

3. A Commentary on the Continuation

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THOUGH IT IS highly commendable in our illiterate age to publish medieval texts with a translation, this particular chronicle was really crying out for an extensive, detailed running *commentary*; one that would enable 'the common reader' to better understand and appreciate the contents, would pinpoint as many literary, biblical, classical and legal allusions as possible and discuss all debatable and doubtful passages and their translation — especially those that may interest or deceive Ricardians.

I will give a few instances to try and prove my point.

Allusions. *Non bellum sed faciem belli* (pp.108-9, translated: 'not a battle but the preparations for a battle') was probably inspired by Sallustius, *Jugurtha*, 46, 5 and means almost certainly: 'not a battle but the semblance of a battle'. *Facies belli* is 'the face, the appearance, the outward signs of war'; the chronicler's meaning may be understood from the classical context.

On pages 120-1, *venit simul eos vidit atque vicit* does not perhaps need explanation, but in view of the author's much-stressed irony, the allusion to Caesar's self-satisfied remark after his victory (*inter alia* Suetonius, *Divus Julius*, 37) should be noted and brought to the reader's attention.

The word *tyrannus* (pp.128-31), used of the man who caused the death of Henry VI, has raised its own controversy.¹ The translation given in the present edition is no doubt correct, but does not in itself help to solve the problem of the 'tyrant's' identity. It is perhaps worthwhile to remember the vocabulary used in saints' legends and martyrs' acts, in which the opposite of the necessary ingredient, the 'martyr', is often a 'tyrant', that is, the unjust, heathen king who gives the fatal order. When the *patiens* is correctly described as a 'martyr', the *agens* thus more or less automatically becomes a 'tyrant'. The word does not necessarily pass an over-all judgment on the character — or legal position — of the described person, it merely suggests the impression this particular — impious — act made on the chronicler. The saintliness and unworldliness of Henry made him who ordered his death a 'tyrant'. The actual killer, he of 'the impious hands', may be another than the *agens* — given the context probably Edward IV — who 'merited the title of tyrant' through giving the order. As to the chronology of the event: the words *hoc tempore interstitio* are a clear echo of the *Arrivall*, or more probably of the signet letter that was its source here, and the suggested translation — 'the discovery at this time . . .' — given by A. J. Pollard,² is likely to be correct.

The translation of *Ecce morior cum nihil horum fecerim* (pp.144-5); why not put it in italics and give its biblical reference (Daniel 13, 43), especially since it is so 'very apocryphal'?

Filios hujus seculi prudentiores filiis lucis (pp.172-3 and note) is also a virtually verbatim Bible quotation and should be treated as such. The 'sons of this world', surely, and not 'of this age'? These 'are better at dealing with their own kind than the unworldly': Richard III's servants, like the dishonest bailiff of Luke 16, 8, were well versed in worldly, that is, money, matters. The quotation is, I think, appropriate and expresses the author's righteous disapproval.

The expression '. . . , *qui legibus solutus*' (pp.152-3) touches on such a vast subject³ that some elucidation might have been expected, particularly, once again, in view of the author's reputed sarcasm. To call the very young, uncrowned and ill-fated King 'he who is not bound by the law', suggests either a legal mind taking the principle of hereditary power with uncompromising seriousness, or irony, stressing the boy's helplessness rather than his authority.

Translation. The most striking examples of debatable translation are, I think, to be found on pages 174-5: '*per haec festa Natalia choreis aut tripudiis vanisque mutatoriis vestium Annae reginae atque Dominae Elizabeth, primogenitae defuncti regis, eisdem colore et forma distributis nimis intentum est . . .*' is translated: 'during this Christmas feast too much attention was paid to singing and dancing and to vain exchanges of clothing between Queen Anne and Lady Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the dead King, who were alike in complexion and figure' (my italics).

One wonders — to put it mildly — what future generations of Ricardian novelists will make of this, especially since the chronicler is said to have been an eye-witness, in an even 'better position' than 'the Lord Chancellor at the high table' to see 'it' (Introduction p.93). If the Queen and Elizabeth merely exchanged the odd veil or other small item of their dress, would the people have spoken against it, the magnates and prelates have been greatly astonished and the King suspected of wanting to marry his niece?! Let us also reject the full-scale orgy and simply agree with Riley⁴ that 'changes of apparel' were 'presented' to both ladies, a normal happening at Christmas. *Mutatorium vestis* or *vestium* means a 'change of clothes', 'new, clean clothes' as in 4 Kings 5, 5 and Zechariah 3, 4. People's amazement was caused by the fact that Anne and Elizabeth had received new dresses 'of the same colour and pattern' or 'shape' (compare the chronicler's use of *forma vestium* on p.148: the monkish robes, and of *mutatoria* on pp.190-1: changes of fortune).

It is true that *color et forma* can refer to the complexion and bodily appearance of humans, but if that was what the author meant, what is the point of the story? Giving new dresses does, in itself, not suggest ulterior motives on the King's part, nor is the appearance of the *recipients* relevant in that case. An exchange of clothes would, moreover, imply a non-involvement of the King and an active contribution and a degree of approval of the Queen, and this, too, is contradicted by the tenor of the rumour to which this episode is said to have given rise.

On the same page occurs the problem of the King shunning his wife's bed. It is highly probable that Richard, as painted by the author, did not visit the Queen and gave an excuse for this. There seems to be no point in the chronicler's saying that the Queen fell ill, got worse because of her husband's unkindness and 'therefore he judged it right to consult with doctors'. The Latin

is obscure, but something like 'he stated that he had been advised by doctors to do so' seems closer to the text and truer to the insinuating tone of the author. This apart from the fact that the bare story is credible, the order of events likely and the King's excuse acceptable.

Sources. I think it can be tentatively argued that the Continuation, though cleverly composed, is a compilation. Much of it is no doubt the author's own, but apart from the 'monastic' pieces, there are some other remarkable passages suggesting that he used written material not his own.

On pages 112-3 both the wording of the decision of the council to accept Edward as king and its present tense point to a quotation; the curious expression *per medium civitatis Eboraci* reminds me of events and words used in some versions of the *Arrivall*, as do the arrest of Henry VI and George Neville (pp.124-5) and the whole of the Barnet episode. And why does the author incongruously and unexpectedly use the titles 'His Serenity' and 'His Majesty' on pages 130-1 when speaking of Duke Charles of Burgundy and Edward IV? Irony again? Or did he have some official document to hand which influenced him? The description of Abbéville as a 'large and very strong town' echoes the 'gode' and 'walled' towns etc. in the *Arrivall* and its variants, of which the original texts were all written as informative reports.

The oath to Edward of Middleham has been taken to prove by its details that the author was a knowledgeable eye-witness of the event (pp.170-1). Though my grasp of this material is uncertain I believe other such documents recording the taking of an oath give similar very detailed information and this could have come to the notice of people not present.

It is perhaps a matter for consideration, as are, I hope, the other instances I have given.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See A. Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians 1483-1535*, Oxford 1975, p.95 and n.4, p.96.
2. *The Ricardian* vol. 7, no. 96 (1987), p.384.
3. See for instance E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton 1981, pp.95-6, 104-7, 135-6; P. M. Kean, Love, Law and Lewie in *Piers Plowman*, *The Review of English Studies* vol. 15 (1964), pp.264-7 and notes and, very exhaustively, D. Wyduckel, *Princeps Legibus Solutus. Eine Untersuchung zur frühmodernen Rechts- und Staatslehre*, Berlin 1979.
4. *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland with the Continuations by Peter of Blois and Anonymous Writers*, trans. H. T. Riley, London 1854, p.498.