings (excepting Edward V) and of Richard II are also based on the standard portrait-types of these rulers as they are known to us from panel-paintings.¹⁶ 1597 is, of course, very late in the sixteenth century, and there would seem to be a reasonable case for believing that the standard portrait-types of the later Plantagenet kings were not generally known about much before this date. As Sir Roy Strong has pointed out, the fashion for the painted long-gallery sets of kings and queens, in which the standard types of these rulers really became established as such, did not begin until the very end of the sixteenth century, during the 1590s.¹⁷ Before then — to judge from the printed series which we have been looking at — the standard types do not seem to have been generally known about. Probably, in the form of the portraits in the Royal Collection and those associated with the Cast Shadow workshop, they had had a very limited currency in the circle immediately surrounding the court.¹⁸

Finally, to return more specifically to the point at which this article



6 Richard III. From Hendrick Goltzius, *Antiquissima Nobilissimaque Anglorum Regum origo atque successio* (Haarlem, 1584). By permission of the British Library



7 Richard III. From T[homas] T[ymme], *A Booke, Containing the True Portraiture of the Countenances and attires of the kings of England* (London, 1597). By permission of the British Library

began, the second observation one would make about the visual image of Richard III which these printed representations express is that, in spite of the Tudor literature on this subject, in none of the prints is Richard shown with any noticeable physical deformity. (The only hint of deformity here is in the slightly angular right shoulder of Thomas Tymme's representation.) This is the more surprising in the case of Goltzius' image, since the paragraph which accompanies this figure actually contains a reference to Richard's deformity: *Corpore erat pusillo & deformi, facie truculenta.*¹⁹ It is also, perhaps, surprising in the case of Rastell's image, since Rastell was the brother-in-law and close associate of Sir Thomas More; More, in his *History of King Richard III*, was one of the most influential authors in establishing the Tudor notion of 'croke backed Richard'.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

The author would like to thank Dr. Pamela Tudor-Craig, who very kindly read through an earlier draft of this article and offered much valuable advice.

1. Cf. P. Tudor-Craig, *Richard III* (catalogue of exhibition held at the National Portrait Gallery, 27th June — 7th October 1973), 2nd edn., 1977, p.80. For references to Richard's personal appearance in sixteenth-century literature before Shakespeare's play see G. B. Churchill, *Richard III up to Shakespeare* (Berlin 1900; reprinted Dursley, 1976), pp.50, 119, 158, 166, 200.
2. Tudor-Craig, *op. cit.*, p.93 (P44); repr. *ibid.*, Pl.26.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.90-1 (P40). The portrait is reproduced in N. Williams, *The Life and Times of Henry VII* (London 1973), p.29.
4. There is no study of the Cast Shadow workshop as such. For details of individual paintings which are associated with the workshop see Tudor-Craig, *op. cit.*, pp.81 (P5), 85 (P15), 87 (P21, P22); R. Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits* (London 1969), I, pp.86, 92 (sub Type B), 159 (sub Type VI), 272.
5. It has often been remarked that such historical evidence as was available on this point was in fact conflicting. On the one hand John Rous, writing for Henry VII, had said of Richard that he had *inaequales humeros, dexter superior sinisterque inferior* (Joannis Rossi Antiquarii Warwicensis *Historia Regum Angliae*, ed. T. Hearne, 2nd edn. (Oxford 1745), p.216); and on the other Sir Thomas More gave Richard's 'left shoulder much higher then (sic) his right' (R. S. Sylvester (ed.), *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, II, *The History of King Richard III* (Yale 1963), p.7). However, the portrait-painters are unlikely to have been influenced by considerations of this kind: it was a common practice of theirs to reverse images quite arbitrarily.
6. Catalogued in W. Nijhoff and M. E. Kronenberg, *Nederlandsche Bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540*, Vol. I ('s-Gravenhage 1923), No. 599, pp.220-1. I am grateful to Dr. Tony Dyson for obtaining this reference for me from Miss A. J. Flipse of the Enschedé Museum, Haarlem.
7. The practice of showing Richard with a broken sceptre was also carried on into some seventeenth-century engravings of him, e.g. that by Renold Elstrack for Thomas Holland's *Baziliologia* of 1618 (repr. A. M. Hind, *Engraving in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, II (Cambridge 1955), Pl.60(c)).

8. The possibility of the broken sword's referring to Richard's defeat and death in battle was first noted by Mrs. G. E. Nathan in *Some Portraits at the Society of Antiquaries, The Ancestor* Number IV (January 1903), p.196: 'It is at least possible that the picture [*i.e.* the Society of Antiquaries *Richard III*] is a commemorative one, painted after the sword of York was broken at Bosworth field.'
9. The copy of this work in the British Library, in which the engraved figures of kings and queens, originally three to each sheet, have been separated and mounted on paper in longer rows, is dated 1586. The engravings themselves, however, are dated on the first sheet 1584.
10. Tudor-Craig, *op. cit.*, pp.80, 93 (P44). Many examples of the standard portrait-type are reproduced *ibid.*, Pls 26-39. Probably the best known is that belonging to the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 148).
11. For reproductions of contemporary drawings and miniatures of Richard, including those in the English version of the Rous Roll, see G. W. O. Woodward, *King Richard III* (London 1972), pp.1, 2, 7, 10, 12, 16.
12. I am grateful to Dr. Tony Dyson for confirming this for me in the cases of the figures of Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III. There are some differences with regard to numbers: *e.g.*, the Netherlandish verses give the length of Edward V's reign as five months, whereas Godet has the correct number of three months.
13. *e.g.*, the Edward I, repr. J. Prebble, *The Lion in the North* (Harmondsworth 1973), p.66.
14. Cf. S. Colvin, *Early Engraving and Engravers in England (1545 - 1695)* (London 1905), p.169.
15. Cf. E. Auerbach, *Tudor Artists* (London 1954), Pls 12a, 13a, 13b (historiated initial letters from patents for Cardinal College Oxford and Cardinal College Ipswich, 1526-29), and 14a, 14c, 14d (historiated initial letters from the Plea Rolls, 1532-36).
16. For the standard portrait-types of the later Plantagenet kings from Richard II to Edward IV see Strong, *op. cit.*, I, pp.87, 142-3, 145, 147-8, 261.
17. R. Strong, *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London 1969), p.47. This dating has since been confirmed by tree-ring analysis of portraits from surviving long-gallery sets: see Tudor-Craig, *op. cit.*, pp.88 (P25), 95 (P49).
18. As a possible qualification of this statement, it must be said that some of Rastell's likenesses could in fact have a tenuous link with the standard portrait-types: his Henry V, for example, is shown in profile, and the face of his Edward IV is vaguely similar to that in the Royal Collection portrait. Also, of course, the original of the Royal Collection *Edward IV* is known to have been reproduced as a print in the fifteenth century: see F. Anzelewsky, *An Unidentified Portrait of King Edward IV, The Burlington Magazine* CIX (1967), pp.702-5.
19. 'He was very small and deformed in body, and his face wore a ferocious expression.' The words are an echo of Polydore Vergil's more extensive description of Richard in his *Historia Anglica* (Basle, 1555; facsimile, Menston, 1972), p.565: *Statura fuit pusilla, corpore deformi, altero humero eminentiore, facie brevi ac truculenta* . . .