

Hamlet's 'The Murder of Gonzago' in contemporary documents

By Noemi Magri

The performance of 'The Murder of Gonzago' in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act III, sc. ii) represents the tipping-point of the whole tragedy: it is when Prince Hamlet becomes certain of his uncle's guilt and, as a consequence, there starts the fall of all the main characters. The inset play is essential to the accomplishment of Hamlet's revenge; in fact, it has been present in print since the first publication of the play, Q1 of 1603 (SR. 26 July 1602) which is a much shorter text than Q2 and Ff.

We may say that every aspect and theme of Shakespeare's most famous tragedy has been analyzed; however, a passage in the inset play, about ten lines altogether, in both Q1 and Q2, is worth re-examining for the reason that, if referred to the original history, the names of the places and characters involved in the murder appear to be rather confused or incongruous. (The passage in F is identical to Q2, so it will not be considered here).

I have always tried to substantiate that in dealing with things Italian, Shakespeare never made an error. The Murder of Gonzago, instead, seems to destroy that certainty of correctness.

The purpose of the present article is to discuss and clarify the confusion of names; illustrate the Italian personages and events the inset play refers to; and present the literary work that Shakespeare mentioned as being 'extant and written in very choice Italian'.

The history of the Gonzaga who ruled Mantua for four centuries was not unknown at the English Court: in the late 1570s it had inspired two plays, performed at Richmond and Whitehall respectively: *The Three Sisters of Mantua*, 1578, most likely dealing with the three daughters of Marquis Ludovico Gonzaga, and *The history of the Duke of Millayn and the Marquis of Mantua*, 1579.¹

In *Hamlet* the Prince asks the Players to perform 'The Murder of Gonzago': evidently there existed another play derived from Mantuan history. Though it is conjecture, it may be that the three 'Gonzaga plays' had been written by Lord Oxford himself after his Italian journey.

The story of the murder is known: it refers to Francesco Maria I Della Rovere Duke of Urbino, murdered by his kinsman Luigi Gonzaga of Castel Goffredo, who poured poison in his ears.² In the play scene the method of killing the King is the same. Shakespeare gives few clues to help us trace back to the history of the murder and its protagonists, but it is clear that his knowledge was not limited to the poisoning of the Duke of Urbino. One of the clues is in Q1.

Q1 'Duke and Dutchesse'

The characters in the Dumb-show are a 'King and Queene' but in the Stage Directions and speech headings there are a 'Duke and Dutchesse'. That is reinforced by Hamlet when he reveals 'the Duke's name' (234; also in Q2); it is evident that Shakespeare had the story of a duke in mind.³

The two versions

In speaking to Ophelia, Hamlet explains they are going to see the performance of a real story and presents the characters.

Q1. *This play is
The image of a murder done in **guyana**. **Albertus**
Was the Dukes name, his wife **Baptista**. (And referring
to the murderer:)
[...] *this is one
Lucianus nephew to the King.
[...] He poisons him for his estate.**

Q2. *This play is the Image of a murther doone in
Vienna, Gonzago is the Dukes name, his wife **Bap-
tista**. [...] *This is one **Lucianus**, Nephew to the
King. [...] A poisons him i'th Garden for his estate,
his names **Gonzago**, the story is extant and written
in very choice Italian, you shall see anon how the
murtherer gets the love of **Gonzagoes** wife.**

The names *guyana* and *Vienna*, *Albertus* and *Lucianus* are completely out of place: they do not relate to the murder of the Duke of Urbino. They are not likely to have been the ones in Shakespeare's original MSS of Q1 and Q2. So, in order to find justification, we must turn to history and palaeography.

Guyana and Vienna

Guyana, as a setting of a historical event that, most likely, took place in an aristocratic environment, is completely extraneous to the story. Ricci's explanation (2005, p.78) that Shakespeare 'perhaps wanted to allude to a more exotic and barbarian world than Italy' appears to be a forced one since, to the Elizabethans, it was Italy which was the typical barbaric country of poisons and murder.

Guyana became better known to the English public after Walter Raleigh organized his first expedition to that place in 1595 and another in 1596: *Hamlet* had been written long before that time. Soon after he came back, in 1596 just before the Cadiz expedition, Raleigh published *The Discoverie of the Large, Riche, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana, Performed in the year 1595 by Sir Walter Raleigh* (SR 15th March 1596, printed by Robert Robinson

of Holborn). Though his aim was to persuade the Queen to organize other voyages in search of 'El Dorado', Raleigh extols the natural beauty of the place, rich vegetation and abundant food supplies: by no means does he describe a savage, cruel, barbarian country. Maybe, some other writer did.

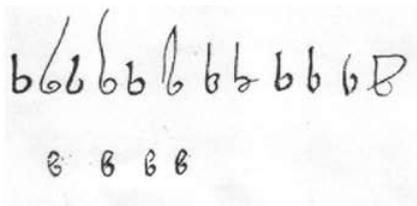
Historically, that remote country had no connection whatsoever with the place where the murder was committed: there is always a reason for the choice of a name in Shakespeare: but not here, apparently. Owing to this inconsistency, we may guess that the name *guyana* was not the one written in the MS used for the printing of Q1.

In Q2 *guyana* becomes *Vienna*: we cannot fail to notice the close sound correspondence between these two names. But neither is Vienna the place of the murder.

Commentators agree that both Q1 and Q2 present numerous misreadings. Finding the choice of city odd, Jenkins (Third Arden) wrote that 'Vienna might perhaps be a misreading of Urbino' (p.507). But, on historical and palaeographic grounds, I have two objections to that: first, Francesco Maria Della Rovere was not murdered in that city; second, though 'U' and 'V' are interchangeable, 'Urbino' cannot be read as 'Vienna' because it contains the letter *b* which is written with an ascending stroke: the upright support of *b*, called the shank, is taller than the letters in 'Vienna', so in this case that type of misreading is unlikely to occur. The city where Francesco Maria was poisoned is Venice.

Therefore, I argue that the place name that Shakespeare wrote in his manuscripts of Q1 and Q2 was **Venice**: it was neither *guyana* nor *Vienna*.

This is how the name may have been modified from its original to the printed form. (I wish to point out that what I am going to say is not my own



Contemporary examples of 'b'

conjecture, but derives from the works of palaeographers and philologists, English, Italian and French.) It is known that a handwritten literary work was copied several times by scribes or copyists before (and after) being printed. In the case of a play, the actors needed one copy each in order to learn their parts, so many transcriptions were made. The more removed the copies were from the original, the more errors of transcription they were likely to have. Palaeographers have established that many errors derive from the

misreading of the copy itself either by the copyist or by the compositor (Cf. Petti, 1977, pp. 29-31).

On the assumption that the name was 'Venice', the variant *guyana* is likely to have been caused by these two errors: misreading, and the so called 'interior dictation'. (The latter, an origin of frequent errors in copying and printing, has been extensively described by philologists.)⁴

This is a simplified explanation: the compositor of Q1 read the MS line ('The play is the image of a murder done in Venice'), misread 'Venice' as 'Vienna', memorized the line, and while picking the characters from the boxes in order to compose it, 'dictated' the line to himself, either silently or whispering: in this activity he made an 'acoustic' error and composed the word 'guyana' owing to the close assonance between this word and 'Vienna', or maybe owing to recent references to that country that he had in mind (Cf. Denholm-Young, 1954, p.58).

The 'acoustic' error is also called 'auditory' (See Petti, 1977, p.30) if the text was read aloud to the compositor. The practice had some advantages: a) the compositor avoided touching and staining the leaves with ink, b) reading the text aloud gave one or more copyists the chance to produce copies of the text simultaneously. Handwritten ones were much cheaper.

There may be another alternative: the original 'Venice' had been erroneously transcribed as 'Vienna' by a copyist, and the copy that was submitted to the printer of Q1 contained the error: 'Vienna' instead of 'Venice'. In that case, too, 'Guyana' was the result of 'interior dictation'. As for 'Vienna' in the second quarto, the copy used by the compositor of Q2 may have had the same error: 'Vienna' instead of 'Venice', or he, too, like the compositor of Q1, may have made a misreading error, but, here, no 'acoustic' one.

It may be objected that it is highly improbable that two different compositors working in two separate printing-presses would make the same mistake in reading. On the contrary, that specific mistake was fairly common: Venice could be easily read as 'Vienna' because the minim clusters, - i.e. letters as *i*, *n*, *m*, *u*, - contained in both words, were liable to be miscounted, and, in many cases, *e* looked like *i*, and *a* was similar to *e*.

It appears that the mental process of 'interior dictation' in copying or printing, and consequential error-making, has never been taken into account by Shakespeare critics: however, Jenkins's mention of the sound of words agrees, in a way, with the 'interior dictation'.⁵ Although he, like many others, is convinced that Q1 is the result of 'memorial reconstruction' and does not refer to 'interior dictation', Jenkins observed that 'sometimes the sound of a word is retained while being associated with a wrong meaning'. He compares phrases in Q2 and F, and speaks of 'misunderstanding of things heard': the examples,

instead, may well be errors caused by ‘interior dictation’. (*with tongue invenom’d speech / with tongue in venom steep’d* F.II.ii.506) (p.23). Significantly, Jenkins stresses ‘hearing’ in the reconstruction work of the text, and ascribes errors to ‘faults of memory’.

Albertus

Q1 *Albertus was the Dukes name, his wife Baptista.*

Sarrazin, followed by later critics, was the first to suggest ‘Albertus’ may be ‘Alfonso’ Gonzaga of Castel Goffredo, murdered by hired killers at the service of his nephew.⁶ But I have strong objections to that: Alfonso was a marquis, not a duke; he was shot by harquebusiers, stabbed and thrown into a pond. Because groans were heard, and to make sure he was dead, one of the murderers jumped into the pond and cut his throat: Alfonso was not poisoned; and he was killed in May 1592: too late for the composition date of *Hamlet*.

There is no ‘Albertus’ in the Della Rovere and Gonzaga family. Instead, there are Della Rovere members called ‘Ubalduus’. On the basis of history and documentary script, I take ‘Albertus’ to be a misreading of ‘Ubalduus’.

Owing to their shape, the letters U/V and A in capitals may be interchanged: they may be both closed and open. In the case of ‘Albertus’ and ‘Ubalduus’, next to the initial letter, both names contain ascenders, i.e. tall consonants, and ascenders are also present in the last part of the names. Also, the names have the same *-us* ending. One of the causes of misreadings is that compositors were not familiar with the words written in the manuscript: the compositor of Q1 may have never heard of the name ‘Ubalduus’. In Q2 *Albertus* was changed to *Gonzago* whereas the wife’s name *Baptista* was retained (see below).

Lucianus

Also the murderer’s name does seem uncertain. In both Q1 and Q2 he is ‘one Lucianus’.⁷ But in Q2 an

addition says, ‘A poisons him i’th’Garden for his estate, his name’s Gonzago’. Who is this ‘Gonzago’? The victim or the murderer? If the murderer, why is he also called ‘Lucianus’? According to Bullough, ‘both murderer and victim shared the Gonzago name’ (p.29); but to Jenkins, ‘his name’ means ‘the sleeper’s name’, that is, the victim’s (p.304). Both interpretations are possible, in the critics’ words.

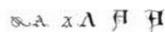
But a few lines above, in Q2, Hamlet had said, ‘Gonzago is the Duke’s name’. So, here, the phrase ‘his name’s Gonzago’, if it referred to the Duke, would be unnecessary repetition. Instead, it fits if it refers to the murderer who, in Q2, would be ‘Lucianus Gonzago’.

Historically, the murderer’s name was Luigi Gonzaga.⁷ With the exception of Gonzago, the names in the inset play are in Latin form. The Latinized form of Luigi is ‘Ludovicus’. With reference to the contemporary script, I understand ‘Lucianus’ as a misreading of ‘Ludovicus’.

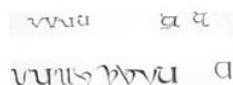
If we consider examples of contemporary manuscript forms, we can see that, in some cases, the letter *d* looks like *c* followed by a letter that could be read as *i*. I argue that the name in the original MS was ‘Ludovicus’, and was misread as ‘Lucianus’ because of the ambiguous shape of the letter *d*. The use of the surname Gonzago for the murderer emphasizes Shakespeare’s familiarity with the real personage: Luigi or Ludovico Gonzaga. It follows that in the addition in Q2, both murderer and victim have the same name. If we refer to history, the passage in the play scene becomes clear and perhaps we will reach the conclusion that it is not so confused.

Historical background to ‘The Murder of Gonzago’

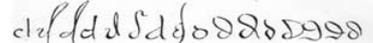
Gonzago, Baptista and suggested Ubalduus belong to the history of Montefeltro and Urbino, two territories in central Italy ruled at the end of the XV century by Federico III of Montefeltro (1422-1482). A great man-at-arms, Federico fought in the service of Ital-

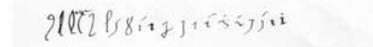
A


U V



Contemporary ‘a’s, ‘u’s and ‘v’s

d


i


Contemporary ‘d’s and ‘i’s

ian Princes. The Pope granted him the title of 'Duke' of Urbino in exchange for his allegiance (1474). The King of Naples rewarded his successful military service with the Order of the Ermine, and King Edward IV granted him the Order of the Garter.⁸

In former times, the residence of the Montefeltro was San Leo, an impregnable fortress, now an attraction for tourists. Federico was also a patron of artists: his new Palazzo Ducale in Urbino became one of the literary centres in Italy. He married Battista Sforza, the daughter of Alessandro Sforza Lord of Pesaro. The name Baptista in the inset play is not a random choice: it is one of the clues to the identification of the Della Rovere family.

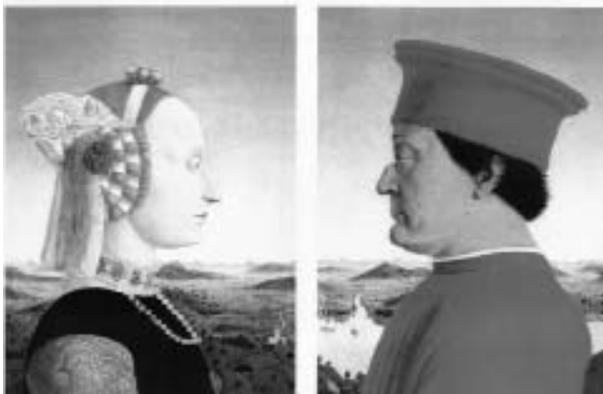
Federico and Battista had six daughters and only one son, Guido Ubaldo (1472-1508), who became the heir and successor. Like his father, Guido Ubaldo was a man-at-arms and a patron of humanists.

The Dukes of Urbino were related to the Gonzaga by marriage. Guido Ubaldo married Elisabetta Gonzaga, daughter of Federico Marquis of Mantua and Margherita of Bavaria. Their court of Urbino and the Villa Imperiale in Pesaro were made famous by poets and writers such as Count Baldassarre Castiglione, Count Pietro Bembo, Cariteo, Serafino Aquilano, and many others.

But the Duke's life was always in danger: when Cesare Borgia, the Pope's son, treacherously occupied Urbino, Guido Ubaldo had no choice but to flee to Mantua and then to Venice with his wife Elisabetta and his nephew.

Guido Ubaldo, too, was given the Order of the Garter: the King on the English throne was Henry VII. The ambassador who in 1506 was sent to London to receive the insignia was Baldassarre Castiglione. In contemporary correspondence it is reported that the King, the Royal family, all the Court and dignitaries welcomed the Italian aristocrat with solemn ceremonies.

Guido Ubaldo had serious problems with the dynastic succession: he was impotent: so, in order to



Battista and Federico III da Montefeltro



Eleonora Gonzaga, Francesco Maria I

prevent the Pope from seizing his territory, in 1504 he adopted his nephew, Francesco Maria Della Rovere (1490-1538), the 14-year-old son of his sister Giovanna Feltria who had married Giovanni Della Rovere Lord of Senigallia. Like all Italian princes, the young heir received a literary and military education.

Also Francesco Maria married a Gonzaga, Eleonora, the daughter of the Marquis of Mantua, Francesco, and his wife Isabella d'Este. Eleonora was the niece of Elisabetta. Francesco Maria took part in many expeditions at the service of various Italian princes. He became 'Captain General of the Vatican State', but owing to an invasion made by the nephew of the new Pope Leone X, Francesco Maria, Eleonora and their son took refuge in Mantua and then in Venice (1516).

Francesco entered the service of the Republic and, because of his successful campaigns, was first created 'Governor General of the Venetian army' and then, 'Captain General of the Republic'. In Venice in 1537 Francesco Maria was appointed *Generalissimo* (Supreme Commander) of all the land armies of the League formed by the Venetian Republic, the Vatican, and Emperor Charles V against the Turks.

In the same year, he had a portrait made of himself and Eleonora by Titian: it was a matter of prestige to be portrayed by that great artist. In the portrait he has curly hair and beard, he is wearing armour, next to him is a helmet, the beaver up, on the helmet a crest of feathers and a white dragon. In the right hand he is holding the baton of the Republic; on the right there are the batons of the Vatican, the city of Florence, the one of the Della Rovere and the one of *condottiero*. It is most likely that the description of King Hamlet all in armour was suggested to Shakespeare by that Titian painting.

Francesco Maria was at the height of his career, however, Titian captured a very sad look in his eyes. While he was in Venice preparing an attack against the Turks he fell ill: he was brought to Pesaro and died there on 21st October 1538. The doctors diagnosed poisoning.

The news of his death and even more the devious, unusual way he was murdered, - poison in

the ears, most certainly while an infection was being treated by his barber⁹ - at once spread to the Courts of Europe and deeply shocked all the Princes, also because of Francesco Maria's prestigious promotion to Supreme Commander and his participation in the recent historical events.

The principals were Luigi Gonzaga Marquis of Castel Goffredo, a twice removed cousin of Eleonora, and Cesare Fregoso, Luigi's brother-in-law, a *condottiero* at the service of the king of France. The perpetrator of the crime was the Duke's barber who, probably under torture, revealed the names of the principals; he was tried, and, by order of the son and heir of Francesco Maria, Guido Ubaldo II, was drawn and quartered in the streets of Pesaro. Luigi Gonzaga and Cesare Fregoso protested their innocence.

All the European courts and princes were involved in the case: in fact, Luigi Gonzaga had applied to the Doge, the Council of the Ten and Emperor Charles V, and Cesare Fregoso to the King of France, for immediate acquittal. The poisoning of the Duke of Urbino that at the beginning appeared to be a private affair, very soon affected relationships between the great Italian and foreign powers.

Though Luigi Gonzaga and Cesare Fregoso had not been convicted, no law-court, prince, nor ruler believed them innocent. In 1541 Cesare Fregoso was assassinated by order of the then Governor of Milan, Marquis Del Vasto. By contrast Luigi Gonzaga obtained an acquittal from Emperor Charles V on grounds that there was no evidence supporting his guilt. With no success, Guido Ubaldo continued to make petitions to the Pope, Cardinals, the Venetian



The murderer - Luigi or Ludovico Gonzaga

Senate, the Duke of Mantua in order that Luigi Gonzaga should be found guilty.

Luigi Gonzaga (1494-1549) was a typical Renaissance prince: a wicked, treacherous, violent soldier, capable of great villainies. And he was also a patron of artists and a lover of literature. When he came into possession of the estate of Castel Goffredo (1511), he at once fortified it by building walls, bastions, towers, and by digging a moat around it. He embellished his palace with works by artists who had been pupils of Giulio Romano. He made his estate a small centre of learning where literary men, artists and musicians used to sojourn for long periods. The more famous of them were Matteo Bandello and Pietro Aretino. Between one military campaign and another, in his 'palace of pleasures', Luigi Gonzaga enjoyed writing poetry and plays. In 1532 he received Emperor Charles V.

When he was in France, where he had accompanied the Pope's nephew who was to marry a French Princess, he and some gentlemen decided to visit England. They stayed there some weeks and were received by King Henry VIII and his barons.

Towards the end of his life, Luigi Gonzaga took part in another crime: the assassination of Pier Luigi Farnese Duke of Parma and Piacenza (1547), a plot organized by the then Governor of Milan in favour of the Emperor: no need to refer to Guyana for cruelties: we may well stay within the boundaries of Italian history!

He poisons him for his estate

Historians have tried to find a motive for the murder of Francesco Maria Duke of Urbino. It is interesting to note the one given by Shakespeare: 'He poisons him for his estate', that is, for his 'status', for his 'degree of rank' (OED).

The most plausible reason presented by historians is Francesco Maria's recent prestigious appointment, which may have provoked the resentment of Luigi Gonzaga and Cesare Fregoso because, a few years before, Francesco Maria had opposed the decision of the Senate to raise Luigi Gonzaga to the rank of captain of the infantry and Cesare Fregoso to captain of the cavalry of the Republic.

Now that he had become *Generalissimo*, the highest rank in the army, it was time for the two enemies to deprive Francesco Maria of 'his estate'. So we can affirm that, here, Shakespeare is consistent with the historical truth.

The question may be raised: why Shakespeare did not call the Duke 'Francesco' or Latinized 'Franciscus', (giving that name, instead, to one of the King's guards), and his wife 'Eleonora'? There may be at least two reasons.

Even though that murder was a historical event that had taken place in the past, because of his loyalty to the Republic and ability as a commander, Francesco Maria was remembered for many decades in Venice. In fact, in 1587, 50 years after his death, a statue by Giovanni Bandini was erected to his honour in the courtyard of the Venetian Palazzo Ducale.

Then, probably the major reason, in 1574, the year before Lord Oxford arrived in Italy, the then Duke of Urbino (Guido Ubaldo II) died: he was succeeded by his son Francesco Maria II (1549-1631), the grandson of Francesco Maria I. Shakespeare/Oxford certainly knew of this, and may have preferred to choose another name for the Duke and, though disregarding the actual family connections, use names of some members of the Della Rovere and Gonzaga.

However, those names were clues to the identification of the Duke: Baptista was the grandmother of Francesco Maria, and Gonzago was the actual name of the murderer.

The Marquises and Dukes of Mantua had far greater political power and cultural renown than the Della Rovere. By calling the duke 'Gonzago' Shakespeare chose a more famous name than Della Rovere, which was less celebrated in England; the Gonzaga, instead, had been known to the English Court since late Medieval times.¹⁰ Besides, 'Gonzago' recalls the Duke's wife, Eleonora.

Full thirty times

In the play scene we have a striking parallel with the life of Francesco Maria. In Q2 (III.ii.165-170), after performing the Dumb-show, with an elaborate metaphor drawn from mythology, the Player King recalls the length of his marriage: 30 years.

*Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground
[...]
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.¹¹*

In 1503, Guido Ubaldo had started negotiations with the Marquis of Mantua to sign a marriage contract by which Francesco Maria (aged 13) would marry Eleonora, then aged 10, the daughter of the Marquis. The marriage was celebrated by proxy in Rome in 1505. In August 1508 Francesco Maria travelled to Mantua to meet his bride: she was still too young to accomplish her matrimonial duties, she was not yet 15 (she was born on 31st December 1493), so she remained in Mantua. Contemporary documents report that a train of gentlemen and ladies, including Elisabetta, the bride's aunt, went to Mantua late in 1509 from Urbino to accompany her to that city. The marriage was consummated in December of 1509: Eleonora was 16 at that time.

When Francesco Maria died in October 1538, he and Eleonora had been married about 30 years. It is undeniable that the dramatist was familiar with that specific detail in the life of the Duke, - a detail that Oxford may have easily known from his Italian acquaintances during his stay in Venice. It is hard for Stratfordians to find Shaksper's source of that detail.

The story is extant and written in very choice Italian

It has always been a main concern of critics to find the historical-literary work mentioned by Shakespeare.¹² They have concluded that no actual source has been traced; yet, they mention Paolo Giovio and his *Elogia* with its parallels with *Hamlet* (Bullough, pp.32-4).

Giovio (1483-1552) first published his *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* in 1551 (Florence) in Latin. An Italian version appeared in 1554 by Lodovico Domenichi with the title *Gli Elogi. Vite brevemente descritte d'huomini illustri di guerra, antichi et moderni* (Florence).

Giovio was a humanist: he studied philosophy and medicine at the universities of Pavia and Padua. He was in the service of the Medici as a doctor and historian in Florence first, and then in Rome when Giulio de Medici was elected Pope (Clemente VII, 1523-34). His prose style was admired by his contemporaries for its magnificence and brilliance of language. Even Pietro Aretino praised his ability to describe the facts and personages of any time in transparent, harmonious constructions. In a letter addressed to him, Aretino wrote, 'With the same strokes with which divine Michelangelo paints his lines round, and spreads the colours, you engrave the momentous, the terrible and the venerable in the figures of your histories'.

Shakespeare's judgement - very choice Italian - was most appropriate.

Commentators assume that an engraving, based on Titian's portrait of Francesco Maria, inspired Shakespeare's description of the armour worn by Hamlet's father. It is true that there are some parallels with *Hamlet* but that supposition has no support. The engraving was published in Giovio's *Elogia* (Latin) in Basel in 1575; Oxford could have seen it in Italy only if the book had been printed in the early spring and if copies of it had been at once sent to some shop in a city he would visit. Since there is no evidence nor record that may establish to which destination the copies had been sent first, in order to be sold, that supposition is not acceptable, unless a copy circulated in England some time before the early 1580s.

Oxford did not need to see the engraving:

a copy of the portrait certainly existed in Titian's house (it was the practice to keep one of any important personage in case the sitter wished to have a replica and make a present of it): Oxford may have seen it there (he had also most probably seen 'Venus and Adonis'): it is known that a replica of Francesco Maria's portrait had been made for the Museum that Giovio had built in his villa in Como.¹³ In spite of the many parallels, critics are very cautious in accepting Giovio as a source, maybe owing to the difficulty of substantiating that Shaksper of Stratford had read the Italian version.

We know that Oxford would have easily had the opportunity to read both the Latin and the Italian text in one of the many libraries in Venice. But, even supposing that he did, there is one major detail in the whole story of the murder that tells us that Shakespeare's main source was not written but oral: the detail, so important in the inset-play, is the pouring of the poison in the Duke's ears: it is a particular that is not recorded in any contemporary chronicle, either in MS or in print.

The method of poisoning was certainly described in the briefs and pleadings of the lawsuit brought against Luigi Gonzaga and Cesare Fregoso by the Duke's son but those documents are lost. Even though they were extant, it is not likely that Oxford could have come to know of their content, because they were secret documents.¹⁴ In the Gonzaga Archives in Mantua there exists a letter by Luigi Gonzaga¹⁵ that contains detailed reference to the barber and the pouring of the poison in the ears, but we can exclude Oxford's having had access to the private correspondence of the Duke of Mantua.

It can be affirmed that Oxford came to know about the method of killing, the motive of the crime, and the length of the Duke's marriage – 30 years - through an oral source.

Shaksper of Stratford was never in a situation to acquire that knowledge.

Conclusion

On consideration of the historical content of the play scene, and the close correspondence with actual facts, we can conclude that Shakespeare/Oxford drew his information about the murder of the Duke of Urbino from Paolo Giovio's work both in the Latin and Italian version and from oral sources, most probably when he was in Venice.

The incongruous names printed in Q1 and Q2 may have resulted from misreading: Albertus and Lucianus may be read as Ubaldus (of Montefeltro) and Ludovicus (Gonzaga), the real historical personages. The place names, Guyana and Vienna, are no other than 'Venice', the city where the Duke of Urbino was poisoned.

N.M.

NOTES

1. See N. Magri, 'The Three Systems of Mantua, a Known History and an Unknown Play', *De Vere Society Newsletter*, Dec. 2005, pp.13-17.

2. The story was first identified by C. Elliot Browne ('Notes on Shakespeare's Names' in *Athenaeum*, 25th July 1876) and quoted by Edward Dowden (Arden editor of *Hamlet*, 1899). According to Bullough (Vol.7, p.30), Browne's source was J. Dennistoun's *Memoirs*.

3. Bullough wrote, 'These variants suggest that the original story concerned a duke and duchess'.

4. Dain, A, 1975, pp.41-45. Vinaver, E, 1939, pp.351-69.

5. Jenkins wrote (p.19) that the recognized signs of 'memory reconstruction' are: omissions, mislinings, paraphrases, verbal and morphological substitutions, misunderstandings, transpositions, anticipations. But he, and the other critics, fail to recognize that those are the more common errors made by copyists or compositors when they do not understand the manuscript, or when they continuously have to shift their eye between Ms and copy or the press.

6. G. Sarrazin, 'Neu Italienische Skizzen zu Shakespeare', *Sh.Jahrbuch*, 31. 1895.

7. Bullough suggests that 'Lucianus' is 'perhaps a Latinized form of Luigi' (p.33). But it is not. The Latinized form of Luigi is 'Ludovicus'.

8. The King sent ambassadors to Italy: the meeting took place at Grottaferrata, 20 km. from Rome, at the famous abbey-fortress of St. Basilus in 1474.

9. He was Pier Antonio da Sermide. (See F. Amadei, *Cronaca universale della città di Mantova*, 1755. Mantova. 1954-57. Voll. 5, Vol. II p.629). In those times, a barber did not only cut beards or hair: he also prepared potions and drugs, treated wounds and infections, cut abscesses, did blood-letting, looked after domestic animals, got or delivered messages, ran all sorts of errands.

10. King Henry V (1413-1422) presented Gianfrancesco Gonzaga Lord of Mantua with the Royal Livery of the Lancaster 'SS' collar, an honour that was granted as a symbol of loyalty. The collar is listed in an inventory dated 1416 held in the *Archivio di Stato di Mantova*, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 410A, n.29.

11. In Q1 the Duke in the play says, 'Full fortie yeares are past, their date is gone, Since happy time ioyn'd both our hearts as one'. Here we have another example of error due to 'interior dictation': 'forty' instead of 'thirty'. In Q2, V.i.148-177, the Clown says that he had been a gravedigger for thirty years, since when Prince Hamlet was born. There follows that the marriage of Hamlet's parents had lasted longer than that period, so here, there is no parallel with Francesco Maria's length of marriage.

12. The story Shakespeare refers to may have been in MS or printed form. There exists a MS chronicle written by a friar of a monastery in Gubbio, a city ruled by the Dukes of Urbino, about 1550 (first printed 1902), which says that the Duke was poisoned but does not specify how the poison was given. The MS has always been held in Gubbio: Oxford is unlikely to have been in that city in the mountains, 100 kms south of Urbino. So, that work may not be reckoned a source, nor may other contemporary chronicles that extol the Duke's bravery but do not report his death.

For the continuation of Noemi's notes and her bibliography for this paper, please go to Page 29.