

Buck and the Elizabeth of York Letter: a Reply to Dr. Hanham

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I FIND interesting Alison Hanham's article on Sir George Buck's report of the Elizabeth of York letter,¹ which proposes a plausible suggestion of the letter's true intent. I am glad my work on Buck's original manuscript² has led the way to further examination of the crucial historical and literary matters it contains.

It appears, however, that I did not make clear in the introduction to it my intention in editing Buck's *History*. I did not, as Dr. Hanham says, *fail* to represent Buck's revisions. I *decided* not to. The practical reasons for this will be apparent to anyone examining the original manuscript: the damage to it is extensive, and Buck interlineates heavily. Most of his revisions are stylistic, often for the worse, often incomplete. To have indicated all of these would have produced a text totally unreadable and hence unpublishable. Since Buck was not an author of literary merit, his revision process is not instructive. Where Buck's revisions appeared to me of substantive value, I did not ignore them. It seemed to me of paramount importance to produce a text which could be published and read, indicating only where the additions to make the text readable had been editorial: Buck's great-nephew's or mine. My decision to handle the text in this way was made in concert with C. A. J. Armstrong, whose work on Ricardian texts is well known. It was my intention to clarify by making the decision I did, not to obscure. No edition has ever been intended as a substitute for an original, and my decision achieved its purpose in making the *History* accessible so that scholars such as Dr. Hanham (and I myself³) could be alerted to the importance of the holograph's content and go back to it for more detailed work. Where Buck's revisions appeared to me significant, I have not ignored them. The one on which Dr. Hanham bases her case is not significant, so I did ignore it.

Dr. Hanham claims the letter 'did not . . . indicate that Elizabeth nourished a desire to marry her uncle'. It is not clear how she achieves this certainty, since Buck's is the only known report of it, and he believes it did so indicate. Buck's report of the Elizabeth of York letter needs to be considered in its context. Dr. Hanham ignores the context and is thus led into an assumption that Buck's revisions alter the sense. They do not. Buck's choosing to include the letter at this precise point in his book makes clear his interpretation of the letter. He cannot *ever*, after deciding to include it here, have understood it to refer to

anything but a proposed marriage between Richard and Elizabeth. For he places it in the midst of a discussion of just that. Buck is following Cornwallis⁴ closely here, citing the rumour that Richard caused Anne's death so he could marry elsewhere, and answering it by arguing that he could have achieved his end as well as by a divorce. Elizabeth's letter does not help to prove that Richard did not murder Anne. It merely supports Buck's statement that there was a marriage plan afoot, and that, contrary to assumption, this idea was generally approved, by the lady herself among others. Buck encountered the rumours about a marriage plan not only in Cornwallis' vague allusion, but also in the Croyland Chronicle,⁵ which mentions Elizabeth by name. He has also come across a letter which seems to him to clinch this rumour. Instead of suppressing it because it might support an argument for Richard's wishing Anne out of the way, Buck is a good enough scholar to include and discuss it. He answers it by saying that Elizabeth is naive in thinking a man could not, by divorce, marry while his first wife lived.

This section is in the hand of Buck's scribe, indicating that what we have is not a first draft, but an attempt at fair copy. We have no means of knowing what was in his notes, or of knowing what changes he had made *before* this attempt at fair copy. This is the farthest stage Buck can get away from his notes. If there was a stage at which he grew to believe, or convinced himself, that the letter referred to this marriage plan, we have no evidence of it. Certainly there is none in his revisions. It is not, as Dr. Hanham says, 'obvious that in Buck's original version of the letter there was no reference whatever to marriage'. We have no original version and can deal only with the version we have. Buck makes revisions in his own hand, trying to clarify, and, as usual, he overloads. Thus he adds to 'autograph' the words 'originall' and 'written with hir own hand'. Similarly, he *probably* added 'in the cause of the marriage', to remind the reader what subject was under discussion, or possibly in an attempt to represent the letter more closely. We have only the interlineated words 'in the cause of' before burning of the margin truncates Buck's phrase. I took 'of the marriage' from Egerton 2216, the closest manuscript copy of the original before its partial destruction. Egerton and subsequent copies by the same editor say, 'in the behalf of the marriage propounded between them'. There is no place in the original for 'propounded between them' — this is an editorial addition to try to make sense of Buck's syntactical tangle. Buck's damaged insertion ends in '>ge', which is the end either of 'marriage' or 'kinge'. He wrote either, 'she prayed him . . . to bee a mediator for her to the K<inge> \ in the cause of <the marria>ge/' — which leaves a syntactical muddle, since the words following modify 'king'; or 'she prayed him to bee . . . a mediator for her to the K<ing> \ in the cause of <her marriage to the Kin>ge/' — an undecided revision requiring editorial clarification. Re-examining the manuscript recently, I have decided that the former is much more likely, both on grounds of space and on the basis of what Buck's great-nephew did to make clear what he understands as Buck's meaning. Therefore, I wish to emend the reading on page 191 of my text to 'in the cause of [the marria]ge to the k<ing>'. The wording is unchanged — my reading still retains Buck's uncertainty and ambiguity while solving the syntactical problem. I have only altered my view of what words were represented by the fragments before and after the destroyed portion.

Buck has included no caret to indicate whether he meant ultimately to say 'she prayed him . . . to be a mediator for her to the king in the cause of the marriage', or 'she prayed him . . . to be a mediator for her in the cause of the marriage to the king'. Seeing both possibilities open might lead us to a plausible conjecture of what the letter may really have said: something, perhaps, like, 'Dear Norfolk, I place my trust in you above all because of my father's love for you, your very faithful service to him and to the king now reigning, and your love and service ever shown to King Edward's children. Thanking you for your many courtesies and friendly offices, I pray you now to be a mediator for me, in the cause of my marriage, to the king, who is my only joy and maker in this world. I am the king's true subject in heart, in thought, in body and in all, Elizabeth. P.S. The better part of February is past, and I fear the queen will never die.' She might have omitted commas around 'to the king'.

Such a letter alludes to matters understood between Elizabeth and Norfolk. If her marriage plans had not received the king's sanction, it would have been impolitic to be more specific. Had she explained more fully the subject for mediation and her wish that the queen would die, Buck might have interpreted her letter otherwise than he has. If her letter is anything like what seems to emerge from Buck's report of it, it is clear how he could have misinterpreted it, and also how his syntactical confusion over 'mediator to the king' and 'marriage to the king' might have been generated by it.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1987), pp.398-400.
2. Sir George Buck, *The History of King Richard the Third*, edited with introduction and notes by A. N. Kincaid, Gloucester 1979, reprinted with corrections, 1982.
3. A Revels Office Scrap Deciphered. *Notes and Queries*, vol. 19 (1972), pp.461-463, and Sir Edward Hoby and 'K. Richard': Shakespeare Play or Morton Tract, *Notes and Queries*, vol. 28 (1981), pp.124-126.
4. Sir William Corwallis the Younger, *The Encomium of Richard III*, edited by A. N. Kincaid, with introduction by J. A. Ramsden and A. N. Kincaid, London 1977.
5. *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459-1486*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, London 1986, pp.174-177.
6. British Library MS. Cotton Tiberius E.x, f. 238v.
7. British Library MS. Egerton 2216, f. 267. Lineation is not preserved in this quotation.
8. Bodleian Library MS. Malone 1, f. 273.
9. University of Toronto, Fisher Rare Book Library, f. 273v.