

Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*: Educating Citizens for Self-Government

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In his *Historia Richardi Tertii*,¹ Thomas More does for England what Sallust did for Rome and what Thucydides had done for Greece. Sallust, who himself imitated Thucydides, had special importance to More. As Richard Sylvester points out: More must have known Sallust “almost by heart”; he was required reading in More’s school, and his histories are “significantly echoed in [More’s] *Historia*.”² There is evidence that More lectured at Oxford on Sallust in 1513 or shortly afterwards, and we know that Sallust held an important place among the English Renaissance humanists,³ just as he did among the Renaissance humanists of Florence.

The great Renaissance leader of Florence Leonardo Bruni—a classical scholar and a chancellor like More—based his history of the Republic of Florence on Sallust’s in his dangerous task of recovering and strengthening republican rule in an age of tyranny.⁴ Sallust was the experienced general and senator promoted by Julius Caesar; Sallust’s long reflections led him to conclude that Rome grew “incredibly strong and great in a remarkably short time” only “once liberty was won”—that is, only once wise and experienced leaders changed the Roman government from monarchy to a republic, with the explicit intent to “prevent men’s minds from growing proud [*superbia*] through unlimited government” (*Catiline* 6.7-7.3).

Sallust was not a favorite author among the Tudor monarchs.

Sallust’s two histories each focuses upon one specific event of the late war-torn Roman Republic,⁵ just as More focuses upon one three-month event of war-torn England. Sallust’s two histories, when considered together, give an interpretation

of what caused the rise and fall of the great Roman Republic and, implicitly, of Roman civic health understood as just and peaceful self-rule. More’s *Historia*, especially when considered with its companion pieces *Utopia* and *Epigrammata*, reveals England’s strengths and weaknesses, and it points to an understanding similar to Sallust’s of civic health.

Especially by its profound influence on Shakespeare, *Richard III* may well be More’s most important and most influential political writing. Shakespeare studied More’s work so closely at the beginning of his career that not only did he structure his first four plays around it, but he continued wrestling with the issues it posed, dramatizing his own conclusions only in the last of his thirty-seven plays at the end of his life.

That influence is also seen in Ben Jonson, who owned (illegally) a copy of More’s Latin Works. Significantly, *Utopia* “is nearly unmarked,” yet there are over 1600 markings in Jonson’s distinctive hand throughout “the roughly 3000 total lines of print” in *Historia Richardi*.⁶

The mysterious and engaging character of More’s *Historia* is evident from the first sentence which asserts that “King Edward...succumbed to fate” and then four other times in the first paragraph “fate” (*fatus*), “fortune” (*fortuna*) or “chance” (*sortem*) are named as causes of the king’s history (314/5, 10, 12, 17). Yet later, right after the nobles unanimously consent⁷ to make Richard “the sole protector” of the young thirteen-year-old king, the narrator raises the question whether this important event in history came about through ignorance (*inscitia*) or through fate (*accidit fato*).

Why open a history attributing the major action to fate or fortune?—a view opposed by any Christian historian or classical author such as Sallust, whom More imitates closely. As we will see, More’s history takes the same stance as Sallust and many of the classical thinkers: that fortune changes with character.⁸

That opening sentence goes on to declare that King Edward IV “succumbed to fate” when he was 53 years, seven months, and six days old. In fact Edward died at 40, and from bad diet and immoderate living, rather than mere fate.⁹ His age at

¹ See volume 15 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986). All references are to this text unless otherwise noted. The remarks in this paper refer primarily to the Latin version, which—as Daniel Kinney (clii) argues—seems to be the final and most complete text. At that early stage of his writing career, More was experimenting with both English and Latin in his poetry and in his prose. As that experimental period came to a close—i.e., when he began writing *Utopia* and the most polished version of *Richard III*—he turned to Latin, just as he would do again at the end of his life when writing his final book, *De Tristitia Christi, On the Sadness of Christ*.

² Sylvester, CW 2, lxxxvii-lxxxviii

³ William Nelson, “Thomas More, Grammarian and Orator,” in *Essential Article: Thomas More*, ed. Richard Sylvester and Germain Marc’hadour (Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1977): 154.

⁴ See Patricia J. Osmond, “*Princeps Historiae Romanae*: Sallust in Renaissance Political Thought,” *Memoirs of The American Academy in Rome* 40 (1995): 101-43. See also her “Sallust and Machiavelli: from civic humanism to political prudence,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 23.3 (1993): 407-38.

⁵ Sallust’s *War with Jugurtha* takes place around 118 B.C. when the Roman Republic is already in decline, while *The War with Catiline* focuses upon the famous conspiracy against the Roman Republic in 63 B.C., just a short time before the Republic’s actual fall and before the rise of Rome’s hereditary emperors.

⁶ Robert C. Evans’ *Habits of Mind: Evidence and Effects of Ben Jonson’s Reading* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1995): 162, 168. For the full text of *Historia Richardi* go to http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/library_richard.html.

⁷ They do so, based on their trust in Richard’s “integrity” (358/23). For the importance of Sallust’s use of “integrity,” see William W. Batstone, “The Antithesis of Virtue: Sallust’s *Synkrisis* and the Crisis of the Late Republic,” *Classical Antiquity* 7.1 (April 1988): 1-29. Batstone argues that Sallust gives a “subtle and sophisticated” and “disturbing meditation on the late Republic” centered upon the meaning “complete virtue.”

⁸ Consider that *The War with Jugurtha* opens with an argument for virtue as the only way to overcome the fickleness of fortune “since fortune can neither give to any man honesty, industry, and other good qualities, nor can she take them away” (1.3). In *The Catiline*, Sallust argues that “[t]he fortune changes with character” (2.5)—a common idea expressed centuries earlier by Heraclitus (see fragment 119).

⁹ In a similar way, the opening paragraph claims that “Elizabeth...by the guidance of fate became the consort of Henry VII and the mother of Henry VIII.” In fact, Richard III worked hard to marry Elizabeth and Thomas More’s own mentor, as More’s English *History* tells us, was the careful architect of Elizabeth’s marriage to Henry Tudor and thus finally ending the War of the Roses. In the

death was of immense import historically and politically because if Edward *had* lived 13 additional years, his two sons would have been 26 and 24 rather than 13 and 11, and therefore not prey to Richard's manipulation.

To appreciate More's literary project in *Richard III*, one has to grapple with the artful complexity of the narrator's voice. What is the narrator's point of view? Is it dark and pessimistic about human nature and the possibility of justice? If so, is the tone sarcastic and even bitter? Or is the narrator wise, detached, even humorous? For example, does the narrator really believe the report he gives on the second page?

[F]rom early youth throughout his life, whenever business did not call him away, [Edward] was particularly given to dissipation and wantonness, *like virtually everyone else*; for you will hardly persuade anyone in good health to restrain himself when his fortune permits great extravagance. (319, emphasis added)

Does the narrator really believe that human beings will be dissolute and wanton whenever good fortune allows?

To appreciate the narrative subtlety and sophistication at work, one must go beyond categorizing this voice by merely identifying it with what we would call today a limited narrative point of view, a narrative strategy that expresses what a particular character would think himself. That describes, in part, what More does in this instance: the narrator adopts Edward's understanding of himself. To appreciate the distinctive character of what More is doing, however, we have to go back to Thucydides whom Sallust and More both imitate as the great master. What Plutarch says of Thucydides, we could say of More and Sallust: "Thucydides aims always at this: to make his reader a spectator.... [The events] are so described and so evidently set before our eyes that the mind of the reader is no less affected than if he had been present in the actions."¹⁰

More's highly artful and sophisticated ways of engaging our minds as if we were actually present and involved are seen in rhetorical devices such as "dialysis" or "the dismemberer" in which the narrator sets forth alternatives but leaves it to us to decide which is actually correct—thus indicating the great difficulty of accurately discerning true motives. Another example would be the many types of irony that the narrator uses, irony that takes us by surprise or makes us smile even when we may not know why. More also uses allusion masterfully—and ironically.

For example, throughout the Latin version, More uses Roman terms such as *senate*,¹¹ *forum*,¹² *senatusconsulto*,¹³ *res publicae* or commonwealth,¹⁴ *patribus*

or fatherland,¹⁵ and "bona fide."¹⁶ Without saying so directly,¹⁷ More invites a comparison between the Roman republic and England's faltering parliament that works with a sometimes strong and sometimes weak hereditary monarch. But More goes beyond this comparison to build upon London's sturdy three-centuries-of-ever-refined traditions of self-government.¹⁸ Why else does More refer habitually to the aldermen of London as the *senate* of London, meeting in the *forum* of London where the Recorder is present so that they are assured of making decisions in full knowledge of the *law* (470). Yes, there is a corrupt mayor and the aldermen go along when they can do nothing else, but the courageous London citizens refuse to pander to Richard's and Buckingham's offers or to prostitute their freedom for personal advantage. And their tears and heart-felt sorrow move us to pity at the tragedy they—and we—witness.

Significantly, the English are never called "subjects" in this history.¹⁹ More never uses "subject" in his poetry either; instead he consistently uses "citizen" or "people."²⁰ That self-government is at the heart of the work is indicated in many ways. Take, for example, Richard's and Buckingham's concerted efforts to win (with transparent deceptiveness²¹) the English people's consent. Richard says explicitly that people cannot be governed without consent.²² As one critic put it in speculating about More's overall project in this work, "the most vital issue of his

¹⁵ 470, 476; 316, 336, 378, 390, 478.

¹⁶ 332, (340), 354, 356, 358, 362, 364, 366, 368, 374, 378, (384, 386), 392, 394 [cp. *Utopia*], 396, 398, (402), 404, 414, 416, 420, 426, 432, 438, 442, 444, 446 [cp. *Utopia*], 450, 458, 464, 468, 484; perfidiam 404, 416; 19n 39n, 45n

¹⁷ Morus, the character and narrator in *Utopia*, advises and uses the same "indirect approach."

¹⁸ Already in 1215 London had annual elections for their mayor, a privilege written into the *Magna Carta*. For Londoner's struggle for independent self-government against the English kings, see Gwyn A. Williams, *Medieval London from Commune to Capitol* (U of London, Athlone P, 1963) and Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500* (Oxford UP, 2004). The significance of More the Londoner is well explained in James McConica's "The Patrimony of Thomas More" in *History and Imagination: Essays in Honor of H. R. Trevor-Roper* (NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1981): 56-71.

¹⁹ In the English version "subject is used only once, when Edward IV is trying to convince his mother that it is acceptable for a king to marry a subject. See CW 2, 62/4.

²⁰ Damian Grace, "Subjects or Citizens? *Populi* and *cives* in More's *Epigrammata*," *Moreana*, no. 97 (March 1988): 133-136. See also his "Thomas More's *Epigrammata*: Political Theory in a Poetic Idiom," *Parergon* N.S. 3 (1985): 115-29. In his 1516 letter to Erasmus about *Utopia*, More states explicitly that wise and prudent rulers are not "swayed by the fact that they would not have many under them as subjects [*subiectos*], as the term is now used by kings to refer to their people [*populum*], who are really worse off than slaves [*seruos*]; for it is a much higher honor to rule over free people [*liberis*]..." (Elizabeth Rogers, *Selected Letters*, Yale UP, 1961, p. 80).

²¹ Note the strength and the repetition of the narrator's insistence that good and wise people saw Richard and Buckingham's actions for what they were: 482/2-7, 432/27-434/2 (*adulationis intolerandae*: intolerable flattery... *sacrilegae palpationis*: blasphemous adulation), 454/6-12, 470/15-17, 472/15-16, 472/25-474/2, 484/15-22. That the narrator agrees with the prudence of this silence by the wise, consider 482/20-24. That More agreed with this silence, consider that he used the same strategy at important times in his own political life.

²² 480/7-8, 19-20; 484/1-5.

English version of *Richard III*, the narrator raises this issue of fate not in the opening lines, but in different ways. For example, after "the lamb was given to the wolf to keep," the narrator asks if the murder of the innocent princes was caused by fate or folly (20).

¹⁰ *On the Fame of the Athenians* 347, Hobbes' translation found in Hobbes' letter prefacing his translation of Thucydides.

¹¹ 320, 322, 358, 420, 454, 474; 4n, 61n, 69n.

¹² 454, 482; 61n, 69n.

¹³ 320, 450, [466]; 4n.

¹⁴ 342, 348, 394, [466, 468], 478, 480.

history” was Richard’s effort to win over the people.²³ Winning over the nobles and the clergy proves to be easy since each of them has a personal interest, leading both cleric and noble to take “counsel of his desire,”²⁴ thereby leading to blindness—and Richard’s success.

The people of London, however, are seasoned in their “everyday forms of resistance”²⁵—constituting a formidable force for both Edward IV and Richard III. Edward and Richard²⁶ were both violent usurpers of the throne, and both acknowledged the absolute necessity of winning over the people, although neither succeeded.²⁷ Throughout *Richard’s History*, both are constantly judged by the people, and More’s independent voice as an historian differs greatly from court historians precisely in the privileged perspective given to “the people,” especially those presented as wise.²⁸

More’s history is more forthright than Sallust’s²⁹ about political sovereignty belonging to the people. In the Latin version of this *History*, More says explicitly

²³ Page 15, T. G. Heath, “Another Look at Thomas More’s *Richard*,” *Moreana* nos. 19-20 (Nov. 1968): 11-19.

²⁴ 440/3; Logan 72.

²⁵ Page 260, Peter C. Herman, “Henrician Historiography and the Voice of the People: The Cases of More and Hall,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 39.3 (Fall 1997): 259-283.

²⁶ Catiline is presented—like More’s Richard III—as “an evil and depraved nature” who from “youth up . . . reveled in civil wars, murder, pillage, and political dissension” (5.1). Instead of being restrained by public virtue, he—like Richard III—was “spurred on . . . by the corruption of public morals” (5.9). Catiline is for Sallust an exemplum of the disease threatening Rome just a short time before the Republic’s fall. Sallust identifies Catiline and the corrupted public that fostered his rise as characteristic of “the worst and most vicious” in the history of the Roman republic. Catiline’s lust for power, Sallust observes, “was spurred on” not only by his own “haughty spirit” and guilty conscience (*conscientia scelerum*) “but also by the corruption of the public morals, which were being ruined by two great evils of an opposite character, extravagance and avarice” (*Catiline* 5.6-8)—both of which are major factors in More’s *History*.

²⁷ Although the narrator, adopting the perspective of King Edward, claims that Edward did win over the English by the end of his life, this claim is undermined by statements made later in the work—and by the actual historical record.

²⁸ Herman 263.

²⁹ One important reason Sallust gives for choosing the topic of *The War with Jugurtha* is that “it marked the first successful resistance [by the Roman people] to the insolence [*superbiae*] of the nobles” (5.1). As we will see, More’s history has a similar intent. But what power did or could the Roman people have over the wealthy and politically domineering patricians and senators? Sallust and More agree that the source of power of the Roman and English people are the same: popular sovereignty based on rule by law. Especially considering that Sallust wrote during the time of the Emperor August Caesar, Sallust seems at first surprisingly forthright about political sovereignty belonging to the Roman people (*Jugurtha* 8.2, 14.7, 31.9, 17, 20, 22-25), a sovereignty that necessarily involves rule by law (*Jugurtha* 21.4, 31.9, 17, 18, 20, 33.2, 35.7; *Catiline* 6.6), which in turn is protected by the internal law of virtue (*Jugurtha* 1.1-3; 4.5-6; 14.19; 85.4, 17, 20, 31-2; *Catiline* 1.4; 2.1, 5, 7; 52.21, 29; 54.4). I say “at first surprisingly forthright” because as Tacitus makes clear, Emperor Augustus was able to consolidate his centralized power only by making public appeals to the Roman tradition of republican self-rule—just as Richard and Buckingham do in *Richard III*.

that Parliament’s “authority in England is supreme and absolute,”³⁰ and Richard argues to the English people that “the title [*ius*] and the profit and the ownership” of a “genuine commonwealth” is “totally” theirs and not the king’s.³¹ More’s history makes clear that the kings of England must be elected—even if the “ludicrous election” is transparently manipulated by Buckingham and Richard.³²

In their effort to win support from the “honest citizens” of London,³³ Buckingham and Richard know they have to address the Londoners as “citizens” and “the people,” and to promise rule by law. Buckingham presents ironically Chief Justice Markham as a hero for defying Edward IV’s orders to make a ruling against English law (458; 62), and Richard insists ironically on being crowned in Westminster Hall “where the king himself sits and ministers the law,” because he considered “that to carry out the laws and to act as their servant was the essence of kingship” (485; 73).

Richard also recognizes the self-governing temper of the English people when he says—with dramatic irony, of course—that “no earthly man can govern [the English] against their wills,”³⁴ a principle recognized by Sallust in his history of the Roman republic—and by Cicero, whom Sallust discretely presents as the “best of Roman consuls.”³⁵

Considering the work as a whole, More’s *History* shows that Richard’s rise to tyranny could have and should have been stopped at many points, except that nobles and clergy of virtuous character were lacking. Hastings helps Richard come to power, even though he is aware of Richard’s cruel and ambitious character. Lord Hastings knowingly collaborates in killing Richard’s political opponents and he knowingly and maliciously lies (356), prostituting his reputation to do Richard’s will. Jane Shore is not alone in her willingness to sell her services.

The other nobles and the clergy show the same lack of citizen virtues as Hastings: all are willing to prostitute themselves and their country—and even their souls³⁶—to further their own political interests.

The Narrator’s Bona Fides

Ultimately the narrator proves to be a wise spokesman of tradition who gives voice to thirty-five of the English text’s fifty-nine proverbs.³⁷ He also proves to have the voice of a father of his country—of his *patria*³⁸—who suggests that institutional changes are desperately needed in England.³⁹ What these changes need to be are

³⁰ 320; CTMS 4, n. 3

³¹ 480/18-20.

³² 484/22, 482/15-24; CTMS 52, 72, 74

³³ Note the distinction that Buckingham makes at 472/15-16.

³⁴ 480/8; CTMS 72

³⁵ See, for example, the speech that Memmius makes to the Roman people at *Jugurtha* 31 and 23-29.

³⁶ See CW15, 367. In the English version see pp. 23 and 34; compare 34 and 392.

³⁷ See Brenda M. Hosington’s “More’s Use of English Proverbs in *The History of King Richard III*,” *Moreana* 134 (June 1998): 5-24. No comparable study of the Latin text has been done.

³⁸ Pages 336, 378, 470, 476.

³⁹ To prevent avarice from corrupting the character of citizens into “lawless tyranny,” Sallust similarly reports that the old and experienced “fathers” of Rome “altered their [monarchical] form of

suggested especially by his subtext of Roman republicanism and by his perceptive analysis of the place of marriage in English society. For example, the narrator shrewdly shows the disastrous consequences of politicizing marriage when, with deft irony, he has Edward IV articulate the consequences from his own self-interested point of view: arguing that personal happiness and the goods of marriage cannot possibly be achieved when marriage is seen as a means to increase wealth, power, and foreign alliances.⁴⁰ The narrator's commentary of Jane Shore's premature marriage is another revealing example of this English father's wise perspective.⁴¹ And there is the rant of King Edward's mother aghast that the "sacrosanct majesty" of a prince's blood would "spawn mongrel, degenerate kings" by marrying an apparently virtuous commoner (440). Since the only reputable people in this history turn out to be the commoners, here is powerful irony indeed.

Throughout *Historia Richardi*, however, two related words more than any others emerge as an important measure of both action and character; those words are *fides*⁴² and *amicitia*. More uses *fides* well over thirty times, usually in the context of a critical decision. By doing so, he repeatedly calls to our mind what was for the Romans the basis of all justice.

"*Fides*" or "*bona fides*"—the quality of trust or reliability—was the first virtue in ancient Rome to become a divinity, and the great lawgiver Numa built the temple of Fides in the middle of Rome, right next to the temple of "Jupiter Supreme and Best" (Plutarch "Numa"; *De officiis* III.29.104). "Bona fides" remains, of course, an indispensable legal concept in our own day, "implying the absence of all fraud and unfair dealing or acting" (Smith 207). In fact, all experienced citizens and all true friends know the importance of establishing the "*bona fides*" of those they choose as friends or as leaders.⁴³

Cicero explains that *fides*, understood as "truth and fidelity to promises and agreements" is the very "foundation of justice" (*De officiis* I.7.23) and that as long as Rome ruled by justice and *fides* it "could be called more accurately a protectorate"⁴⁴

government and appointed two rulers with annual power, thinking that this device would prevent men's minds from growing arrogant though unlimited authority" (*Catiline* 6.7-7.3).

⁴⁰ See esp. 442ff.

⁴¹ 424/23-426/3.

⁴² In More's English text, the most frequently used equivalent of *fides* is "trust" and sometimes "special trust" but More also uses "faith" or "good faith."

⁴³ This is a theme dominant in Shakespeare's plays. For example, shortly before King Duncan is murdered by placing too much trust in Macbeth, he complains that there is no way to judge those we can trust: There is no art / To find the mind's construction in the face: / He was a gentleman on whom I build / An absolute trust. (*Macbeth* 1.4.11-14, emphasis added) This inability to judge, that allows the tyrant Macbeth to arise in Scotland, seems to be the same as what allows the tyrant Richard to arise in More's history of England.

Or is it possible that More agrees with Duncan's tragic view of human intelligence? As I imply in this paper, More follows his greatest classical teachers in positing the opposite view—and not only positing that view but in devising a history that exercises and develops the very art that Duncan did not believe to exist.

⁴⁴ Consider the power of repeatedly (at least forty-five times in the Latin edition) calling Richard the "Protector." The best known literary example of similar irony is Shakespeare's rhetorical master Antony calling Brutus an "honorable man."

of the world than a dominion" (II.8.27). *Bona fides* is so important, says Cicero, that the very bond of humanity requires it (III.17.69) and that it is presupposed in "all the transactions on which the social relations of daily life [especially friendship]⁴⁵ depend" (III.17.70). Several times in his book *On Duties*, Cicero presents the famous consul and hero Regulus as the example of a Roman embodying *bona fides*, a person willing to undergo the cruelest torture and death rather than go against fidelity to his word and to Rome. Such a character is strikingly absent from *Richard III*, except for the silent Londoners who refuse to capitulate to Buckingham's or Richard's enticements to their self-interest, and Chief Justice Markham who loses his position as chief justice rather than go along with the King's illegal actions.

The example of Lord Hastings shows how *fides* and friendship affect civic life. When Hastings' fellow nobleman Lord Stanley expresses grave concern about the secret second council Richard has set up, Hastings boasts that he has no fear because he has a friend—a lawyer—of "special trust [*fides*]" who attends that council and supposedly reports everything to Hastings. This lawyer

was Catesby, who was of [Hasting's] near secret counsel and whom he very familiarly used, and in his most weighty matters put no man in so special trust [*fide*], reckoning himself to no man so dear, since he well knew there was no man to him so much beholden as was this Catesby, who was a man well learned in the laws of this land....⁴⁶

Although Hastings is the person who "by special favor" raised Catesby "in good authority" and gave him "much rule" over Hastings' own affairs, the narrator tells us that instead of returning loyalty or *fides* to Hastings, Catesby "trusted by [Hastings'] death to obtain much [more] of the rule" and that trust in his own advantage was Catesby's "only desire...that induced him to be partner and one special contriver of all this horrible treason."⁴⁷

In this context of Catesby's treasonous misuses of *bona fides*, the narrator makes one of his most artful and memorable comments, about Hastings:

Thus ended this honorable man, a good knight and a gentle one, [especially dear to the king on account of his trustworthiness (*fidem*)]⁴⁸, ... a loving man and passing well beloved; very faithful, and trusty [*fidus*] enough, trusting too much [*fidens nimium*]. (45, 421)

The inability to trust wisely is not only a question of individuals like Hastings in this history, but as the narrator tells us, it characterizes England at large as well.

⁴⁵ See Cicero's *De Amicitia* for the important connection between *fides*, *amicitia*, and good political life. 14.49-15.55 uses the example of King Tarquin as the type of character who could not "procure...true friends" and it quotes Tarquin's complaint that he was unable to distinguish "*fidus amicos*" from "*quos infidos*" (15.53). 14.50 points to pride (*superba*) as an especially debilitating character trait. Other passages of special significance for *fides* and *amicitia* are 17.64-18.65 and 23.86-25.96.

⁴⁶ This is a quote from the English version, CTMS 39, but compare the Latin at 404/1-16.

⁴⁷ CTMS 40: 404-06.

⁴⁸ CW 15, 421/5-6.

After Richard has both young princes in his hands, the narrator comments: “For the state of things and the dispositions of men were *then* such that a man could not tell whom he might *trust* or whom he might fear” (37, emphasis added; *confidas*, 398/19). What happened “then” that allowed such a state of affairs to arise? The answer to this question is, of course, the major task of More’s history.

Queen Elizabeth (1437-92) embodies this problem more mysteriously than any other character in the *Historia*. How could the Queen hand over her sick son to their greatest enemy? She has had thorough experience in English ways for forty-six years—nineteen of those as queen. As she points out, her last stay in sanctuary saved the life of her eldest son. How then could she be so trusting, right after she has just eloquently and persuasively invoked recent and past history, English law, church law, and natural law, and her personal experience?

Fides is invoked before, during, and at the end of this most dramatic scene of *Historia Richardi*. Richard begins his ploy by saying that he needs the help of the right intermediary. He says, “I think we should send some venerable and influential emissary to the mother, someone who cares about the king’s honor and the reputation of our order but who also commands some [friendship] and trust (“*amoris*⁴⁹ . . . *et fidei*”) from the queen” (362).

When the Cardinal chooses to do Richard’s business, he introduces himself to the Queen as her “trustworthy and loving *friend*.”⁵⁰ After their spirited debate, she stops and reflects. In the short paragraph just before she decides to hand over her son, “*fides*” is invoked five times in the narrator’s summary. Then, the Cardinal scornfully ends by saying that the Queen “seemed to doubt either their prudence or *good faith* in the matter, their prudence if she thought they were dupes of another man’s perfidy, their *good faith* if she thought they were knowing accessories” (392).

Here the narrative challenges us to review the evidence given, to decide if the Cardinal was simply Richard’s dupe or knowing accomplice. But the narrative poses a problem even more difficult next.

At this climactic moment of decision, why does Queen Elizabeth so readily capitulate? Why does she not do more to protect her young son, a son who is sick and specially dependent on her as both mother and queen? Why does she not at least make a public scene, standing up for the clear legal and natural rights that she has so well articulated? Why does this Queen not combine the passion of a mother with the passion of a queen concerned for the good of her country in protecting her sons, even to death? Every prompting of nature and all her considerable experience of the past should have led the Queen to lay down her life to protect her young sick son. Does she fail because of *fear* (354)? Yet she shows extraordinary power and passion in confronting the Cardinal and these nobles. Does she suffer from *poor judgment*, something she has already lamented in letting herself be convinced to send a much too small guard for her elder son (351)? Yet her speech has just set forth all the difficulties, dangers, and protections with extraordinary clarity. Is she *momentarily blinded* in a pressured moment of haste? Or is she *deceived* by the Cardinal’s appeal to trust or *fides*? These are questions that the narrator forces us to ask, leading us to probe deeply the motives at work (in ways that Shakespeare does

in each of his plays).

The most puzzling example of misdirected *fides*,⁵¹ therefore, is Queen Elizabeth, who decides to turn over her son to Richard—“the lamb . . . to the wolf” (20)—but this issue of *fides* runs throughout the entire history.⁵²

Besides *fides*, other significant Latin terms point to the narrator’s preoccupations, terms such as *superbia* (pride) and *virtus* (virtue).

Superbia or pride is a major theme that More raises in *Richard III*, *Utopia*, and his poetry. Throughout his life, in fact, pride is perhaps the most persistent and central theme that he explores. It is also an important theme in Sallust. Sallust says that he chooses the subject of *Jugurtha* because it is the Roman people’s first resistance to the “*superbia*” of the nobles (5.1), a *superbia* that was fostered by prosperity and unchallenged power (41.3) and that subsequently gave rise to “parties and factions” (41.2-3). In *Jugurtha*, Marius argues that yearly elections prevent the growth of *superbia*. In *Catiline*, the narrator reports that wise fathers of the Roman *res publicae* changed from monarchy to a republic, to prevent rulers from degenerating into pride and tyranny (*superbiam dominationemque*, 6.7).

How *superbia* is treated in More’s *Utopia* and *Epigrammata* would be a separate study. But in *Richard III*, however, consider the quote that “long-confirmed power [*potentia*] turns many princes to pride [*superbia*]” (318/20-21), and King Edward’s deathbed lament that *superbia* was the “odious monster” causing the major troubles of his reign (334).

As for the importance of virtue: Looking back over hundreds of years of Roman history, Sallust found himself asking “what quality in particular had been the foundation of so great exploits” (*Catiline* 53.2). His answer? “After long reflection I became convinced that it had all been accomplished by the eminent virtue of a few citizens” (53.4). Sallust’s *Catiline* begins by praising virtue, which, the narrator says, alone is “splendid and lasting” (*Catiline* 1.4), and which would allow kings and rulers (*regum atque imperatorum*) to be “as potent in peace as in war” and “human affairs would run an even and steadier course” (*Catiline* 2.3), rather than “turmoil and confusion” which result “when sloth has usurped the place of industry, and lust (*lubido*) and pride (*superbia*) have superseded self-restraint and justice” (2.5).

The Work of Citizenship

The great mystery of More’s laboring for many years on his *Richard III* without publishing it becomes clear when we consider the republican lessons of civic liberty which are proposed, the same lessons set forth by Sallust. Thomas More’s project in *Richard III* is similar to Sallust’s: to educate civic leaders to that level of virtue and citizenship needed to accomplish the great and most difficult work of justice and peace. It is an education that aims at the type of judgment and character lacking in

⁵¹ In his deathbed speech, King Micipsa advises Jugurtha to “prove virtuous” by fidelity (*fide*) with his fellow Numidians since “neither armies nor treasure form the bulwarks of a throne, but friends” who are won “by duty and trust” (“*officio et fide*,” *Jugurtha* 10.4-6).

⁵² Early on, for example, the narrator asks us how it is that Richard was able to triumph over all the bonds of nature and society, of loyalty, good faith, and law to achieve his will, when “every prompting of either nature, fidelity [*fides*], or gratitude should have moved [Richard] to lay down his own life to thwart any enemy of” these young princes (321).

⁴⁹ See Cicero’s explanation of the relationship between *amor* and *amicitia* in *De Amicitia* 8.26-9.32.

⁵⁰ He also appeals to “both the realm’s public interests . . . and *her own private interests*” (378, emphasis added).

Hastings and the Queen.

To the careful reader, i.e., to the reader who has learned to exercise sharp-sighted prudence, *Historia Richardi* reveals dramatically and with penetrating irony how a nation fails in self-government; in doing so, *Richard III* also points to clear principles and highly valuable prudential advice about good self-government; it points—just as the Roman historian Sallust did—to the importance of self-governing institutions such as the senate, but even more importantly to prudent citizens capable of governing themselves for the good of the commonwealth.⁵³

More never published *Richard III* during his lifetime,⁵⁴ not just because it implicated powerful political families in egregious corruption, but because it shows in brilliant relief the major weaknesses of a primitive form of hereditary government doomed to self-destruction. To show this claim more clearly would require a study of *Richard III*'s companion pieces, *Utopia* and the Latin Epigrams that were published with the 1518 edition of *Utopia*. For example, one of More's original poems on politics, modeled in part on Greek sources, is "On Two Beggars: One Blind, One Lame" [Epigram 32].

There can be nothing more helpful than a loyal friend [fidus amicus], who by his own efforts assuages your hurts. Two beggars formed an alliance [a legal term in the Latin, foedera contraxere, commonly used in treaties for trade or peace—the same term used in *Utopia*] of firm friendship [solidae amicitiae]—a blind man and a lame one. The blind man said to the lame one, "You must ride upon my shoulders." The latter answered, "You, blind friend, must find your way by means of my eyes."

In this poem, human deficiency—the fact that we are all either blind or lame in some way—is not a reason for sadness or bitterness. Rather, an individual's deficiency is presented as the occasion, the opportunity, for loyal friendship, and for politics marked by free conversation. Yet the last lines promise more: "The love [amore] that unites, shuns the castles of proud kings [superborum regum] and rules in the humble hut." Love that unites requires humble rule by law.

Perhaps the speaker of this poem and the narrator of *Richardi Historia* agree about the requirements of human happiness and civic justice.⁵⁵

⁵³ This prudence, for example, explains the odd but effective institution of sanctuary—effective in view of the oft-repeated tyranny of English monarchs.

⁵⁴ One reason More would be able to face his own death with such admirable calm and good humor was that he studied England's history so profoundly that he accepted his death as the cost for strengthening England's tradition of self-government under law.

⁵⁵ Compare, for example, 378/14 and 402/27-404/17 with the language and themes of Epigram