

SHAKESPEARE'S POSSIBLE USE OF POLYDORE VERGIL'S *ANGLICA HISTORIA* IN *HENRY VIII*

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The sources for Shakespeare's plays are collected in Geoffrey Bullough's famous volumes, but, as far as *Henry VIII* is concerned, one of them – Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* – seems to have escaped scrutiny both by Bullough and by the editors of various modern editions of the play. On the contrary, Hay (translator of the *Anglica Historia*, 1950, and Vergil's biographer) suggested, as long ago as 1952, that Shakespeare very probably read Vergil's history when working at his last chronicle play. Following this hypothesis, the paper examines some points in the dramatic text where Vergil's influence may be caught, either mediated through Holshed's history or derived from a direct reading of the Italian's work. The sequence where this seems to happen in a fairly consistent way is iv.ii, when Queen Katherine's appears on stage for the last time. Here the comparison between Vergil's text and Shakespeare's play seems to shed light towards the identification of the origin of certain details in the play which have so far gone unnoticed or underestimated.

L'utilisation probable de l'*Anglica Historia* de Polidoro Virgili dans *Henry VIII* de Shakespeare. Il est notoire que les sources des drames shakespeariens sont recueillies dans les volumes très célèbres – et à juste titre – édités par Geoffrey Bullough. Cependant – du moins en ce qui concerne *Henry VIII* – l'une d'entre elles a, semble-t-il, échappé à Bullough, tout comme aux éditeurs des éditions modernes de la pièce : il s'agit de l'*Anglica Historia*, par l'écrivain Urbinate Polidoro Virgili. Ce n'est tout de même pas un hasard si Denis Hay (biographe de Virgili, qui traduisit également, en 1950, l'*Anglica Historia*) signalait, dès 1952, qu'il est fort probable que Shakespeare ait puisé de nombreux éléments dans l'histoire de Virgili, à côté des matériaux que lui ont fournis les chroniques de Hall et de Holinshed, pour la rédaction de cette tragédie historique. À partir de cette hypothèse, l'article analyse certains passages dans lesquels on peut percevoir l'influence de Polidoro Virgili – que ce soit à travers la médiation de l'ouvrage de Holinshed ou par la connaissance directe de l'Urbinate de la part du dramaturge. La séquence dramatique où ceci est le plus évident est la iv.ii, au moment de la dernière apparition sur la scène de la reine Katherine. C'est dans ce cas que la confrontation directe entre des passages de Virgili et le drame de Shakespeare fait ressortir l'origine de certains détails textuels qui, jusqu'à présent, n'ont pas été pris en compte par la critique.

The sources for Shakespeare's plays are collected in Geoffrey Bullough's famous volumes,¹ but, as far as *Henry VIII* is concerned, one of them – Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* – seems to have escaped scrutiny both by Bullough and by the editors of various modern editions of the play. Neither does Foakes (editor for the Arden series, 1964) nor Margeson (editor for the New Cambridge, 1990) point to the possible presence of borrowings from Polydore Vergil. On the contrary, Hay (translator of the *Anglica Historia*, and Vergil's biographer) suggested, as long ago as 1952, that Shakespeare, since “he was faced with the problem of accounting for the divorce of Catherine of Aragon and the marriage of Anne Boleyn in such a way as

¹ Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957-75). The sources of *Henry VIII* are collected in vol. iv (1962).

to leave both Henry and Anne in as spotless a condition as possible”, found a “way out of the dilemma” in Vergil. Besides observing that “Catherine of Aragon and her noble consort are made the dupes of Wolsey’s tortuous ambition and Henry’s passion for Anne Boleyn becomes the main factor in the destruction of the overweening cardinal,” Hay adds that “In this play, therefore, [...] the dramatist was to hammer into the heads of succeeding generations the main elements of Vergil’s narrative.”²

Book XXVII of the *Historia*, the one dealing with Henry VIII’s reign, was published only in the final edition of 1555,³ therefore it could not be a source for Halle (1542 and 1548), but was known to Holinshed, who often mentions it both in his text and in the marginal captions, and it was – this is what I suppose – available to Shakespeare.

I do not intend to question why the above-mentioned editors have overlooked Hay’s words and have not even mentioned or tried to dismiss his hypothesis, but I would like to see which aspects of Polydore Vergil’s history could have pushed Vergil’s biographer to maintain his position.

Polydore Vergil, a humanist from Urbino who had already published some works in Italy, was sent to England by Pope Alexander VI as subcollector of Peter’s pence in 1502 and lived there, as a Catholic (perhaps a cool and mild one), through the whole development of English problematic history of the first half of the sixteenth century till after the accession of Mary to the throne. He was strongly biased against Cardinal Wolsey because the latter had caused his

² Denys Hay, *Polydor Vergil. Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), viii-ix.

³ The *Anglica Historia* was first published in Bâle in 1534, but it contained only the first 26 books. A second edition (1546) did not contain the chapter devoted to Henry VIII either. The final book seems to have been finished during the reign of Edward VI, since the last paragraph explicitly mentions the young king: “Edouardum sextum, qui nunc regnat, adolescens equidem certe natus ad imperium, ad virtutem et prudentiam, qui summa ingenij indole praeditus, mirificam cunctis populis sui expectationem facit” (691, lines 3-5; “Edward VI, who now reigns, a youth certainly born to govern, to show his virtue and discretion, who, endowed by nature with excellent wit, makes all peoples expect great things from him”).

All translations from Latin are mine; for the complete translation of the last three books of *Anglica Historia* cf. Polydore Vergil, *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil. A.D. 1485-1537*, trans. by Denys Hay (Camden Series, London: Royal Historical Society, 1950). I would like to thank my colleague Girolamo De Vanna for lending me his precious copy of the *Anglicae Historiae Libri vigintiseptem* (Basileae: apud Thomam Guarinum, ANNO M.D.LXX) and for allowing me to keep it for a long time.

imprisonment for a few months in the Tower in 1515. Vergil's hate of Wolsey is clearly manifest in the *Anglica Historia*, where the historiographer never forgets continually to highlight Wolsey's ambition, pride, viciousness and covetousness.⁴ For example, Vergil clearly attributes to Wolsey the unjust condemnation of Edward of Buckingham in 1521, by describing in detail the intrigues the cardinal made use of in order to accuse someone he disliked. Vergil, on this occasion, describes Wolsey so much "ardens odio, idque saturandi humano sanguine cupidus" (665: "burning with hate and desirous of satiating it with human blood") as to devise the whole tragic hoax against the duke of Buckingham through Charolus Cheneuettus (Charles Knyvet), a former servant of the duke's. To show Holinshed's indebtedness to Polydore Vergil suffice it to see that the Latin sentence just mentioned is translated almost literally by Holinshed, when he presents Wolsey as "boiling in hatred against the duke of Buckinham, & thirsting for his bloud."⁵

It is well known that this episode of English history is dealt with in I.i, I.ii and II.i of *Henry VIII*, where Shakespeare follows Holinshed to the utmost and where (as elsewhere), according to Foakes, "some speeches are little more than Holinshed [...] versified."⁶ The dramatist's semantic choices attributed to Buckingham at the beginning of the play when speaking of Wolsey, though, must not be overlooked: the cardinal is said to be a "holy fox / Or wolf, or both (for he is equal rav'nous / As he is subtle, and as prone to mischief / As able

⁴ Hay observes that Vergil's "attitude of uncritical abuse makes suspect every passage in which Wolsey is mentioned" (*op. cit.*, 154). In spite of this, Vergil – as will be clear later – is paraphrased or translated by Holinshed.

⁵ Raphael Holinshed. *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1587), 862, col. 2, l. 53-4.

⁶ R. A. Foakes, "Introduction". In William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Methuen, 1964), xxxvii. The attribution to either Shakespeare or Fletcher of the various parts of the play has long been debated with often diverging results: from G. Wilson Knight, for example, who saw the play as completely Shakespearean (*The Crown of Life*, London: Methuen, 1969 (1947), esp. 256-72), to Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, who consider the presence of Shakespeare certain only in six scenes (cf. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1193). But cf. R. A. Foakes's introduction to the Arden edition of the play for a discussion of the different positions up to 1964, esp. xv-xxviii (quotations from the play are drawn from this edition), and John Margeson's more recent comments in William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, ed. J. Margeson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-14. For the purposes of the present paper, the problem of authorship is irrelevant, therefore the name "Shakespeare", as referring to the author of *Henry VIII*, is used without any hint at defining a specific attribution of the lines quoted.

to perform't)" (I.i.157-61). These words show that, even if Holinshed – once again – is the nearest source of Shakespeare for this episode, it was Vergil who not only gave Holinshed the right words to speak of the cardinal, but also offered Shakespeare a complete and continually adjourned picture, as it were, of the cardinal's defects and vices throughout the whole Book XXVII of his *Anglica Historia*.

Another instance of derivation of the Shakespearean text from Holinshed which is relevant to the hypothesis of this paper is offered by the allusion to Dr Pace in II.ii. Shakespeare makes Cardinal Campeius comment on Dr Pace's absence from Wolsey's service with the following words:

They will not stick to say you envied him,
And fearing he would rise (he was so virtuous)
Kept him a foreign man still, which so griev'd him
That he ran mad and died. (II.ii.126-9)

The passage seems to come straight from Holinshed, who observes that the cardinal, after raising Stephen Gardiner, appointed him "in the roome of doctor Pace, the which being continually abroad in ambassages and the same oftentimes not much necessarie, by the cardinals appointment, at length he tooke such greefe therewith, that he fell out of his right wits" (907, col. 1, l. 22-7). But Holinshed's borrowing from Vergil is total for this passage and acknowledged by the English author in the marginal gloss (here as in many other cases). Vergil describes Dr Pace's case in this way:

cuius [Gardiner's] locum apud eum tenebat Ricardus Pacaeus, sed is legationibus frequentioribus, & iis quidem nonnunquam minus necessariis ab Volsaeo datis, ut diutius a latere regis abesset, oppressus, pene est exilio affectus procul a patria, ex quo tantum molestiae animo cepit, ut paulo post interdum deliraret.⁷

In itself, this does not prove any direct link between Vergil and Shakespeare, because Shakespeare might also have reproduced another passage from the *Chronicles*, where Holinshed first introduces the subject of the relationships between Dr Pace, Wolsey and the king.

⁷ 687, l. 23-7: "Richard Pace had his [Gardiner's] position near him [the king], but he – oppressed by the too frequent and sometimes truly unnecessary embassies on which he was sent by Wolsey in order to keep him long far from the king – much suffered because of the exile from his country, which he bore so badly in his soul that a short time afterwards he went mad."

After praising Dr Pace (who is said to be “a right worthy man”, 871, col. 2, l. 76; “learned”, “indued with many excellent good gifts of nature”, 872, col. 1, l. 1-2), the historian adds that he was also

highlie in the kings favour. [...] But the more the prince favoured him, the more was he misliked of the cardinall [...] so that he procured that this doctor Pace under color of ambassage, should be sent forth of the realme, that his presence about the king, should not win him much authoritie and favour at the kings hands. (872, col. 1, l. 3-11)

Therefore, it is clear that Shakespeare first looked at his Holinshed for his own passage. Nevertheless, it might also be possible that he, without having to connect two passages that in Holinshed are 35 pages far apart, used Polydore's shorter and more compact version, which embeds both the clue to Wolsey's malicious acting and Dr Pace's rising in the king's favour.

In Vergil, furthermore, Wolsey's responsibility for Dr Pace's dismissal is quite clear, much more and especially in much harsher words, than in Holinshed, due perhaps to the compression of causes and effects in a short passage. In the play, Campeius directly mentions the Cardinal's “envy”, thus showing Shakespeare's knowledge of Wolsey's malicious involvement in the event. While Holinshed remains the main source for this episode in the play, it cannot be excluded that Shakespeare's condensation derives from the *Anglica Historia*.

It is particularly for the character of Katherine, however, that Shakespeare may have looked directly at Vergil's highly sympathetic attitude towards the queen, even if the humanist's history is not so rich in detail as Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

On considering Shakespeare's main English sources, *i.e.* Halle and Holinshed, it is relevant to see that the playwright seems to prefer the former to the latter when dealing with Queen Catherine. In fact, in Halle's text Shakespeare found a more tender picture of the queen than that of Holinshed, especially when Halle reports Henry's words about her during his oration to his subjects, delivered in order to sedate rumours about the divorce spread in the community before the trial:

For I assure you all, that beside her noble parentage of the whiche she is discended (as you wel know) she is a woman of moste gentlenes, of most humilitie and buxumnes, yea and of al good qualities apperteignynge to nobilitie, she is wythoute comparyson, as I this xx yeres almost have had

the true experiment, so that if I were to mary agayne if the mariage myght be good I would surely chose her above al other women.⁸

When writing about the sessions of the trial held at Blackfriars in 1529, Halle again transcribes the king's words about Catherine, which include the praise of her "womanhode, wysdom, nobilitie, and gentlenes" (fol. 182^r, l. 30-1). In order to create his own Katherine, therefore, Shakespeare found help and inspiration surely more easily in Halle than in Holinshed, who, on the occasion of the trial (after Catherine's departure from the court), relates Henry's words in a much cooler and more detached way:

For as much (quoth he) as the queene is gone, I will in hir absence declare to you all, that shee hath beene to me as true, as obedient, and as conformable a wife, as I would wish or desire. She hath all the vertuous qualities that ought to be in a woman of her dignitie, or in anie other of a baser estate, she is also surelie a noble woman borne, hir conditions will well declare the same. (907, col. 2, l. 34-41)

But if Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* was available to the playwright, as I suppose it was, Shakespeare may have found in it even a more favourable characterisation for the queen. In Vergil's treatment of these years of Henry VIII's reign, though, not many details are recorded, but some are relevant just for what they say about Catherine. In his revengeful attack against Wolsey, Vergil attributes to the cardinal the rising of Henry's doubts about the legitimacy of his marriage, explaining everything out of Wolsey's variance with the queen. At the same time he depicts Catherine as a gentle lady, ready to amend his enemy's defects and evil behaviour with mild words:

Porro ei in mentem venit mutare dominam, & unam alteram quaerere, quam aequé vita ut moribus sibi similem esse volebat: quanquam Catherina regina hominem non offendebat, non laedebat, sed eius tantum malos oderat mores, quos ut continentia emendaret, identidem benigne monebat.⁹

He also shows a Wolsey well aware of Henry's interest in Anne Boleyn, and therefore afraid that his previous plans to marry his king to the

⁸ Edward Halle. *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancastre & York* (London, 1550), fol. 180^v, l. 10-13.

⁹ 685, l. 9-13: "Later he thought to change his queen and to look for another whom he wanted to be similar to himself both in life and mores: although Queen Catherine did not offend or wronged the man, but she only hated his bad habits much and always admonished him benevolently to amend them with continence."

princess of France might miscarry (“Volsaeus homo sagax animadvertit Henricum adiicere oculum cuidam puellae nomine Anne filiae Thomae Bulleyne vicecomitis Rochefordiae, quae reginae inserviebat: tum ille permagna sollicitudine affectus est, ut qui prospiceret futurum, uti eam rex in matrimonium duceret, si divortium fieret”).¹⁰ If the embedded negative meaning of “sollicitudo” is not well grasped, though, the last clause in the passage might also be interpreted as a purpose one, thus affecting the understanding of Wolsey’s attitude. According to this interpretation, then, the clause might mean that Wolsey took great care “in order that the king married her [Anne]...” In this case, Wolsey himself would appear guilty of directing the king’s attention towards Anne Boleyn as a possible wife. It is a wrong interpretation of the Latin text and in contradiction with what Vergil writes some pages before,¹¹ certainly, but Shakespeare’s “small Latin” is well known. Did Shakespeare have this latter interpretation in mind when he wrote Wolsey’s words to the king in 1.iv.101-2, that is when the cardinal ushers Henry and the lady dancing with him (Anne) into a more private room where “There’s fresher air”, thus ambiguously acting as pander? It is known that Anne Boleyn was not present at that entertainment at Wolsey’s palace to which Holinshed refers (921-2): why, then, did Shakespeare telescope the events (the disguising and Anne dancing with the king), locating them well before any hint in the play to Henry’s conscientious troubles? Is Shakespeare perhaps saying – obliquely¹² – that Henry VIII fell in love with Anne Boleyn first, and that only because of that the whole business of the divorce started?¹³

¹⁰ 688, l. 17-21: “Wolsey, that sly man, perceived that Henry addressed his eyes to a certain girl named Anne, the daughter of the Viscount of Rochford, who was one of the queen’s maids: then he was taken by very great concern, like a man able to foresee the future, that the king might marry her, in case of divorce.”

¹¹ Suggesting Francis’s sister as a suitable wife for Henry, Wolsey describes her in these words (686, l. 8-10): “Est [...] mulier praeter caeteras digna tuo matrimonio, soror Francisci regis Gallorum vidua, quae uxor fuit ducis Alansonij, aetate & virtute quamfloreantissima” [“There is a lady worthy of becoming your wife more than all others; she is the sister of Francis king of France, an extremely noble and deserving young widow, who was the duke of Alançon’s wife.”

¹² In a play which has been considered highly apologetic, these hints would be a further proof of Shakespeare’s ambivalent treatment of English history (especially if one considers that the subtitle of the play is *All is True*), here represented in its many-faceted reality and from different points of view. Cf. Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) for a thorough discussion of Shakespeare’s practice and of his often “polyphonic” results in dealing with historical sources.

¹³ Pugliatti, in an article written before her volume on Shakespeare’s histories, suggested that “In the play Katherine undergoes an indirect course change: the slightly varied

Of course, as any conjecture about how the playwright exactly worked and how he used his sources, these hypotheses are destined to remain unanswered. But they do come to one's mind.

Henry's words during the trial as referred by Vergil – "Habeo in matrimonio Catherinam uxorem mihi charissimam, ob eius pariter animi singulares virtutes, atque generis nobilitatem"¹⁴ – seem to be poorer than Halle's and nearer Holinshed's. Therefore they do not help to prove Shakespeare's indebtedness to Polydore Vergil at this point of the play, in spite of Vergil's strong siding with the queen. Actually, the passage from Polydore Shakespeare appears to be most influenced by is the historian's description of Catherine's style of life after the divorce, with which he deals in IV.ii:

Ea post divortium a viro factum, se contulit in comitatum Bedfordiensem, ad villam regiam, quam appellant Kymbalton, locum minus salubrem, ubi *vera patientia mirifice armata*, vitam degebat sanctam.¹⁵

What emerges from this passage are the attribution to Catherine of the virtue "patience" accompanied by the adjective "true", and the use of the adverb "extraordinarily". Besides, the verb qualifying the possession of this virtue ("armed with") indicates that Vergil wanted to underline the queen's attitude with a certain emphasis. Foakes, the New Arden editor, marvels at the creation of the character Patience as the queen's maid, because, he writes, this "is wholly an invention" (134, n.) and "a notable addition to the sources" (lix). In effect, the only use of the word as related to Catherine near her death appears in Polydore Vergil, a source unmentioned either by Bullough or by Foakes. Apart from relating the Spanish ambassador's visit to her during her last week of life and the content of her letter to the king, Holinshed does not say anything about how Catherine lived after the

sequence of events which shows the king's falling in love with Ann Boleyn previous to the divorce acts, besides acquitting Wolsey, makes the queen a victim of the king's whims, rather than of any serious moral or political scruples of his." ("Dalla cronaca al dramma storico: *Henry VIII* di Shakespeare." *Linguistica e letteratura*, XI, 1-2, 1986, 19-45, 40; my translation). My suggestion is, however, that Shakespeare, on the contrary, insinuates the cardinal's guilt.

¹⁴ 686, l. 8-10: "In marriage I have my wife Catherine, very dear to me because of both the extraordinary virtues of her soul, and the nobility of her family."

¹⁵ 690, l. 6-9; my italics: "After the divorce caused by her husband, she went to the village of Bedford, to a royal mansion called Kymbalton, a less healthy place, where she led a saint life, extraordinarily armed with true patience."

divorce. Halle, in his turn, with very few words informs his readers that “on the viii. day of January folowing [he has just talked of a procession held in London, in November 1535, for the recovering of the king of France] dyed the princes dowager at Kymbalton and was buried at Peterborough” (fol. 227^r, lines 3-5).

It is certainly true that the word “patience” occurs many times in the play, especially referred to people fallen from their high positions. This happens to Buckingham, according to the comment of the First Gentleman in whose words the duke “show’d a most noble patience” during his trial (II.i.36). Even Wolsey, once at the bottom of his career, answers Cromwell’s invitation “Good sir, have patience” with “So I have” (III.ii.458). As far as Catherine is concerned, Shakespeare ‘arms’ her with a character of that name: for him it must have been easy to create a character, nearly allegorical, from a noun. Patience as a quality becomes a person, and the verb “armed with” from Vergil is transformed into actions: Patience accompanies the queen to her last hour, helps her and, literally, leads her by the arm (the initial SD in IV.ii says: “Enter Katherine Dowager, sick, led between Griffith, her Gentleman Usher, and Patience, her woman”).

IV.ii also includes the narration of the content of a letter written by Katherine to Henry, told personally by the queen while speaking to the Spanish ambassador:

KATH. [the letter] in which I have commended to his goodness
 The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter
 (The dews of heaven fall thick in blessing on her)
 Beseeching him to give her virtuous breeding
 (She is young and of a noble modest nature,
 I hope she will deserve well) and a little
 To love her for her mother’s sake, that lov’d him,
 Heaven knows how dearly. My next poor petition
 Is that his noble grace would have some pity
 Upon my wretched women, that so long
 Have follow’d both my fortunes faithfully,
 Of which there is not one, I dare avow
 (And now I should not lie) but will deserve
 For virtue and true beauty of the soul,
 For honesty and decent carriage,
 A right good husband (let him be a noble),
 And sure those men are happy that shall have ‘em.
 The last is for my men, they are the poorest
 (But poverty could never draw ‘em from me),
 That they may have their wages duly paid ‘em,
 And something over to remember me by.

If heaven had pleas'd to have given me longer life
 And able means, we had not parted thus.
 These are the whole contents...

(iv.ii.131-54)

The use of reported speech, which Shakespeare transfers to his play, is already in Holinshed's brief mention to this letter:

she [...] caused one of hir gentlewomen to write a letter to the king, commending to him hir daughter and his, beseeching him to stand good father unto hir: and further desired him to have some consideration of hir gentlewomen that had served hir, and to see them bestowed in marriage. Further, that it would please him to appoint that hir servants might have their due wages, and a yeeres wages besides. (939, col. 2, l. 24-30),

But concerning the whole content of the passage and the tone that passes between its lines, there are some details which seem to suggest that the playwright knew how Polydore Vergil had treated the subject. It is worth mentioning that Vergil, who speeds his narrative quickly to its end and condenses the events of the years 1533-37 in less than two pages (in the edition I consulted), devotes more than a half page to Catherine's last moments. Furthermore, it is a very extraordinary fact that nearly a third of a page is occupied by the text of Catherine's letter, thus denoting the historian's affectionate attitude to the queen.

Vergil reproduces the whole text of the letter to Henry, after a short introduction:

At Catherina sexto post die graviori morbo affecta, cum animo praesentiret mortem adventare, ancillam non indoctam iussit binas scribere literas eodem exemplo, unas ad regem, alteras ad Eustachium [Caputius], quas ipsa dictavit, in hæc verba:

Domine mi rex marite semper charissime, salve. Iam advenit hora mortis meae, in quo temporis puncto, amor facit ut te paucis admoneam de salute animae tuae, quam debes cunctis mortalibus rebus antepone-re, neglecta prae ea omnis corporis cura, propter quam & me in multas miserias, & te ipsum in solitudines plures coniecisti: sed hoc tibi ignosco, ac Deus tibi ignoscat, tam velim, quam precibus piis oro. Quod superest, commendo tibi filiam communem nostram, in quam, quaeso, officium illud paterne totum conferas, quod ego a te alias desideravi. Praeterea precor summe, ut ancillas meas respicias, easque suo tempore *bene* locare nuptiis placeat, quod multum non est, cum non sint nisi tres, & dare meis ministris stipendium debitum, atque in unum etiam annum ex tua gratia, benignitate, liberalitate futurum, *ne deserti*

*vel inopes esse videantur. Postremo unum illud testor: Oculi mei te solum desiderant. Vale.*¹⁶

The letter to Eustachius is only briefly summarised in the following two lines of the text, while direct speech is used for Catherine's letter to Henry, which is literally quoted.

Nearly all of the first half of this letter is devoted to greeting the king and to reminding him of the queen's love and of the sorrows which followed their separation (a part totally omitted by Holinshed). In Vergil's transcription of the letter Catherine's remembrance of her past love is reinforced by the queen's initial vocative "My lord, king and husband always very dear to me" and, especially, by the ending words "my eyes desire you only". This point is kept by Shakespeare, disseminated as it were in several semantic choices such as "chaste loves" (l. 132), and "beseeching him [...] a little / To love her [Mary] for her mother's sake, that lov'd him, / Heaven knows how dearly" (l. 134-8). Furthermore, the final touch where Katherine expresses her yearning for a different conclusion of events ("If heaven had pleas'd to have given me longer life / And able means, we had not parted thus", l. 152-3) seems to embed the passionate closure of the letter in Vergil's text.¹⁷

In the second part of the letter one can detect some further suggestions that the playwright may have considered worthwhile transferring to his play. The historical Catherine asks Henry to see to

¹⁶ 690, l. 17-29; my italics: "But Catherine, on the sixth day after [Eustachius Caputius's visit], affected by her illness even more severely, when she felt death approaching, ordered one of her maids who was not illiterate to write two letters, one to the king, and the other to Eustachius, which she dictated herself using these words:

My lord, king and husband always very dear to me, greetings. Now the hour of my death has arrived, and at this point of time love makes me remind you briefly of the safety of your soul, which you must consider before all other mortal affairs, after abandoning all preoccupations for your body because of which you threw me into a lot of misery and yourself into much anxiety. But I pardon you all this, and I would so much like God to pardon you, that I invoke him with pious prayers. For the rest, I entrust to you our mutual daughter, on whom I beseech you to bestow all the paternal care that I once I asked of you. Besides, I highly pray you that you take care of my maids and, in due time, you see to them being properly married; this is not much, since they are but three. And I also beseech you to give my servants their wages, and also for the year to come, out of your grace, benignity and liberality, in order for them not to appear abandoned and poor. Finally, I merely declare this: My eyes long for you only. Vale."

¹⁷ "Her [Katherine's] reception of the Emperor's ambassador Caputius, her petitions and the simplicity of her last words keep close to the sources, but are raised to tragic dignity", writes Bullough (*op. cit.*, vol. IV, 447), but the only source mentioned in this case is Holinshed.

her maids' marrying "bene", that is according to their status, and recommends that the due wages be paid to her stewards so that they do not appear abandoned and poor ("deserti vel inopes"). Holinshed avoids these nuances completely, which, on the contrary, seem to have been picked up by Shakespeare when he makes his Katherine say first that each of her maids deserves "A right good husband (let him be a noble)", and then that her last request concerns her men: "they are the poorest / (But poverty could never draw 'em from me)" (iv.ii.146, 148-9). The idea of the servants being poor is in Vergil and in Shakespeare, and so is the request to the king about "good" marriages for the maids. Of course the dramatist's derivation from Polydore Vergil is artistically elaborated, but these two small details also seem to support the hypothesis that Shakespeare used the *Anglica Historia* directly as one of his sources, if not the primary one.

The English history written by a Catholic Italian humanist appears to have been read by the playwright alongside the more "orthodox" English chronicles. In a play whose first title was *All is True*, Shakespeare shows his relative independence from officially well-established Tudor sources in his search for "truth," both poetical and historical. To this play, too, what Roy Rosenstein has recently written about Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the playwright's knowledge of *Anglica Historia* can be applied: "Shakespeare rejects the often linear and monolithic stances of the opposing camps along with any teleological determinism that almost inevitably evolves from historical hindsight."¹⁸ Certainly for dramatic purposes, but these can hardly be separated from a view of historical facts as continually interpretable many-sided events.

Hay's suggestions, then, about a possible use of Vergil's *Anglica Historia* in *Henry VIII* seem to be verified and other Shakespearean histories (apart from *Richard III*, already deeply investigated with Polydore Vergil as a parallel and *Richard II* in Rosenstein's fresh analysis) might undergo scrutiny in search of derivations from the Italian's history. The long and valuable scholarly tradition concerning Shakespeare's sources might not be affected in its well-established tenets, but this line of research might add at least a small tessera to our

¹⁸ Roy Rosenstein, "From Polydore's *Richard II* to Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Ricardi Misera Mors et Mores", in *Polidoro Virgili e la cultura umanistica europea*, ed. Rolando Bacchielli (Urbino: Accademia Raffaello, 2003), 109-42, 114.

knowledge about the infinite variety of the dramatist's marvellous ability in manipulating his raw material.¹⁹

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¹⁹ The use of sources has been considered as a proof of authorship especially by Baldwin Maxwell (*Studies in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), who maintains that "a comparison of *Henry VIII* with its sources argues strongly against Fletcher's participation" (58). The subtle elaboration of passages from Vergil's *Anglica Historia* might be a further proof of Shakespeare's authorship for the scenes dealt with in the present article.