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Review Essay: Piccolomini, Manfredi. *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide during the Renaissance*

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The royal manor and Liberty of Havering-atte-Bower in Essex contained some 16,000 acres extending from marshes on the Thames north to Romford, fourteen miles east of London. In 1964 Marjorie Keniston McIntosh began working in extensive primary sources for a doctoral thesis on the manor's prominent Cooke family of Gidea Hall. In the early 1970s she turned to study the relationship between the crown and the manor. In *Autonomy and Community: The Royal Manor of Havering, 1200–1500* (Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986) she traces the emergence of a local aristocracy, a commercial and individualistic society, and the process by which the tenants developed responsibility for local government. The vigorous, socially cohesive community actively resisted crown encroachments, especially in judicial matters.

In the volume under review, McIntosh continues her analysis in greater detail for the period of 1500–1620. Her point is that by 1620 the close-knit community had fallen apart. The decline of the manorial court charted the collapse of resistance to crown advances. In 1500 the court, as a major agency of community life, punished crimes and enforced community standards for personal behavior; in 1620 that historic role had vanished, and litigious residents took their cases to the Essex quarter sessions and the impersonal central courts in Westminster. Many factors, McIntosh suggests, promoted the change: Proximity to London facilitated an influx of new political, economic, and religious ideas and practices. Over time the gulf widened between town and country, rich and poor, educated and unlettered. Women found themselves squeezed out of economic activities and limited to their households. Political and social power subtly moved from a group of over one hundred families to a few privileged landlords.

The preceding summary cannot do justice to the content of six very long chapters, eight appendices, and fifty-three tables that detail the composition and dynamics of Havering's community structure. McIntosh compliments broad developments with vignettes of the manor's incidentally interesting persons (Beatrice Davis, the eleven-year-old servant who became an occupational casualty when she drowned in a watering trough in 1560 while on an errand for her master [p 99]) as well as major figures (Sir William Ayloffe, who complained in 1610 that he did not have a pew in the parish church appropriate for his station as head of one of the community's leading families [p 199]). Researchers will find these and similar details, as well as general themes, quite accessible through the table of contents and index, although persons unfamiliar with Havering should begin with the overview of the manor in the *Victoria County House of Essex* (1978). The infrequency of comparisons with other manors or larger questions of community identification and autonomy is a disappointment. On its own terms, however, *A Community Transformed* is a major contribution to manor and village history and should be in every major research library.

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Piccolomini, Manfredi. *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide during the Renaissance*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1991. xiv + 142 pp. \$24.95.

In this slim volume, Manfredi Piccolomini traces the figure of Brutus as it appears in Renaissance literature from Dante to Shakespeare. The image of the historical Brutus was transmitted to posterity by such classical authors as Lucan, Seneca, and Plutarch, who saw Brutus's assassination of Julius Caesar as a noble but futile deed, doomed to fail despite its high moral purpose. This apparently fixed image went through some notable transformations between the fourteenth century and the seventeenth. Dante condemned Brutus to be gnawed in Lucifer's monstrous jaws for betraying his benefactor and rebelling against God's historical design. Leonardo Bruni redeemed Brutus, lauding him as a defender of the Roman republic against a tyrannical usurper: from the most despicable of sinners, Brutus suddenly became the greatest of heroes, a role he played repeatedly on the Renaissance stage. For Shakespeare, Brutus was the lone moral actor in the brutal world of Roman politics, a person of such high principles that even his enemies recognized him as 'the noblest Roman of them all'.

All this is well known, of course, and Piccolomini's brief remarks on these major writers are neither novel nor penetrating. Even when he turns to more obscure dramatizers of Brutus' deed — Marc Antoine Muret and Jacques Grévin in France, Orlando Pescetti in Italy — he is not particularly incisive or informative. He generally remains descriptive rather than analytical, talking grandly and vaporously about Brutus as a figure 'caught in the struggle between free will and destiny, expediency and morality, freedom and absolute power, the real and the ideal' (p 116), and in the end he tells us rather less than we already know about Brutus in the Renaissance.

This failure is due in part to a refusal to ponder what might have caused the transformations he describes, adopting instead 'a view of culture and human events interlocked in a circularity where cause and effect are practically interchangeable' (p xiii). Thus, to cite only the most conspicuous example, Piccolomini offers no explanation other than 'fashion' (pp 62–4) for Bruni's transfiguration of Brutus from sinner to hero. Though he includes Hans Baron in his acknowledgments, Piccolomini says not a word about Baron's explanation of this revaluation of Brutus as part of a new defense of civic values and republican liberty, articulated by Bruni and other civic humanists in the course of the long and bitter conflict between the Florentine republic and the duke of Milan.

Baron's approach, which insists that ideas are the product of particular historical settings and respond to identifiable events and concerns, runs contrary to Piccolomini's intent to show 'how often life imitates art' (p xi). To support this claim, Piccolomini merely describes a number of assassination plots, whether or not Brutus was invoked by the conspirators as an inspirational model. Such slipshod argumentation and cavalier disregard for evidence is characteristic of a work in which we are told that Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* (composed 1401–1405) 'found an almost immediate echo' (p 61) in Cristoforo Landino's *Commentary on the Divine Comedy* (written in 1481) and that the revival of classical antiquity, identified by Burckhardt as a hallmark of the Italian Renaissance, 'has been overlooked or forgotten by his many followers in the revival of Renaissance studies' (p 63).