'So mutable is that sexe': Queen Elizabeth Woodville in Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia* and Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*

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The institutions of kingship and queenship both underwent major changes during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Beginning during the reign of Edward IV and reaching their zenith under Henry VIII, attempts were made to curb the power of aristocratic factions - one of the main forces behind the Wars of the Roses - and consolidate it in the person of the king. As a result, the queen's public role as mediator and intercessor was minimized, and although she could still wield power in the shadows, as it were, there no longer existed a framework within which she could do so openly. Official histories from this period, particularly those dealing with the fifteenth century, become a textual inscription of these administrative changes by manipulating the queen's role within the narrative. This is especially evident in the case of Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV, who is depicted in two very different, almost contradictory, ways in Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia* and Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*.

When Vergil was commissioned at the end of Henry VII's reign to write a history of England from its mythological founding to the sixteenth century, his aim was to weave the Tudor dynasty into the larger tapestry of national history. Vergil, already well known in the intellectual circles now called humanists, was an ideal choice, and the *Anglica historia*, first printed in Basle in 1534, was written with the intention of being disseminated both within England and abroad. Following the Ciceronian model, he sets forth in the first book of the *Historia* his desire to be as impartial as possible: that the historian 'should neither abhorre the discoveringe of falsehoode, neither in anie case alowe the undermininge of veritee, neither to gyve suspition of favor nor yeat of envy'. That being said, and though he displays scepticism of popular legends such as King Arthur and the founding of Britain by Brutus of Troy, Vergil's rendering of the fifteenth century is tailored for the Tudor regime by way of contextualization of source material. He employs, to use Hayden White's term, a carefully constructed providential narrative wherein the sins of wicked kings are visited on succeeding generations - for instance, Henry IV's deposition of Richard II is reflected in the dethroning of his grandson Henry VI by the house of York - until Henry Tudor arrives to save England from Plantagenet corruption. It falls to later writers to attribute Henry's own usurpation of the throne to the ending of the Tudor line with the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, although Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (c.1513) uses its own deceptively providential narrative to highlight contradictions and ambiguities within itself, and thereby question both political philosophies and the relationship between rhetoric and history within humanist circles.

Pauline Stafford, in her groundbreaking study of early medieval queenship, remarks that 'great men, or would-be great men could always be attacked through their wives and mothers. As easy targets, royal women became scapegoats for the actions of their men'. Vergil is no exception, as the *Anglica historia* is a deeply political text, informed equally by his royal commission and his own intellectual desire to emulate classical historians who not only related the course of events but also attempted to articulate the motivations behind them.

This double discourse of political expediency and literary convention leads to a contradictory representation of Elizabeth Woodville, as well as the other consorts of this period. How does Vergil negotiate between his inherited ideas of womanhood and the political nature of his chronicle? How does he manipulate historical context and rhetorical conventions to fit a queen - who, unlike a king, does not have a clear role in the political upheavals of the late fifteenth century - into his providential narrative? The idea of emplotment - the encodification of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures - is a key factor in the representation of women, particularly queens, who are already deeply inscribed into a symbolic framework.

It is not surprising that women do not play a central role in Vergil's narrative, or that when they do appear, he makes a conscious effort to contain them, to subvert their lives as it were, to his larger purpose. For instance, when describing the death of Katherine de Valois, widow of Henry V, Vergil focuses not on Katherine herself, but on her secret marriage to Owen Tudor, on whose lineage and good qualities he lingers, dismissing the queen as 'yonge in yeres, and thereby of lesse discretion to judge what was decent for her estate'. It would not be unreasonable to assume that, had Katherine's lack of discretion not ultimately produced Henry VII, Vergil would have had no reason to even mention her. Laura Barefield draws attention to the disruptive effect of women on chronicle essays in cultural criticism (Baltimore, 1978). 4 P. Stafford, Queens, concubines and dowagers: the king's wife in the early Middle Ages (London, 1998), p. 3. 5 White, *Tropics of discourse*, p. 83. 6 P. Vergil, Three books of Polydore Vergil's English history, ed. H. Ellis (London, 1844), p. 62. All other references to this text will be given parenthetically.
histories, what she calls ‘gendered moments’ that ‘turn the text toward subordinate stories, typically characterized as more literate, analytical, or romantic’. Vergil’s particular use of one of these gendered moments in the account of Katherine succeeds in suppressing what on the surface appears to be her agency — a second marriage of her own free will — by literally changing the subject to Owen, and by extension Henry, Tudor. This pattern of discomfort and eventual containment by the careful deployment of specific generic tropes repeats every time a new queen consort appears. Marguerite of Anjou, for example, is given a narrative based on that of de casibus tragedy. Elizabeth Woodville’s life fits the paradigms of courtly romance and tragedy just as well as, if not better than, Margaret’s — in fact, she was the subject of a courtly poem in terza rima written by Antonio Cornazzano for Bianca Maria Sforza, duchess of Milan, where her refusal to surrender to Edward’s advances earns her the crown. Vergil, however, takes a different and more negative path. In the Historia, from the outset, she is characterized as an interloper, entering the narrative when Edward’s ‘mynde alteryd upon the soddayn’ and he decides against a politically advantageous French match to marry a widow ‘of meane caulynge’ who had already borne two sons (116, 117). Vergil condemns the marriage, claiming Edward ‘was led by blynde affecction, and not by reule of reason’, and emphasizes the dissatisfaction of the nobility, particularly the earl of Warwick, formerly Edward’s staunchest ally (117). Although he records a ‘more fabell of the common people’ that the cause of the dissension between Edward and Warwick was not Edward’s own marriage, but that of his sister Margaret to the duke of Burgundy, it is only as a means of dismissing that theory. Rather than serving as mediator and peacemaker, the traditional roles meant for a queen, Elizabeth becomes the source of discord in Vergil’s narrative. All trappings of romance are removed, leaving only an imprudent choice made by a young and foolish king. Furthermore, his focus on Edward’s licentiousness — that he ‘wold readly cast an eye uppon young ladyes, and loove them inordinately’ — as insufficient reason for his betrayal of Warwick further denigrates Elizabeth by association, displacing even her prerogative as queen to be set apart from other women (117). The next brief mention of Elizabeth — fleeing into sanctuary at Westminster in 1471 while ‘great with chylde’ — furthers this careless characterization of Edward, who is depicted as having more or less abandoned his wife and children to Warwick and his allies (133). Where previous chroniclers painted her as heroic, patient and a model of constancy, Vergil spares her a single line, where he relates the birth of a son.

7 L.D. Barefield, Gender and history in medieval English romance and chronicle (New York, 2003), p. 4.
8 Dominic Mancini’s Usurpation of Richard III (1483) and More’s History of King Richard III relate similar stories of the courtship. See John Bruce (ed.), The history of the arrival of Edward IV in England (London, 1838), p. 17. Her ‘langowr and angwich’ is also the subject of several verses in ‘On the recovery of the throne by Edward IV’ in T. Wright

And even that son can be seen as a mere pawn in a larger story, his eventual death being the price of Edward’s own morally suspect actions in 1471. Elizabeth therefore continues to be a disruptive, if strangely passive, force in male-dominated narratives.

After the death of Edward IV in 1483, she becomes more prominent, if no less passive. Rather than being the impassioned antagonist of Richard of Gloucester — the role both earlier chroniclers and Thomas More fashion for Elizabeth — Vergil saves that place for Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry Tudor, until Henry himself arrives in England, Elizabeth becomes the helpless dupe of Richard’s treachery, first taken by his ‘promysing on his behalf (as the proveber is) seas and mountaines’, and later fleeing once more into sanctuary to protect herself and her children (173). The implicit scorn in Vergil’s narration damns Elizabeth’s apparent inability to see through Richard’s numerous ‘fayre wordes and persuasione’ to the point that she gives up her younger son to his death despite ‘forseing in a sort within hir selfe the thing that folowyd furthwith after’ (178). Elizabeth is placed in a narrative double bind in this scene, sandwiched as it is between two invented speeches of Richard’s, both of which invoke her, first as a ‘womanshe disease’ and later as a witch (177). Vergil condemns her inability to resist Richard’s words while repeating propaganda that accused the Woodvilles, and particularly Elizabeth, of necromancy and other forms of witchcraft. Earlier chroniclers, such as the Second Crowland Continuator and Robert Fabian, do not include those accusations in their accounts, which again begs the question of Vergil’s larger agenda. His narration becomes almost indistinguishable from Richard’s voice when speaking of Elizabeth; considering his portrayal of Richard as a villain on par with Tacitus’ Tiberius or Sallust’s Catiline, the fact that he is willing to agree with him at all speaks for his unwillingness to portray Elizabeth positively.

Elizabeth’s role in Richard’s seizure of the throne is also displaced in Vergil’s narrative. Rather than Richard claiming kingship based on Edward’s invalid marriage to Elizabeth — the motivation described in the Titulus regius of 1484 — Vergil focuses on the rumour that he had proclaimed Edward’s own illegitimacy. Although an argument could be made that Vergil only wants to highlight Richard’s ‘wyked mynde’, his willingness to sacrifice even his mother, a ‘woman of most pure and honorable life’, for his ambition, he could easily have followed Fabian and mentioned both accusations (184). When viewed in the context of Elizabeth’s other absences, it appears that Vergil’s interest is keeping her (ed.), Political poems and songs relating to English history, 2 vols (London, 1861), ii, pp 271–82 at p. 281.
11 Parliament rolls, xv, pp 15–16.
narrative deliberately submerged. Several recent biographical studies have mentioned Vergil's portrayal of Elizabeth, although none appear to have considered his motivations beyond simple misogyny. 13

Though it would be easy to declare Vergil a misogynist and leave it at that, there are understandable political reasons for his unwillingness to broach the subject of Elizabeth Woodville in any detail. Gabrielle Spiegel, in her analysis of French vernacular chronicles, contrasts the distant past with near-contemporary history; the former can, from a safe distance, be viewed as 'an idealized and stable world' while the latter is 'inconclusive [...] since those events were incomplete and harbourd as yet unknown consequences'. 14 Elizabeth herself had only died in 1492, and her actions during the years 1483–5 remain largely undocumented. Although Vergil's depiction could be his equivalent of a conniving Roman matriarch to Richard's classical tyrant — as Rebecca Bushnell points out, 'the image of woman as improper authority dominates the aristocratic vision of corruption-ridden empire' — Elizabeth's bizarre passivity belies such an interpretation. 15 It is also unsurprising that Vergil chooses to ignore this rather unflattering use of employment wherever he can, and conceals his political point by portraying Elizabeth as the epitome of inconstant womanhood, an example to be avoided and a careful contrast to Margaret Beaufort.

Elizabeth's moment of realization is exaggerated almost to the point of parody after the deaths of her two sons. Her 'lamentable shrykes made all the house ring, she stryk hir brest, teare and cut hir heare', and later 'next unto God and hir soone, thought hir self most injured' (189). Her selfishness and inconstancy, paired with that of her late husband, become her defining characteristics, and it is left to Margaret to assume the mantle of the mother fighting for her children. Later, when Elizabeth allows her daughters to return to Richard's court in exchange for yet more 'fayre promises', Vergil transforms this into a general condemnation of women: 'so mutable is that sexe' (210). And yet, he never returns to this claim. The next two women who appear however briefly in the narrative, Margaret Beaufort and Elizabeth of York, are both portrayed positively. At the end of Elizabeth Woodville's life, in the 1513 manuscript Vergil once again invokes inconstancy, though this time it is 'the inconstancy of human affairs, that one may regularly see those who were yesterday accounted most wealthy and fortunate, today leading lives of misery'. 16 Elizabeth's narrative ends with her effective exile in Bermondsey Abbey, 'deprived by the decree of the same council of all her possessions' for the crime of having made peace with Richard of Gloucester (AH 18–19). Once again, she is passive, even described in the passive tense and used as 'an example to others to keep faith' (AH 19). This is not so much de casibus tragedy as one of Giovanni Boccaccio's negative exempla in De mulieribus claris, deployed to examine how the wicked are punished. In what has now become a pattern, he abandons her immediately after this homily 'to revert to our narrative', not of Elizabeth but of Henry VII (AH 19). It is left to Thomas More to find in Elizabeth a worthy tragic subject.

Another compelling political reason for Vergil's undertcutting of Elizabeth Woodville can be seen in his treatment of Elizabeth of York. The younger Elizabeth is repeatedly invoked in books XXII and XXIII, but always in the context of marriage contracts, first unsuccessfully to the Dauphin Charles, and then to the future Henry VII. The emphasis is not on her as a human being, but as what Pierre Bourdieu calls a 'pledge or liquid asset, capable of earning symbolic profits'. 17 However, as Paul Strohm points out in his analysis of the marriage of Henry IV and Joan of Navarre, the potential queen's 'ability to cross boundaries and frontiers, to represent different categories of material and symbolic wealth' can be difficult to control, and this is the case with Elizabeth of York. 18 The symbolic profit for Henry VII is nothing less than the throne of England, and since Vergil is writing to legitimize the Tudor dynasty, rather than that of the Yorkists, he must keep the latter carefully contained. Elizabeth Woodville's agency, evident in sources both before and after Vergil, is completely undercut by his emphasis on her inconstancy as a symptom of her sex. He carefully manipulates medieval conceptions of womanhood to serve what is ultimately a political end. Women are merely disruptions in his narrative, whose absences and silences denote not a lack of a story, but the deliberate submersion of that story by a historian who had a very different agenda in mind.

Sir Thomas More, who moved in Vergil's circles and whose work is juxtaposed with Vergil in the chronicles of Richard Grafton and Edward Hall, offers an alternative interpretation of the events of 1483 in the unfinished History of King Richard III, where Elizabeth Woodville is given not only the potential for agency, but also a voice through invented speeches. More's History has a complicated textual history that has been dealt with in detail elsewhere. 19 I am

concentrating on two of the many manuscript and printed versions: the English edition printed by More’s nephew William Rastell in 1557 and edited by Richard Sylvester in 1963, and a Latin version from MS Fr. 4996 at the Bibliothèque Nationale, translated by Daniel Kinney in 1986. As numerous critics have made clear, the English and Latin versions are not translations of one another, but two distinct texts, most likely intended for different audiences. I am privileging the English version since it is the more widely circulated of the two by way of Richard Grafton and Edward Hall, but will be including occasional material from the Latin version as it helps to illuminate More’s complex view of women and queenship, as well as his careful use of voice and generic conventions to question historical representations of both. His text, even more so than Vergil’s, relies upon carefully emplotted narratives, but unlike Vergil, whose use of emplotment serves to displace characters and events that might detract from the overall political movement of his work, More uses them to problematize and subvert what on the surface appears to be a straightforward meditation on the subject of tyranny.

Crediting More with manipulating genre begs the obvious question: what genre is the History of King Richard III? Alison Hanham calls the Latin and English versions ‘translations of the same account, adjusted to suit the requirements of two different genres.’ The Latin version carries what Hanham calls ‘a proper classical dress’, making its Greek and Roman antecedents clearer, as well as including explanations for its international audience of various offices and customs. The English version is clearly intended for a wider audience that may not be as familiar with mythology, but is conversant with recent history and local political structures. But this still does not answer the question of More’s overall generic intentions. His attitude, evidenced in Utopia as well, is one of playfulness and irony, and though the dramatic structure of the History has been remarked upon by many critics, the reasons behind More’s textual choices remain unclear. Elizabeth Story Donno calls it ‘a display piece with the object either of praise or of blame, designed primarily to delight by means of its ingenuity and artifice’; in other words, while More’s text is superficially a political narrative, it deconstructs itself, and one of the ways in which this decon-

given parenthetically as L); D. Womersley, ‘Sir Thomas More’s History of King Richard III: a new theory of the English texts’, Renaissance Studies, 7 (1993), 272–90. Alison Hanham, ‘Honoring a history: Thomas More’s Revisions of his Richard III’, The Review of English Studies, 59 (2008), 197–218, disagrees with some of the points made by these critics and provides additional information about More’s processes of revision. 20 Hanham postulates that the version of the History interpolated into Grafton’s 1543 continuation of hardness’s chronicle is the most final of More’s revisions, rather than Rastell’s 1557 edition, which Sylvester, Kinney and David Womersley support. The sections relevant to this paper are relatively consistent between the 1543 and 1557 printings, so I will be using Rastell’s edition. 21 Hanham, ‘Honoring a history’, p. 199. 22 Ibid., p. 200.

struction is manifested can be found in the shifting generic conventions surrounding the figure of Elizabeth Woodville.23 Sylvester and others have remarked upon the similarities between the History and the Annales of Cornelius Tacitus, particularly the account of the death of Augustus and the rise of his stepson Tiberius, ‘in both plot and pervading atmosphere’.24 Both begin with the death of a powerful and popular ruler, introducing the major players grouped around his deathbed. The only woman present is Augustus’ ambitious and unscrupulous wife Livia who is suspected of the deaths of several of her son’s rivals as well as that of her husband.25 Elizabeth and her faction are first mentioned in the context of the death of George of Clarence, and although More places final responsibility on Edward himself, the association of Elizabeth with ambition and political intrigue remains. He qualifies Elizabeth’s actions by claiming that ‘women commonly not of malice but of nature hate them whence their housebands loue’ (R 7, emphasis mine). Much like Vergil’s throwaway remark about women’s mutability, More never returns to this point, at least not in his narrative voice. Richard and Buckingham both allude to Elizabeth’s ‘frowardenesse’, but given the text’s emphasis on the ‘interplay of oration, speech and action which focuses on the disparity between events and words’, it is difficult to view any words attributed to them without scepticism (R 27, 28).26 What, then, is the purpose of attributing Elizabeth’s motivation to her female nature? It, along with the many references to rumours and common knowledge, serve to create what Donno calls ‘a misasma of uncertainty and doubt’ throughout the narrative.27 Elizabeth’s grudge against Lord Hastings, for instance, stems from jealousy – ‘sche thought hym secreete familier with the kyngge in wante contempnye’ – while her kindred begrudge his being given the captaincy of Calais (R 11). Tacitus’ Livia is similarly described as irrationally jealous and full of caprice, so it is possible that More is following the classical model of ‘ambitious and unprincipled women fighting for power for themselves, their husbands, or their children’.28 The education of the future Edward V at the hands of his mother’s relatives owing to the ‘driffe […] not unwisely devised’ by Elizabeth ‘whereby her bloode might of yeouth be rooted in the princes favour’ seems to support this characterization, with its focus on Elizabeth’s manipulation of policy (R 14).

However, the text itself undermines such a simplistic reading of Elizabeth, just as it undermines the initial representation of Edward IV as a glorious monarch. Although a superficial contrast is set up between Edward and Richard,
More demonstrates that ambition, the 'pestilente serpente' of Edward's deathbed speech, infects every character in the *History* (R 12). Tacitus too, as the *Annales* progress, reveals that Augustus was not as golden as initially painted; More's seemingly careless references to Edward's 'over liberall dyet' and 'flesheye wantonnesse', and the later description of all three sons of Richard of York as 'statelye of stomacke, gredye and ambicioue of authoritie' put Edward's position in the narrative in question almost immediately (R 4, 6). The contradictions in Elizabeth's representation arise later in the text, after Edward's death and Richard's ascension to the throne. Richard uses the Woodvilles' purported influence as 'the foundation of all his unhappy building', claiming they 'brought to confusion somme [...] as necere of his royal bloode as we', namely Clarence (R 14, 15). Although More does not explicitly exonerate Elizabeth here, Richard's use of and equal abuse of her reputation destabilizes it. This refashioning of Elizabeth into the victim of political circumstance is underlined in a short but effective description of her flight into sanctuary. Amidst the 'heuinnesse, rumble, haste and business, carriage and conuenyeanc of her stiffe into Sainctuary [...] all on mennes backes, no manne vnoccupied', More paints a pathetic image of Elizabeth 'alone alowe on the rishes all desolate and dismayde' (R 21). When the archbishop of York tries to comfort her by giving her word from the lord chamberlain Hastings, her reply that 'hee is one of them that laboureth to destroie me and my bloode', when seen in context of Hastings' support of Richard even though they did not bear 'eche to other so much love, as hatred bothe unto the Quenes parte is understandable, and in fact prefigures her apparently solitary stance against Richard (R 22, 15). Even the additional suggestion later in the Latin version of Elizabeth's 'nighly speeches to prejudice the king' against Hastings must be viewed in light of his own treatment of her throughout (L 419). It is the appropriation of the narrator's misogynist rhetoric by Richard and Buckingham, to the extent that in the Latin version, Richard likens Elizabeth to Medea, willing to 'even sacrifice her own children to take vengeance on those whom she hated', that calls that same characterization into question (L 367).29

The climactic scene of Elizabeth's resistance is her debate with the archbishop of York over Richard's demand that she allow her younger son to be removed from Sanctuary. Before this, the negative rhetoric reaches fever pitch: Richard speaks of her 'malyce, frowardnesse, and foly', while Buckingham claims 'here is no manne that wil bee at warre with women' and dismisses Elizabeth's fears (R 27, 28). Though he concedes her 'shrewde witte', it is only to evoke the threat that she might find some means to send her son out of reach.

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'So mutable is that sexe' (R 29). His speech on the subject of sanctuaries associates Elizabeth implicitly with 'theues, murtherers, and malicious heynous traitours' (R 30). Buckingham, according to Donno, 'instead of a serious analysis of the issue [...] offers a mock-serious one', since his goal has nothing to do with sanctuaries themselves, but merely extends to removing Edward's son, and it is testament to his *eloquentia* that he convinces both the clergy and the nobility.30 Only Elizabeth stands firm in her refusal, no longer evoking the malicious Livia, but instead the widowed Agrippina, whose words supposedly quelled a mutiny 'which the imperial name had failed to check'.31 More's choice to emplot Elizabeth into a narrative of *mater dolorosa* and tragic victim diverges completely from Vergil. The length and detail of the sanctuary scene draw attention to Elizabeth's wit and rhetorical skill, and more importantly, to the fact that she, unlike nearly every other named character in the *History*, sees through Richard completely. 'Troweth the protector,' she demands, 'that I parceue not whereunto his painted processe draweth?' (R 38) It is not fair promises of mountains that defeat this Elizabeth but the narrative – the 'painted process' – in which she is now trapped. As a king's widow at the mercy of a usurping tyrant, words are her only recourse, and though she succeeds in ripping apart Buckingham's argument, it falls on empty ears.

First, she appeals to them as a mother, claiming the boy has been ill and there is 'none y' either knoweth better how to order him [...] or is more tenderly like to cherish him, then his own mother that bare him' (R 35). When this attempt, drawing on traditional notions of the queen's duties as mother of the heirs to the throne, fails, she turns to more unconventional means, overturning all of Buckingham's derisive and misogynistic remarks. Rather than being driven by irrational fear, it is Elizabeth's knowledge of 'men so gredye withowe any substauncial cause to haue him' that lead her to withhold her son (R 37). She presents Richard's motives very clearly: 'I fere to put hym in the protectours handes that hath lys brother already, and were if bothe fayede, inheritor to the crown' (R 39). Although Donno uses this moment to claim that Elizabeth herself 'views the younger prince as a political pawn', I would argue that she is merely appropriating Richard's words in the hopes that she might win over her persecutors.32 Despite her arguments, which the narrator and the reader clearly know to be correct, she fails. While Lee Cullen Khana claims that this is 'the failure of history and of life, not the failure of art', More appears to be drawing attention to the defeat of Elizabeth's rhetoric by 'men who are able to naturalize their own aggression even as they slander hers, because the fictions of gender sustain the voices – and the entitlment – of men'.33 Although this is less of a

generic shift than a shift in perception, the re-emption of Elizabeth strips her of actual agency even as it celebrates her verbal power. Her words, unlike Richard's or Buckingham's, do not alter the course of events since the council has already decided that if she refuses, they will forcibly remove her son from sanctuary.

Although More also includes the accusation of witchcraft levelled against Elizabeth, he turns it against Richard by clever use of context. Richard's dramatic unveiling of his withered arm in the council meeting and his subsequent railing against 'that sorceres and that other witch of her counsel shoris wife' is met with misgiving on the part of the other council members (R 48). More adds:

For wel thei wist, that ye queane was to wise to go aboute any such folye. And also if she would, yet wold she of all folke leste make Shoris wife of counsaile, whom of al women she most hated, as that concubine whom the king her husband had most louted. (R 48)

Unlike Vergil, who uses this moment to allow his narrative voice to merge with Richard's, More contrasts Richard's intentions with his results, and the council's unwillingness to believe what is obviously 'but a quarel' leads to Richard's loss of temper and Hastings' violent execution (R 48). It is the first instance in which a staged moment turns against Richard; the more famous is Buckingham's offer of the crown after Ralph Shaa's sermon that More later calls 'Kynges games, as it were stage players' (R 81). It is significant that this first moment allows More to dismiss what was a common accusation against powerful women as a political tool.34

Elizabeth's final appearance in the History is in flashback, one of Laura Barefield's 'subordinate stories' emerging from a debate about the supposed bastardy of Edward's children, and carries with it a definite generic shift, one that allows Elizabeth's rhetoric to incite political change.35 More's version of the marriage of Edward and Elizabeth owes a great deal to the romance tradition of Antonio Cornazzano, repeated in Mancini's Usurpation. However, even if More had read either of them - an unlikely proposition given their limited circulation - he keeps the basic frame while changing the representation of Elizabeth herself. Vergil deliberately ignores this aspect of the marriage since it does not fit with his portraits of either Elizabeth or Edward, but More uses it to support his depiction of a wise and rhetorically powerful Elizabeth. By this point, More has already digressed from his 'remembrances of great matters' to discuss Jane

Shore, and acknowledged that some might think 'this woman to sleight a thing, to be written of' (R 59). He is therefore well aware of his movement between genres, from political narrative to, in the case of Elizabeth's courtship, romance.

In keeping with this shift in genre, he also highlights aspects of Elizabeth's persona that Vergil omits or downplays. She is 'a widow borne of noble blood, specially by her mother, which was Duches of Bedford', and was once a lady-in-waiting to Margaret of Anjou (R 60). When she appears before Edward to recover her jointure after her first husband's death, he 'beheld, & hard her speke' and only then 'waxed enamored on her' (R 61, emphasis mine). This is far from Vergil's blind affection. Elizabeth herself is a model of 'contencyne and chastitiie', though More allows that she denies Edward 'so wisely, & with so good maner, & wordes so well set, that she rather kindled his desire than quenched it' (R 61). Hanan Yoran draws attention to this line, pointing out the difference between More's equivocal language and Mancini's more straightforward version.36 The Latin manuscript supports that assertion. It includes a second meeting between Elizabeth and Edward where she 'pretended not to know what he wanted' and manipulated his own language to achieve the same end as in the English version: 'as she wist herself to simple to be his wife, so thought she her self to good to be his concubine' (R 61, L 439).37 Edward, unused to being 'so stifferly sayd naye', decides to 'set her vertue in the stede of possession & riches' and marry her (R 61).

More addresses the objections to Elizabeth's suitability for queenship interspersed implicitly through Vergil's account, but he specifically does so through the voice of the duchess of York, all of whose arguments are shot down by Edward. First, it is 'not princely to mary hys owne subject' who brings nothing to the marriage; secondly, Elizabeth's previous marriage would leave the king 'defouled w' bigamy' (R 62). More's generic shift is evident in Edward's responses; he claims that marriage ought to be undertaken for love rather than 'temporal aduantage' (R 63):

As for possibilitie of more inheritance by new affinity in estrange landes, is ofte ye occasion of more trouble then profite [...] That she is a widow & hath alredy children, by gods blessed Ladie I am a batcheler & have some to: & so ech of vs hath a profe ye neither of vs is like to be barren. (R 64)

Within the confines of a romance, Edward's willingness to thrust aside diplomatic advantage for love is worthy of applause rather than approbation. The

34 Witchcraft accusations were levelled against Queen Joan of Navare in 1419, against Eleanor Cobham, duchess of Gloucester, in 1441, and hinted in connection with Anne Boleyn in 1536. 35 Barefield, Gender and history, p. 8.

36 Hanan Yoran, "Thomas More's Richard III: probing the limits of humanity", Renaissance Studies, 15 (2001), 514-37 at 521. 37 This equivocal language also makes its way into Shakespeare. In 3 Henry VI, the courtship of Elizabeth and Edward is an extended series of puns and wordplay.
duchess’ failed attempts to prevent the marriage by spreading rumours that Edward was already married to a girl named Elizabeth Lucy puts her into the role of lausengier or scandal-monger common in French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Even More’s final remark that Elizabeth, who had been married to one of Edward’s enemies, ‘many time had praid full hartly for his losse. In which god loued her better, than to graunt her her bone’ echoes Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain, where the heroine falls in love with the man who killed her first husband (R 65). At the end, More once again signals his return to the main narrative by acknowledging his digression; that he did so to reveal ‘how slipper a grounde the protector bulted his colour, by which he pretended king Edwardes children to be bastardes’ (R 66). The fact that Richard is able to use this information to support his bid for the throne proves that Edward’s actions, however acceptable within the emplotted romance, have disastrous consequences.

More therefore manipulates genre within the History, not to contain his female characters as Vergil does, but to draw attention to the contradictions and ambiguities throughout the text. If genres ‘represent constructed symbolic resolutions to social tensions and contradictions and thereby inscribe ideologies’, More’s highlighting of the points at which he returns to his main narrative subverts those resolutions and ideologies. Unlike Vergil, who is upholding the political status quo, More is drawing attention to the very things that Vergil is suppressing: the theatricality of rhetoric, and the fictive nature of historical writing itself. The fact that his depiction of Elizabeth is so different from Vergil’s emphasizes the larger divergences between the two texts. While Vergil is making the unequivocal point that the containment of women promotes political stability, thereby fitting himself into the larger movement of consolidation of monarchical power in the person of the king, specifically Henry VIII, More, by placing Elizabeth — however powerless — at the centre of resistance to the usurping Richard, questions that consolidation.

When Richard Grafton interpolated More’s History into his 1543 continuation of John Hardyng’s verse chronicle, though he corrected certain errors that appeared in Rastell’s 1557 edition of More’s complete works, his juxtaposition of More with translated sections of Vergil’s Historia leads to a number of contradictory passages. Although David Womersley has remarked upon several sections in which Grafton’s editing ‘vigorously asserts providentialism to be the mechanism of history in a way foreign to the Anglica historia’, it is worth noting that Vergil’s representations of all the royal consorts, complete with their providentialist rhetoric, remain more or less intact. In fact, the inclusion of More’s text allows for a brief assertion of a more active Elizabeth than would otherwise