


## **An Accident of Note: Chapman's *Hamlet* and the Earl of Oxford**

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n scene III.iv of *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Chapman's Clermont recounts an anecdote of Count John Casimir inviting the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford to view the troops with which he was to fight in France. The protagonist of the play, Clermont D'Ambois sets Oxford as an example for having declined the offer on the ground that "it was not fit to take those honours that one cannot quit." But as an example of what? There can be no doubt about the answer. The scene closes with a variation on an extract from the *Discourses* of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, a work on which Chapman's play relies to no small extent. Epictetus lived from ca. 55 to ca. 135 A.D., the generation after Seneca (ca. 1-65 A.D.), another Stoic to whom references are found in the play. One of Epictetus' thoughts is precisely that virtue consists in doing only those things that are in our power,

and if he has learned that he who desires or avoids the things which are not in his power can neither be faithful nor free, but of necessity he must change with them and be tossed about with them as in a tempest, and of necessity must subject himself to others who have the power to procure or prevent what he desires or would avoid.<sup>1</sup>

The allusion to Oxford is not something external to the play, but integrated into its fabric. After the first half of Clermont's information on Oxford, the Marquis de Renel remarks: "'Twas answer'd like the man you have describ'd." The man Clermont describes before speaking about Oxford is, as will be seen, an ideal Stoic. Clermont at that moment is meditating about a similar invitation to himself, namely

to view troops. This seems a noteworthy coincidence, the more so because Oxford happens to be integrated into a play of which Frederick S. Boas, in his excellent edition of both plays, *Bussy D'Ambois* and *The Revenge*, observes, "Had Hamlet never faltered in the task of executing justice upon the murderer of his father, it is doubtful if a brother of Bussy would ever have trod the Jacobean stage."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* contains many references not only to Epictetus and Seneca but also to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Boas annotates the passage about the Earl of Oxford: "The subject of this remarkable encomium was Edward de Vere (1550-1604), seventeenth Earl of Oxford... The portrait here drawn of him is too flattering, as he was violent in temper and extravagant, but the Earl's literary gifts merited the praise of Chapman. Puttenham and Meres speak highly of him as a writer of comedy, and Webbe pays a tribute to his excellence in 'the rare devises of poetry.' Over twenty of his lyrics survive, chiefly in anthologies. And in the following note he asks: "Why, however, does Chapman introduce it here, and how did he know of it?"<sup>3</sup> The question is left unanswered. To answer it is the subject of this paper.

## History

Boas identified the source of Chapman's two plays as well as of his two other French tragedies, *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron* and *The Tragedy of Byron* as Edward Grimeston's translation of Jean de Serres's *Inventaire Général de l'Histoire de France*. Serres' account ended in the year 1598 with the Peace of Vervins between France and Spain. He covered the subsequent period, which covers the conspiracy and execution of Charles de Gontaut, Duke of Biron, from works of other French historians; Grimeston's translations were first published in 1607, shortly before Chapman's dramas appeared. The two Byron plays were published in 1608, *Bussy D'Ambois* in 1607 and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* in 1613.

Louis de Clermont d'Amboise,<sup>4</sup> seigneur de (Lord of) Bussy, born in 1549, was the eldest son of Jacques de Clermont-d'Amboise and grandson of Louis de Clermont who married Renée d'Amboise. After the extinction of the male line of the Amboises, the name was added to that of the Clermonts. Thus, Clermont d'Amboise is not a first name and a surname but a composite family name. Louis Bussy d'Amboise probably held the title "seigneur de Bussy" by courtesy of his father. Bussy had two brothers, Hubert and Georges, three sisters and a half sister. His eldest sister Renée plays a role in Chapman's play *The Revenge*, where she is renamed Charlotte. However, he had no brother Clermont; Chapman's Clermont is an entirely fictitious person.

Marguerite de Valois, wife of Henry of Navarre, whose lover Bussy is reported to have been, mentions him a couple of times in her *Mémoires*. She always refers to him as "Bussy." She neither mentions her alleged love affair nor his death. But she speaks with admiration of him, and recalls his father Jacques as "a worthy father of

so worthy a son.”<sup>5</sup>

At the age of twelve, Bussy became a page to king Charles IX. Then, in 1573, at the age of twenty four, he accompanied the king’s brother Henri to Poland where he had been elected king. On the death of Charles IX one year later Bussy returned to France with Henri, who succeeded his deceased brother on the throne. He soon became a favorite of the king’s brother and rival François, Duke of Alençon and Anjou, perhaps better known as “Monsieur.”

Bussy was an indefatigable duellist. As a favorite of Anjou, he was an adversary of Henri III’s “mignons.” A gingerly, effervescent, fearless and arrogant aristocrat, he seduced Françoise (in Chapman’s plays rechristened Tamyra), wife of Charles Chambes, Count of Montsoreau (Montsurry in Chapman’s plays). Montsoreau was chamberlain of the Duke of Anjou and also his “grand veneur” (“great venerier,” that is master of the hunting dogs). The affair became public, possibly because Bussy had boasted of it. The Count of Montsoreau trapped Bussy by forcing his wife to write an invitation to him. Bussy came, saw and....was slain by the count’s servants.

### **Chapman’s Two *Bussies***

In *Bussy D’Ambois* Chapman follows history only to a certain extent. But the main thread of the plot, the love affair between Bussy and the Countess Montsurry, and Bussy’s killing, is historical. On the other hand, Chapman reverts the time sequence of patronage. Bussy was first a favorite of King Henri III, then of the Duke of Anjou, who in either play is called Monsieur.<sup>6</sup> In Chapman’s play Bussy is not of noble birth (historically untrue) but gains access to the court thanks to Monsieur. Monsieur, who wants to become king himself, cannot pardon him his defection, the less so because Monsieur is also courting the Countess of Montsoreau. Monsieur is one villain of the play; the other is the Duke of Guise. The enmity between Bussy and de Guise has nothing to do with religious affairs. De Guise hates Bussy because he suspects him to be courting his wife. Henri III is the equanimous, wise king above the fray, who likes Bussy’s spiritedness. That Chapman wanted to present Henri III in a favorable light is perhaps best illustrated by his praise of the English queen:

No queen in Christendom may vaunt herself;  
Her court approves it. That’s a court indeed,  
Not mixt with clowneries us’d in common houses,  
But as courts should be th’abstracts of their kingdoms  
In all the beauty, state, and worthy they hold,  
So is hers, amply, and by her inform’d.  
The world is not contracted in a man  
With more proportion and expression  
Than in her court.

(I.2.18-26)

In Chapman's play the scheme to entrap Bussy by forcing the Countess to write an invitation to her lover is concocted by Monsieur with the approval of de Guise. In his dying speech Bussy curses Monsieur and de Guise.

In *Bussy D'Ambois* Chapman allows himself considerable liberties with history; in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* this liberty is almost complete. It contains some shreds of history but most of them do not belong to the history of Bussy but to an episode after the execution of the Duke of Biron. We are also facing an amazing reversal of characters. Monsieur is still the villain, but he hardly plays a role of note. In act I he leaves the court for Brabant. His death is mentioned later but in a single line. But in this play the other villain is king Henri III, the wise king in *Bussy D'Ambois*. And Clermont's noble-minded friend and patron is no other than the Duke of Guise, the same de Guise who in Marlowe's *Massacre of Paris* had died, crying out "Vive la Messe! Perish the Huguenots" (scene xxii), and who was cursed by the dying Bussy. He is here presented as a morally irreproachable man, victim of a sordid king. Boas has suggested that Chapman might have turned Catholic. But both about-turns are probably best explained by Chapman's endeavours to focus on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet* Claudius is both false and lecherous; so is Henri III in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, though nowhere in the play he is shown so. Chapman seems to have imported this vice from *Hamlet*, more particularly from scene V.2 (see below), without caring much to psychologically fit it into his play. The changed character of de Guise is probably due to his being treacherously murdered by the king's captains.

Clermont D'Ambois is urged by the ghost of his murdered brother to avenge him. Like Hamlet he is slow to execute the mission. He sends a challenge to the Count Montsurry, who, however, does not accept it. But Clermont does not want to undertake anything as long as Montsurry has not reacted to his challenge. The king distrusts Clermont as a friend of his greatest foe, the Duke of Guise, and devises a plot to imprison him a suitable distance from the court. Clermont is invited to muster troops in Cambrai, where he is ambushed and taken prisoner. It is via this mustering that Chapman brings the Earl of Oxford into his play. But forced by de Guise, the king orders Clermont's liberation. Then King Henri III invites de Guise to Blois under the pretext of taking council with him and kills him. Learning that his best friend is killed, Clermont kills himself.

As a dramatical composition *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* must be considered a failure. It looks as if Chapman was trying to achieve many things at the same time. First, to write a closet play with long speeches for the public stage with some spectacular scenes at the end; second, to write at the same time a sequel to his own play *Bussy D'Ambois* and yet to stage a very different Bussy, one not acting impulsively but through the considerate control of his own passions, a Stoic; third, to model his hero after Hamlet, incorporating a tribute to the Earl of Oxford.

### **Clermont and Hamlet: the Unconditional and the Inhibited Stoic**

It would have been possible for Chapman to compose a revenge tragedy out of the historical material about Bussy d'Amboise available in his source. Why did Chapman invent a fictitious brother Clermont while a real close relative of the

historical Bussy actually was striving for revenge:

It was a sister, not a brother, who had devoted her own and her husband's energies to the task, though finally the matter had been compromised. He accordingly introduces Renée d'Amboise (whom he rechristens Charlotte), but with great skill he makes her fiery passion for revenge at all costs a foil to the scrupulous and deliberate procedure of the high-souled Clermont. Like Hamlet, the latter has been commissioned by the ghost of his murdered kinsman to the execution of a task alien to his nature.<sup>7</sup>

That Chapman intended to write a play aligned with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* appears most clearly from the ghost scenes. In contrast to *Hamlet* the ghosts do not appear at the beginning and in the middle, but only in the last act of either D'Ambois play. Chapman seems to have valued ghosts mainly as operators of dramatical apotheoses. In *Bussy D'Ambois* it is the ghost of the friar acting as go-between for Bussy and Tamyra that appears in the last act. In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* the first apparition does not occur until the fifth and last act and in the last scene of the last act a whole bevy of silent ghosts make their appearance, not only Bussy but also de Guise, Alençon, de Guise's brother and even Lord Châtillon, in a dance of death around Clermont's corpse.<sup>8</sup> The apparition of Bussy's ghost is mentioned a couple of times in passing — without any dramaturgical impact, as if in *Hamlet* Barnardo would have answered Horatio's question "What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?" — "No, this week it has not yet appeared." But in the second apparition the analogies with the ghost in *Hamlet* are striking. In *Hamlet* the ghost appears a second time in the so-called closet scene to "whet thy almost blunted purpose" (III.4.111). In Chapman's play the ghost enters on stage solo, speaks a monologue, remains standing nearby and then makes his second apparition:

Danger (the spur of all great minds) is ever  
 The curb to your tame spirits.....  
 Away, then! Use the means thou hast to right  
 The wrong I suffer'd. What corrupted law  
 Leaves unperform'd in kings, do thou supply,  
 And be above them all in dignity.  
 (V.1.78-79 and 96-99)

In the *Hamlet* closet scene the ghost remains invisible to to the queen:

**Queen.** Alas, how is't with you,  
 That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
 And with th'incorporeal air do hold discourse?

...

Whereon do you look?

**Hamlet.** Do you see nothing there?

**Queen.** Nothing at all; yet all that is I see...

This is the very coinage of your brain.  
(III.4.116.136)

In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* the ghost remains invisible to Clermont's friend de Guise:

**Guise.** Why stand'st thou still thus, and apply'st thine ears  
And eyes to nothing?

**Clermont.** Saw you nothing here?

**Guise.** Thou dream'st awake now; what was here to see?

**Clermont.** My brother's spirit, urging his revenge.

**Guise.** Thy brother's spirit! Pray thee mock me not.

**Clermont.** No, by my love and service!

(V.1.100-104)

Again, why would Chapman invent a brother of Bussy or fail to compose his revenge tragedy with Bussy's sister as heroine? It was his purpose to create a protagonist not only different from, but contrasting to Bussy D'Ambois and his bravado, a hero acting in compliance with Stoic ethics. The historical Renée d'Amboise, the Charlotte of the play, was not a very convenient choice. She was a strong-willed woman who seems to have shared her younger brother's bold spirit. As such she fitted better into Chapman's design as contrast to the scrupulous Stoic intellectual Clermont. In the first act Clermont sends a challenge to the Count of Montsurry, Bussy's murderer, so that he may have a fair chance in a duel. But the count does not accept the challenge, so delaying the revenge, which Clermont feels anyway not pressed to execute. In act III, scene ii, the following argument develops between Clermont and Charlotte:

**Char.** Send him a challenge? Take a noble course  
To wreak a murder done so like a villain?

**Cler.** Shall we revenge a villany with villany?

**Char.** Is it not equal?

**Cler.** Shall we equal be  
With villains? Is that your reason?

**Char.** Cowardice evermore  
Flies to the shield of reason.

**Cler.** Nought that is  
Approv'd by reason can be cowardice.

(III.2.94-100)

The argument between Charlotte and Clermont is partly the same argument with which Hamlet himself is engaged:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action.

(III.1.83-88)

We have no Stoic affirmation from Hamlet to compare with Clermont's "Nought that is approved by reason can be cowardice." We have no pathetic exclamation from Clermont like Hamlet's concluding lines of the first act:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right.

With Clermont a similar reflection takes the form of a dispassionate proposition:

I repent that ever  
(By any instigation in th'appearance  
My brother's spirit made, as I imagin'd)  
That e'er I yielded to revenge his murder.

(III.2.109-112)

Two other comparisons demonstrate that Clermont D'Ambois is, in fact, Hamlet turned Stoic. The first is between Hamlet's monologue after meeting Fortinbras and his army on the way to Poland (IV.4) and Clermont's monologue at the opening of III.iv. Both monologues set out from the self-perception of being too slow in action. Hamlet, like a flagellant in a medieval Good Friday procession flogging himself into ecstatic communion with the Saviour's passion, is verbally whipping himself into a revengeful rage, trying to spark off the initial ignition either from within himself or by irradiation from Fortinbras' example:

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge...

...

Rightly to be great  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel with a straw  
When honour's at the stake

(IV.4.32-56)

Then Hamlet manifests his double bind, forcibly driven to action without possessing the inner drive to complete the act. The double bind is shown through a chain of

gloomy considerations and images intimating the absurdity of Fortinbras' enterprise but glorified into a bright example of resolution.

And let all sleep, while to my shame I see  
 The imminent death of twenty-thousand men  
 That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
     Which is not tomb enough and continent  
     To hide the slain? O, from this time forth  
     My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.  
 (IV.4.59-66)

Nothing will come of this word-whirling resolution. In the next scene Laertes, on a "straw of suspicion" that Claudius has killed his father, unsheathes his sword, prepared to kill Claudius as soon as he comes into his view. But in act V, Hamlet, returned from England, and knowing that Claudius had plotted his murder, and apprehending that he is still seeking means to kill him, will still not proceed to action.

In Clermont's monologue in III.iv there is no trace of stirring up emotions through a cascade of suggestive images. Clermont "sets down decrees" as guidance for his conduct. He evokes Homer's "revengeful and insatiate Achilles" but makes no attempt to suck in an Achillean spirit. On the contrary, he attributes to Homer a Stoic motive in showing how Achilles' rashness leads him into destruction:

I wonder much  
 At my inconstancy in these decrees,  
 I every hour set down to guide my life  
 When Homer made Achilles passionate,  
 Wrathful, revengeful, and instatiate  
 In his affections, what man will deny  
 He did compose it all of industry,  
 To let men see that men of most renown,  
 Strong'st, noblest, fairest, if they set not down  
 Decrees within them, for disposing these,  
 Of judgment, resolution, uprightness,  
 And certain knowledge of their use and ends,  
 Mishap and misery no less extends  
 To heir destruction, with all that they priz'd,  
 Than to the poorest, and the most despis'd.  
 (III.4.13-25)

Stoic thoughts are not absent from Hamlet's mind. But he does not unconditionally subscribe to them. Twice he is contemplating the possibility of



suicide but either rejects it for the reason of its incompatibility with Christian ethics:

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter  
(I.2.131-2)

or for fear of what might come after death:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
(III.1.56-58)

.....

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud's man contumely  
(70-1)

.....

When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin?  
(75-6)

The monologue is infused with Senecan thoughts. Regarding "bare bodkin" this is a long-standing insight; on the other hand, it seems as if it has hitherto gone unnoticed that "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and "the undiscover'd country" also owes a debt of inspiration to Seneca.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of Chapman's play similar thoughts enter Clermont's mind when, perceiving de Guise's ghost, he knows his best friend dead and himself barred from revenge by the *raison d'état* of the absolute monarchy:

Shall I live, and he  
Dead, that alone gave means of life to me?  
There's no disputing with the acts of kings,  
Revenge is impious on their sacred persons.  
(V.5.149-52)

and:

Piety or manhood — shall I here survive,  
Not cast me after him into the sea,  
Rather than here live, ready every hour  
To feed thieves, beasts, and be the slave of power.  
(V.5.189-92)

Other than in Hamlet's monologue the question is not a philosophical but a rhetorical one. No further reflections follow: upon these words Clermont commits

suicide. Clermont is the Stoic Roman who Hamlet shrunk from being and exhorted Horatio not to be.

However, the Hamlet of act I-IV is different from the Hamlet of act V, especially in V.2, and calls for a separate examination.

### **The Inhibited Stoic**

On Hamlet's words, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/Rough-hew them how we will" (V.2.10-11), Harold Jenkins remarks, "the present passage shows Hamlet recognizing a design in the universe he had previously failed to find."<sup>10</sup> The existence of a design in the universe, alternatively called the universal will, Nature, the Gods, or God, is *par excellence* a Stoic concept. In his Moral Epistle 107, "On Obedience to the Universal Will," Seneca writes:

We should not manifest surprise at any sort of condition into which we are born, and which should be lamented by no one, simply because it is equally ordained for all. Yes, I say, equally ordained; for a man might have experienced even that which he has escaped. And an equal law consists, not of that which all have experienced, but of that which is laid down for all. Be sure to prescribe for your mind this sense of equity; we should pay without complaint the tax of our mortality. Winter brings on cold weather; and we must shiver. Summer returns, with its heat; and we must sweat. ... And we cannot change this order of things; but what we can do is to acquire stout hearts, worthy of good men, thereby courageously enduring chance and placing ourselves in harmony with Nature.<sup>11</sup>

Such is life, writes Seneca, and he adds what to him is the only attitude: to "keep the mind in readiness." Having been confronted on his journey to England with death and still haunted by the presentiment of his forthcoming death, Hamlet will answer to Horatio, who recommends him, to listen to his ominous feelings and not to fight the fencing match with Laertes: "Readiness is all" – in a profoundly Stoic passage:

Not a whit, we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come', if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

(V.2.215-220).

For nearly each of the constituents of this answer, a fairly close match can be found

in Seneca's *Moral Epistles* or *Moral Essays*:

<b>Hamlet in <i>Hamlet</i></b>	<b>Seneca in his <i>Epistles</i></b>
<p>Not a whit, we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.</p>	<p>LVIII: On Being</p> <p>Let us at the same time reflect, seeing that Providence rescues from its perils the world itself, which is no less mortal than we ourselves...</p>
<p>If it be now, 'tis not to come', if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come.</p>	<p>IV: On the Terrors of Death</p> <p>Death arrives; it would be a thing to dread, if it could remain with you. But death must either not come at all, or else must come and pass away.</p>
<p>the readiness is all.</p> <p>Let be.</p>	<p>CVII: On Obedience to the Universal Will</p> <p>It is amid stumblings of this sort that you must travel out this rugged journey. Does one wish to die? Let the mind be prepared to meet everything.</p> <p>Moral Essays: Polybius on Consolation</p> <p>The Fates will seize one at one time, another at another; they will pass no man by. Let the mind, then, stand in readiness, and let it never fear whatever must be, let it always expect whatever may be.</p>

<p>Since no man knows ought of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?</p>	<p>LXIX: On Rest and Restlessness</p> <p>No one dies except on his own day. You are throwing away none of your own time; for what you leave behind does not belong to you.</p>
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Using an epithet Chapman coins for his hero Clermont D'Ambois, we are fully justified in saying that Hamlet here is a "Senecal man." It is the scene in which he relates to Horatio how he narrowly escaped death and dispatched Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Claudius' accomplices. The parallels in Chapman's play are obvious.

For two motives, Claudius explains to Laertes, Hamlet is sent to England to have him killed far away from the court: "The Queen his mother/Lives almost by his looks... The other motive.../Is the great love the general gender bear him" (IV.6 and 11-18). On the advice of his treacherous brother-in-law, Clermont is sent away from Paris to the town of Cambrai in the northern French province:

With best advantage and your speediest charge,  
Command his apprehension: which (because  
The Court, you know, is strong in his defence)  
We must ask country swinge and open field.  
(II.1.11-14)

Clermont's brother-in-law justifies his betrayal of the public weal through the ideal of absolute monarchy centered in the king:

Treachery for kings is truest loyalty:  
Nor is to bear the name of treachery,  
But grave deep policy.  
(II.2.32-34)

On the very same argument Rosencrantz and Guildenstern justify the unconditional acceptance of their lurid mission:

**Guildenstern.** We will ourselves provide.  
Most holy and religious fear it is  
To keep those many many bodies safe  
That live and feed upon your Majesty.  
**Rosencrantz.** The single and peculiar life is bound  
With all the strength and armour of the mind  
To keep itself from noyance; but much more  
That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests

The lives of many. The cesse of majesty  
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw  
What's near it with it.

(III.4.7-18)

And so argue the captains who have apprehended Clermont and are now by him accused of having sworn false.

**Maillard.** No, I swore for the King.

**Clermont.** Yet perjury, I hope, is perjury.

**Maillard.** But thus forswearing is not perjury.

You are no politician: not a fault,

How foul soever, done for private ends,

Is fault in us sworn to the public good.

We never can be of the damned crew,

We may impolitic ourselves (as 'twere)

Into the kingdom's body politic,

Whereof indeed we're members; you miss terms

(IV.1.45-54)

Historically, the mustering episode does not belong to the time of Bussy d'Amboise, killed in 1579 (while his patron, the Duke of Alençon and Anjou, was courting Queen Elizabeth), but to the conspiracy of the Duke of Biron, executed in 1602. “*The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* follows historical lines less closely than the “Byron” plays, but here, too, Grimeston's volume was Chapman's inspiring source, and the perusal of its closing pages gives a clue to the origin of this most singular of the dramatist's serious plays. The final episode included in the folio of 1607 was the plot by which the Count d'Auvergne, who had been one of Byron's fellow conspirators, and who had fallen under suspicion for a second time in 1604, was treacherously arrested by agents of the King while attending a review of troops. The position of this narrative (translated from P. Matthieu) at the close of the folio must have helped to draw Chapman's special attention to it, and having expended his genius so liberally on the career of the arch-conspirator of the period, he was apparently moved to handle also that of his interesting confederate.”<sup>12</sup>

Another motive, probably the crucial one, must have presided over Chapman's choice of this episode: it offered him a number of elements by which to adapt his play to *Hamlet*, and more particularly to the Stoic Hamlet in V.2. And the search for some conformity to Shakespeare's play may also account for the stunning transfiguration of the good King Henri III in *Bussy D'Ambois* into a bad king (Claudius) and of the villain Guise into sort of Horatio. Hamlet is fostering suspicions when Claudius send him to England :

**Hamlet.** Good.

**King.** So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

**Hamlet.** I see a cherub that sees them.

(IV.4.50-51)

And his misgivings continue after his safe return: “Thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart; but it is no matter. (V.2.208-9). Horatio proposes to seek an excuse for not going to the encounter with Laertes. It is then that Hamlet declares his “Senecal” decision.

In scene III.iv of *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois*, the scene in which the mention of the Earl of Oxford occurs, Clermont D’Ambois displays a similar Stoicism. Indeed, the whole scene is essentially a discourse on how the ideal Stoic man has to behave. Clermont, having been warned by an anonymous writer of the danger he would incur if he decided to accept going to Cambrai for viewing the troops, meditates:

I had an aversation to this voyage,  
When first my brother mov’d it; and have found  
That native power in me was never vain:  
Yet now neglected it.”

(III.4.8-11)

The brother here is not Bussy D’Ambois but the treacherous brother-in-law. Then follows that part of the monologue which has before been compared with Hamlet’s monologue subsequent to his meeting Fortinbras and his army. Just like Horatio to Hamlet, Clermont’s friend the Marquis de Renel suggests that Clermont cancel his journey, to which Clermont replies with Stoic principle:

I shall approve how vile I value fear  
Of death all time; but to be too rash,  
Without both will and care to shun the worst  
(It being in power to do, well and with cheer)  
Is stupid negligence, and worse than fear.

(III.4.32-36)

The contempt of fear of death can be equated to Hamlet’s “If it be now, ‘tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come.” But as far as Hamlet is concerned, the other lines seem redundant. They serve, however, a purpose. As will be seen soon, they allow Chapman to unite in one and the same discourse about Stoic values the characters of Hamlet, especially the Hamlet of act V, Clermont D’Ambois, and the real Earl of Oxford.

The lines epitomize one of Chapman’s main sources (as Boas has pointed out), the *Discourses* of Epictetus (c. 55-c. 135), the leading Stoic philosopher of the generation after Seneca (c. 1-65). Not death itself, Epictetus taught, is an evil, but the fear of death. Death is neither good nor bad, it is a necessity, independent of our will. Death, health and wealth are without moral value, because they are “externals” and therefore indifferent. Only such things that are within the power of our will can be good or bad. Man should only undertake such things as are within his powers:

The poor body must be separated from the spirit either now or later, as it was separated from it before. Why, then, are you troubled? for if it is not separated now, it will be separated afterward. Why? That the period of the universe may be completed, for it has need of the present, and of the future, and of the past.<sup>13</sup>

Toward things which are within the power of our will, we should exert caution, toward things not within the power of our will, we should be courageous:

And thus this paradox will no longer appear either impossible or a paradox, that a man ought to be at the same time cautious and courageous: courageous toward the things which do not depend on the will, and cautious in things which are within the power of the will.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, according to Epictetus (and to Seneca as well), death obeys the universal will. In developing this subject, Chapman links up Clermont with Hamlet:

But he that knowing how divine a frame  
The whole world is; and of it all, can name  
(Without self-flattery) no part so divine

and Clermont with the Earl of Oxford:

As he himself, and therefore will confine  
Freely his whole powers in his proper part  
Goes on most God-like. He that strives t'invert  
The Universal's course with his poor way,  
Not only dust-like shivers with the sway,  
But, crossing God in his great work, all earth  
Bears not so cursed and so damn'd a birth.

(III.4.66-75)

Like Hamlet in V.2, Clermont will not attempt to interfere with the Universal Will, God, Nature, Providence. However, part of this passage,

As he himself, and therefore will confine  
Freely his whole powers in his proper part  
Goes on most God-like. He that strives t'invert

ties up this part of the discourse with what Clermont has stated a few lines before:

For any man to press beyond the place  
 To which his birth, or means, or knowledge ties him.  
 For my part , though of noble birth, my birthright  
 Had little left it, and to keep within  
 A man's own strength still, and on man's true end  
 Than run a mix'd course. Good and bad hold never  
 Anything common: you can never find  
 Things' outward care, but you neglect your mind.  
 (III.4. 49-57)

One might be tempted into supposing that Chapman was writing this with the Earl of Oxford before his eyes. It may be a debatable perspective, but at least two arguments can be adduced in support. It cannot be readily seen how the phrase “though of noble birth, my birthright had little left it” would apply on the Clermont of the play. It suggests that Clermont would be somehow impoverished and in some kind of disgrace. Nowhere else in the play is this mentioned. He is certainly in disgrace with the king, but he is the closest friend of the powerful Duke de Guise. Then, it is this discourse which suddenly reminds Clermont of the Earl of Oxford and after Clermont's first statement about Oxford, the Marquis de Renel refers to this discourse with the words “'twas answered like the man you have describ'd.”

### **D'Ambois and Oxford**

While Clermont shares many features with Hamlet, he definitely shares also some with the Earl of Oxford as depicted in the play by Clermont himself. The dying Guise calls Clermont “The most worthy of the race of men” (V.4.72). Clermont calls Oxford “the most goodly-fashion'd man I ever saw” (III.4.96). De Guise esteems that Clermont exceeds his brother Bussy “because, besides his valour/He hath the crown of man, and all his parts,/Which learning is; and that so true and virtuous/That it gives power to do as well as say/Whatever fits a most accomplish'd man” (II.1.81-87). Clermont on Oxford: “He was beside of spirit passing great, /Valiant and learn'd.” De Guise praises Clermont for his “liberal kind of speaking what is truth” (IV.4.24). Of Oxford Clermont says that he is “liberal as the sun.” De Guise lauds Clermont for his steadfastness:

In his most inexorable spirit  
 To be remov'd from anything he chooseth  
 For worthiness, or bear the least persuasion  
 To what is base, or fitteth not his object,  
 In his contempt of riches and of greatness,  
 In estimation of th'idolatrous vulgar,  
 His scorn of all things servile and ignoble,  
 Though they could gain him never such advancement.  
 (IV.4.16.23)



Clermont says more or less the same of Oxford:

And yet he cast it only in the way,  
To stay and serve the world. Nor did it fit  
His own true estimate how much it weigh'd,  
For he despid'd it; and esteem'd it freer  
To keep his own way straight, and swore that he  
Had rather make away his whole estate  
In things that cross'd the vulgar...

(III.4.105-111)

De Guise on Clermont:

His just contempt of jesters, parasites,  
Servile observers, and polluted tongues  
In short, this Senecal man is found in him

(IV.4.40-42)

This "Senecal" man Clermont himself recognizes in Oxford:

Had rather make away his whole estate  
In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would  
Be frozen up stiff (like a Sir John Smith,  
His countryman) in common nobles' fashions,  
Affecting, as the end of noblesse were,  
Those servile observations.

(III.4. 110-114).

What the meaning of the comparison between Oxford and his countryman Sir John Smith (as he was indeed Essex-born) is and what might be the meaning of "common nobles' fashions" and Sir John Smith's "servile observations" will be examined in the next and last section. Here, another possible "Senecal" characteristic of Oxford deserves mention.

In 1975 Steven W. May published an article on the authorship of the popular song (set to music by William Byrd), "My Mind to me a Kingdom is." This followed his discovery of a manuscript of what is considered a sequel poem, "I Joy not in no Earthly Bliss."<sup>15</sup> Both poems are commonly ascribed to Sir Edward Dyer, though an attribution in a manuscript might rest on a mere guess and ought to be handled with caution, the ascription to Dyer is still being confidently repeated, despite Professor May's well-founded caveat:

It is entirely possible that Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is responsible for this perennially favorite work. Indeed, in the Harvard manuscript the poem is attributed to Lord Ver. What is more, though

“were I a King” is undoubtedly Oxford’s poem and in an anonymous reply to this poems it is alluded to “My Mind a Kingdom is” in a way which suggests that the latter poem too is by the same author, Oxford’s claim, which seems much stronger than Dyer’s, is not yet generally accepted. The alluding lines are most probably wrongly attributed to Sir Philip Sidney:

Wert thou a king, yet not commaund contente;  
Where empire none thy mind could yet suffice.<sup>16</sup>

And in another anonymous reply allusion is made to the sequel, in which the line occurs “The Court or Cart I like nor loath.”

To be a king thy care would much augment,  
From Court to Cart the fortune were but bare.<sup>17</sup>

What seems to have been overlooked hitherto is that both poems are a breviary of Stoic thought, especially of Seneca’s philosophical essays and letters. As in the case of Hamlet shown above, it is possible to set off the majority of verses in either poem against a corresponding sentence from Seneca.

### **Oxford and Sir John Smith**

Chapman’s statement about Oxford is not an alien interjection, but an integral part of his play, fitting into a discourse on Stoic values: “An incident of high and noble note,/that fits the subject of my late discourse,” Clermont says. It may also be useful to remember that the behavior Clermont/Chapman ascribes to Oxford is at the same time the observation of a Stoic rule of conduct, several times pointed out in Epictetus’ *Discourses*: “We must make the best use that we can of the things which are in our power, and use the rest according to their nature.” It is this observation which allows Chapman to integrate the Earl of Oxford in the discourse along with Hamlet and Clermont:

And ‘twas the Earl of Oxford; and being offer’d  
At that time, by Duke Casimir, the view  
Of his right royal army then in field,  
Refus’d it, and no foot was mov’d to stir  
Out of his own free fore-determin’d course:  
I, wondering at it, ask’d for his reason,  
It being an offer so much for his honour.  
He, all acknowledging, said ‘twas not fit  
To take those honours that one cannot quit.

(III.4.95-103)

The same is said by the Marquis de Renel to Clermont:

But the pretext to see these battles rang'd  
Is much your honour.

(III.4. 78-9)

It would therefore appear that Chapman chose for his hero a situation from an alien episode closely corresponding to the situation into which Duke Casimir's offer brought the Earl of Oxford. Matter enough to wonder at, and one is tempted to cut the Gordian Knot, deciding that Chapman connected the Earl with such an event for purely dramaturgical reasons. But because the event has hitherto been considered as factual, an examination of the circumstances reported by Chapman cannot be avoided. Caution, however, will require us to speak in the conditional: it would be an extraordinary coincidence that Chapman experienced the Earl of Oxford in a situation similar to that of the Count d'Auvergne in Edward Grimeston's translation and wove it into the fabric of a play about an entirely fictitious hero, Clermont D'Ambois.

Frederick S. Boas seems to have had some doubts.<sup>18</sup> But, finally, he decided in favor of factuality:

In 1575 he paid a visit to Italy, and it is apparently to an episode on his return journey in the spring of 1576 that reference is made here, and in the following lines....The *Duke Cassimere* here spoken of was John Casimir, Count Palatine, who in the autumn of 1575 entered into alliance with the Huguenots and invaded France, but, after suffering a check at the hands of the Duke of Guise, made a truce and retired. The incident here spoken of apparently took place in the spring of the next year.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately, a difficulty crops up. Count John Casimir raised troops which he led into the battle of Dormans in which he was defeated on 10 October 1575 by the Duke de Guise but managed to operate a junction with other troops and to take three towns at the beginning of 1576; however, not in Germany but in Burgundy.<sup>17</sup> And in January 1576 Oxford was still in Italy. By the end of March he arrived at Paris. It is not very likely he met Casimir during the latter's military operations in Burgundy. Was Chapman ill-informed?

In April 1575 Oxford was visiting John Sturmius at Strasbourg, in Alsacia, then considered to be a German region. It does not seem impossible that about that time Count Palatine John Casimir was recruiting mercenaries for his subsequent campaign against the army of King Henri III. But to suppose that Chapman meant an episode in the Spring of 1575 instead of 1576 would be stretching the meaning of "coming from Italy" and "overtook" much too far:

I overtook, coming from Italy,  
 In Germany, a great and famous Earl  
 (III.4.84-5)

And how could Chapman have known it? He was born in 1559 or 1560, would have been only 16 or 17 years old and would either have accompanied the Earl of Oxford to Italy or traveled independently to that country. Chapman is not mentioned in Oxford's letters; nor is he known ever to have mentioned it himself. Furthermore, there is hardly a trace of an Italian experience in Chapman's works. The setting of his four tragedies is France and two of his comedies, *Monsieur d'Olive* and *An Humourous Day's Mirth*, have also a French setting. Is the episode between Count John Casimir and Oxford the mere product of Chapman's dramatic invention?

It cannot be ruled out and even seems the most satisfactory hypothesis. In the dedication of *The Revenge* to Sir Thomas Howard, the second son of the Earl of Suffolk, Chapman writes:

And for the autenticall truth of either person or action, who (worth the respecting) will expect it in a poem, whose subject is not truth, but things like truth? Poor envious souls they are that cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions; material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary being the soul, limbs, and limits of the autenticall tragedy.<sup>20</sup>

Chapman's handling of the play had met with some unknown criticisms ("in the scenical presentation it might meet with some maligners"), perhaps the "maligners" took issue with his representation of the noble character of Guise.

The next passage, with the reference to Sir John Smith, adds to the interpretative difficulties.

And yet he cast it only in the way,  
 To stay and serve the world. Nor did it fit  
 His own true estimate how much it weigh'd,  
 For he despis'd it; and esteem'd it freer  
 To keep his own way straight, and swore that he  
 Had rather make away his whole estate  
 In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would  
 Be frozen up stiff (like a Sir John Smith,  
 His countryman) in common nobles' fashions,  
 Affecting, as the end of noblesse were,  
 Those servile observations.  
 (III.4. 105-115)

Boas comments:

Though alluded to in so contemptuous a way, this Sir John Smith appears to be the noted soldier of fortune, diplomatist, and military writer, who lived from about 1534 to 1607. After serving for many years in continental armies, in 1574 he became an agent of the English government, and took part in various diplomatic missions. In 1590 he published "Certain Discourses concerning the formes and effects of divers sorts of Weapons" and dedicated the work to the English nobility, whom he calls in one part of his "proeme" the "verie eyes, eares and language of the king, and the bodie of the watch, and redresse of the Commonwealth."<sup>21</sup>

Hence, perhaps, the allusion in l. 113 to "common Nobles fashions."

But what could it mean that Sir John Smith was "stiff frozen up" in those fashions? Another approach, based upon a letter printed in B.M. Ward's biography of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, has been made by Hilda Amphlett.<sup>22</sup> In a letter of 28 July 1588 Leicester wrote from Tilbury camp, "My Lord of Oxford... returned again yesterday by me... I trust he be free to go the enemy, for he seems most willing to hazard his life in this quarrel."<sup>23</sup> B.M. Ward continues:

Lord Leicester concludes with an amusing contrast between Oxford's eagerness to fight and the antics of a certain Sir John Smyth: 'Sir, You would laugh to see how Sir John Smyth hath dealt. Since my coming here he came to me and told me that his disease so grew upon him as he must needs go to the baths. I told him I would not be against his health but he saw what the time was, and what pains he had taken with his countrymen and that I had provided a good place for him....He said his health was dear to him and desired to take his leave of me, which I yielded unto. Yesterday being our muster day he came again to dinner to me, but such foolish and glorious paradoxes he burst without any cause offered, as made all that knew anything smile and answer little, but in sort rather to satisfy men present than to argue with him. After at the muster he entered again into such strange tries for ordering of men and for the fight with weapons as made me think he was not well.'<sup>24</sup>

Was it to this event that Chapman referred? It must again be asked how Chapman could have known of Leicester's letter. Of course, a mustering is mentioned in Leicester's letter. But it nowhere appears what part Oxford took in it or if he played a part in it at all. Moreover, Leicester's letter presents Sir John Smith as a queer or bizarre man who was rather more reluctant and querulous than servile. Nothing in Leicester's letter indicates that it was this event that Chapman was thinking of when he compared Oxford favorably with Sir John Smith. The contrast revolves around the terms "crossed the vulgar" on Oxford's side and "frozen stiff up," "common nobles' fashions" and "servile observations" on Sir John Smith's side.

According to Sidney Lee's biography in the old *DNB*, Smith grew more reluctant and even rebellious in the following years. In 1590 he published a book on the use of weapons in which he strongly pleaded for not replacing the English longbow by fire weapons, probably the odd sort of weapons Leicester meant in his letter. Along with technical reasons he also adduced an educational one: the exercise of the longbow will keep both body and mind "unweakened."<sup>25</sup> In 1595 he was imprisoned for having publicly vituperated against corrupt mustering practices and tried to obtain pardon by declaring he had been drunk. It's certain that Sir John Smith cannot be said to have been a servile observer of the common practices of the time nor one who shrank from challenging the public order. In what kind of "common nobles' fashions" was he "stiff frozen up?" Another biographic detail may lead to an understanding of what Chapman meant. But let us leave Sir John Smith for a while and return to him later.

### **Learning and Honesty**

Both Oxford and Clermont are praised for their learning. De Guise places Clermont above his brother:

Because, besides his valour,  
He hath the crown of man, and all his parts  
Which learning is; and that so true and virtuous  
That it gives power to do as well as to say  
Whatever fits a most accomplish'd man  
(II.2.83-7)

Of Oxford it is said that he "Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects" (III.4.93), which Bussy D'Ambois "for his valour's season, lack'd/ And so was rapt with outrage oftentimes/Beyond decorum." (II.2.88-90). Guise's words could have been taken straight out of Cicero's *De Officiis*, one of the most influential educational works in early modern times and a major source of Baldesar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. The title "De Officiis" has been variously translated as "Of Duty," "Of Dutiful Behaviour," etc. It could also be translated as "Of Correct Social Behaviour." The first criterion of such behaviour, Cicero writes, is learning, for "knowledge of truth, touches human nature most closely. For we are all attracted and drawn to a zeal for learning and knowing."<sup>26</sup> The second criterion is composed of justice and liberality (in the sense of "generosity"), the third is valour. The fourth and last criterion is temperance, "the one in which we find considerateness and self-control, which give, as it were, a sort of polish to life; it embraces also temperance, complete control of all the passions, and moderation in all things, what in Latin may be called *decorum*."<sup>27</sup>

"Decorum" is derived from the verb "decet," meaning "to be fit" or "to be proper" with connotations such as "beautiful," "gracious," "elegant." "Decorum" and "honestus" are reciprocal: "nam et quod decet est honestum et quod honestum est

deceit,” “what is proper is honest and what is honest is proper.” The word “honestum” is best translated as “honorable,” though in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Book of the Governour* (1531) and Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster* (1570) rendered it as “honest,” probably because the word “honour” was too charged with feudal and chivalric meaning. The range of meanings connected with “honesty” was very broad: civility, graciousness, control of the passions, refinement, cultivation, etc., including the restricted modern sense of “not deceitful,” which was, however, not the most usual meaning Elizabethans attached to it.

The purpose of this excursion is to show that the contradiction between Oxford and Sir John Smith that Chapman must have had in mind was between “uncouth” and “refined”; between “in” in “military prowess” and “learning”; or, as it was often expressed, between “arms” and “letters.” When Chapman has Clermont say of Oxford that mustering troops did not “fit/ His true estimate how much it weigh’d,/ For he despis’d it,” he definitely declares that Oxford, though an aristocrat, was much more attracted by cultural and humanist values. This is also a characteristic of Hamlet, who thought himself far from being a Hercules.

### **Common Nobles’ Fashions**

It is perhaps not so well known that the largest part of the nobility in medieval and early modern times was hostile to learning. Most aristocrats regarded learning as incompatible with military and chivalric valour. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Spanish Marquis de Santillana exhorted the nobility to abandon their prejudices. “Letters neither slacken the spear nor weakens the sword in the hand of the knight.”<sup>28</sup>

In the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Castiglione wrote the *Book of the Courtier*. It was not published until 1528, but circulated in manuscript several years before. Castiglione must have begun writing in or before 1515, the year Francis I was crowned king of France, as at one place he is still called Monsieur d’Angoulême. Castiglione subscribes to the precedence of arms over letters: “And forso much as this disputation hath already been tossed a long time by most wise men, we need not to renew it, but I count it resolved upon arms’ side.”<sup>29</sup> Despite this obvious preference, he has little to say about arms but much about letters; he underscores the necessity for the courtier not only to be universally educated but to behave with grace and elegance. He has Count Lodovico declare that, “although the Frenchmen know only the nobleness of arms, and pass for nothing beside: so that they do not only not set by letters, but they rather abhor them, and all learned men they count very rascals, and they think it a great villany when anyone of them is called a clerk.”<sup>30</sup>

To which the Magnifico Giuliano replies: “You say very true, this error indeed hath long reigned among the Frenchmen. But if Monseigneur d’Angoulême have so good luck that he may (as men hope) succeed in the Crown, the glory of arms in France doeth not so flourish nor is had in such estimation, as letters will be, I believe.”<sup>31</sup>

Even if Roger Ascham was laying it on a little thick in the 1560s to attract the attention of his readership, he nevertheless did not consider it superfluous to add this passage from Castiglione (without expressly referring to it) to his other warnings at the address of young noblemen:

Yet I hear say, some young gentlemen of ours, count it their shame to be counted learned and perchance, they count it their shame, to be counted honest also, for I hear say, they meddle as little with the one, as with the other. A marvelous case, that gentlemen should so be ashamed of good learning, and never a whit ashamed of ill manners: such do say for them, that the Gentlemen of France do so: which is a lie, as God will have it... And though some in France, which will needs be Gentlemen, whether men will or no, and have more gentleship in their hat, than in their head, be at deadly feud with both learning and honesty, yet I believe, if that noble Prince, king Francis the first were alive, they should have neither place in his Court, nor pension in his wars, if he had knowledge of them.<sup>32</sup>

The symmetry should be marked: “ashamed of good learning, and never a wit ashamed of good manners,” and “some young gentlemen count it their shame to be learned, and perchance they count it their shame, to be counted honest also.” To Ascham “honesty” means “good manners”; ill manners are “dishonest.” He attaches the adjective “honest” to a number of other exercises: learning, dancing, recreation in general.

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and during the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the situation in England was markedly worse than in Ascham’s time:

The most superficial examination of the most conspicuous data tells us with certainty at least this: that in the sixteenth century there was a great deal of complaint about the education of the aristocracy and that with a few exceptions the Jeremiahs of the time were all saying pretty the same thing. The well-born were indifferent to learning, and they preferred to stay that way.<sup>33</sup>

A gentleman told the humanist Richard Pace that he had rather his son hanged than be a “clerk.” Learning did not fit a gentleman. All he had to learn was “to blow the horn nicely, to hunt skilfully, and elegantly to carry and train a hawk.”<sup>34</sup> Even about half-way the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Renaissance Italy this attitude seems to have still prevailed. The famous humanist Leon Battista Alberti wrote that he would welcome it to see young noblemen more often with a book in the hand than with a hawk on the fist.<sup>35</sup> Alberti held this “common fashion of noblemen” for the opinion of a simpleton.

With the ever growing need of learned officers in a centralizing state, this situation could not endure. As, once again, Ascham warned:



The fault is in yourselves, you noble men's sons, and therefore you deserve the greater blame, that commonly, the meaner men's children come to be the wisest councillors and greater doers in the weighty affairs of this Realm.<sup>36</sup>

In other words: you aristocrats will be displaced from the helm of the realm if you continue to despise learning and honesty, good manners. It will be the very task of the aristocracy to set the standards of proper social behavior:

Take heed therefore, you great ones in the Court, yea though you be the greatest of all, take heed what you do, take heed how you live. For as you great ones use to do, so all mean men love to do. You be indeed makers or marrers of manners of all men's within the Realm.<sup>37</sup>

It seems to be in this sense we must understand the words ascribed to Oxford by Chapman:

To keep his own way straight, and swore that he  
Had rather make away his whole estate  
In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would  
Be frozen up stiff (like a Sir John Smith,  
His countryman) in common nobles' fashions,  
Affecting, as the end of noblesse were,  
Those servile observations

(III.4.109-115)

Sir John Smith certainly did not lack learning. He was sent several times on diplomatic missions. He wrote a series of discourses on the use of weapons. But he seems to have lacked "honesty."

### ***Sprezzatura* or Vulgar Chivalry**

Cicero wrote that considerateness and self-control gave a sort of polish to life. In Elizabethan literature the concept of polish adopts several names: "sweet" and "honey-tongued," "silver-tongued," "honed" and "smooth," "refined," "grace," etc. The concept was developed in detail by Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier*. "Grace" is best acquired, according to Castiglione, by means of a certain nonchalance, "*sprezzatura*," the display of a behavior artful to the point of appearing entirely natural and artless. Though Castiglione maintained that arms should remain the courtier's main occupation, he was utterly contemptuous of the type of bragging soldier, the *miles gloriosus*. He illustrates this ill-mannered type in the following anecdote:

Yet will we not have him for all that so lusty to make bravery in words, and to brag that he hath wedded his harness for his wife, and to threaten with such grim looks, as we have seen Berto do oftentimes. For unto such may well be said that a worthy Gentlewoman in a noble assembly spoke pleasantly unto one, that shall be nameless for this time, whom she to show him a good countenance, desired to dance with her, and he refusing both that, and to hear music and many other entertainments offered him, always affirming such trifles not to be his profession, at last the Gentlewoman demanding him: “what is then your profession?” He answered with a frowning look: “To fight.”

Then said the Gentlewoman: “Seeing you are not nowe at the war nor in place to fight, I woulde thinke it best for you to be well besmeared and set up in an armory with other implements of war till time were that you should be occupied, least you wax more rustier then you are.”<sup>38</sup>

Sir John Smith, it would seem, was cast in the same “miles gloriosus” mold. According to Sidney Lee, he prided himself of having refused to take part in “very great entertainment that he was offered by certain very great and foreign princes,” and spoke disparagingly of the ladies of the French Court. Chapman might well have been thinking of this anecdote in *The Book of the Courtier*, replacing “besmeared and set up in an armory” by his own metaphor “frozen up stiff” —immobilized in antiquated fashions and avoiding the “very great entertainment” of foreign princes.

## Conclusion

Did Count John Casimir really request Oxford to view his troops? Or did Chapman invent the anecdote? It seems possible that Chapman, having woven into his “text” the episode on the Count D’Auvergne, remembered a similar proposal that had actually been put to Oxford. But it is also possible that Chapman merely invented it.

Our conclusion, which not everyone will want to share, favors the latter assumption. As a preliminary it should be indicated that this conclusion is influenced by Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, especially by chapter VI, subchapter C, “The Means of Representation in Dreams”:

For representing *causal relations* dreams have two procedures which are in essence the same. Suppose the dream-thoughts run like this: ‘Since this was so and so, such and such was bound to happen.’ Then the commoner method method of representation would be to introduce the dependent clause as an introductory dream and to add the principal clause as the main dream. If I have interpreted arigh, the temporal sequence may be reversed. But the more extensive part of the dream always corresponds to the principal clause.<sup>39</sup>

Freud more than once draws the analogy between dreams and the unconscious, on the one hand, and literary censorship on the other:

A similar difficulty [as censorship within the dream] confronts the political writer who has disagreeable truths to tell to those in authority... A writer must be beware of the censorship, and on its account he must soften and distort the expression of his opinion....he finds himself compelled either merely to refrain from certain forms of attack, to speak in allusions in place of direct references...<sup>40</sup>

Let us suppose that Chapman wanted to transmit to his readers a knowledge of a specific relationship between Hamlet and the Earl of Oxford. As this had remained concealed, Chapman could only state it by indirect allusion. He established a connection between his play and *Hamlet* by picking up the episode on the Count d'Auvergne. This allowed him to put Clermont, conceived as an ideal Stoic, in phase with the Stoic Hamlet of Shakespeare's play (V.2). The positioning could have served to communicate any one of three propositions: Whether Oxford wrote *Hamlet*, was the model for Hamlet, or *both* wrote the play *and* was the original of the title character, this scene III.4 was the ideal place to introduce him. We have, then, answered Boas' question as to why he introduced Oxford here and nowhere else.

We have now to cast a rapid look at how Chapman did it. In other words: by which "means of representation"? We have first the introductory part. Clermont describes an ideal Stoic and mentions an attribute particularly stressed by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus: "one should do only what is in his powers." Then he associates Oxford with a situation similar to that by which Clermont is confronted. Whether it is Oxford, Clermont, or Chapman the admonition is the same: "cast it only in the way to stay and serve the world." What this is has been said before: virtue, civility, valor, liberality, learning, cultivation ("spoke and writ sweetly"). It is repeated afterwards: therein he was the contrary of his countryman Sir John Smith, to whom refinement and cultivation signified little. Sir John Smith preferred military matters, Oxford humanistic values and learning. In Chapman's testimony, moreover, Oxford was so devoted to this task that he "had rather make away his whole estate in things that crossed the vulgar."

Chapman's witness accords with the characterization of Thomas Nashe's in *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (pub. 1598), where Ver declares: "What I had, I have spent on good fellows." Using Roger Ascham's terminology for "cultivation" or "honesty," that is, Chapman also tells us that Oxford wanted to "cross the vulgar," to "sow honesty." This is what (about the same time) Sir John Davies of Hereford tells us... of "Will Shake-speare." According to Chapman, Oxford was a very different man from his countryman Sir John Smith, more devoted to military matters — and that Oxford, using Ben Jonson's formula, was more concerned with "brandishing lances" at the "eyes of ignorance."



❧ **Endnotes** ❧

<sup>1</sup> Epictet. *Discourses*, I.I.

<sup>2</sup> George Chapman, *Bussy d'Ambois and The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, edited by Frederick B Boas, Boston and London, 1905, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20890>

<sup>3</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.

<sup>4</sup> The correct French spelling is "d'Amboise." It will be used when reference is made to the historical personage; reference to the character of Chapman's plays follows the original author's spelling, "D'Ambois."

<sup>5</sup> *Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois*, Sylvie Rozenker, ed. Toulouse: Éditions Ombres, 1994, 131-3.

<sup>6</sup> His title as heir apparent, as Sir Tomas Smiths explains: "But as in France the king's eldest son hath the title of the dauphin, and he or the next heir apparent to the crown is monsieur." *De Republica Anglorum*, I:18.

<sup>7</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.

<sup>8</sup> De Guise's brother, a cardinal, was assassinated shortly after the Duke of Guise himself in December 1588; Châtillon is Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, killed on St Bartholomew's day in August 1572; none of them figures in Chapman's play.

<sup>9</sup> For "bare bodkin," see *Moral Epistle* 70: "Non opus est vasto vulnere dividere praecordia: scalpello aperitur ad illam magnam libertatem via et puncto securitas constat. Quid ergo est quod nos facit pigros inertesque? Non opus est vasto vulnere dividere praecordia: scalpello aperitur ad illam magnam libertatem via et puncto securitas constat. Quid ergo est quod nos facit pigros inertesque?/If you would pierce your heart, a gaping wound is not necessary - a lancet will open the way to that great freedom, and tranquillity can be purchased at the cost of a pin- prick. What, then, is it which makes us lazy and sluggish?" For "slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune," see *Epistle* 104: "Unus est enim huius vitae fluctuantis et turbidae portuseventura contemnere, stare fidenter ac paratum tela fortunae adverso pectore excipere, non latitantem nec tergiversantem./The only harbour safe from the seething storms of this life is scorn of the future, a firm stand, a readiness to receive Fortune's missiles full in the breast, neither skulking nor turning the back." For "But that the dread of something after death,/The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns, puzzles the will," see *Epistle* 82: "Illa quoque res morti nos alienat, quod haec iam novimus, illa ad quae transituri sumus nescimus qualia sint, et horremus ignota./And there is another element which estranges us from

death. we are already familiar with the present, but are ignorant of the future into which we shall transfer ourselves, and we shrink from the unknown.”

- <sup>10</sup> Harold Jenkins. *Hamlet*, Routledge: London & New York, 1982: 557.
- <sup>11</sup> Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, CVII.
- <sup>12</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.
- <sup>13</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, II:I.
- <sup>14</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, II:I.
- <sup>15</sup> May, Steven W. “The Authorship of ‘My Mind to me a Kingdom Is’,” *Review of English Studies*, New Series, Volume XXVI: 104 (November 1975), 385-395.
- <sup>16</sup> May, 389.
- <sup>17</sup> Ringler, William. *Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1962, 557.
- <sup>18</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.
- <sup>19</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.
- <sup>20</sup> Thomas Marc Parrot. *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman: The Tragedies*. George Routledge and Sons: London, 1910, 77.
- <sup>21</sup> Boas, *Bussy*.
- <sup>22</sup> Amphlett, Hilda. “Sir John Smith,” *Shakespearean Authorship Review*, No. 13, Spring 1965. Reprinted in Turner Clark, Eva. *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare’s Plays*. Edited by Ruth Lloyd Miller. Jennings LA: Kennikat Press, 1974, pp. 705.
- <sup>23</sup> Ward, B.M. *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604*. London: John Murray. 1928, 289-90.
- <sup>24</sup> Ward, 290.
- <sup>25</sup> Smith’s book is extensively quoted from online at: [http://www.archerylibrary.com/books/english\\_bowman/html/30.html](http://www.archerylibrary.com/books/english_bowman/html/30.html)
- <sup>26</sup> Cicero. *Of Duty*, translated by Walter Miller, Loeb edition, Cambridge, MA, 1913. [http://www.stoics.com/cicero\\_book.html](http://www.stoics.com/cicero_book.html). Book I.18.
- <sup>27</sup> Cicero, I.27.
- <sup>28</sup> Pelorson, Jean-Marc, *Les Letrados – juristes castillans sous Philippe III. Recherches sur leur place dans la société, la culture et l’état*. Poitiers, 1980, 208.
- <sup>29</sup> Castiglione, Baldesar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Translation by Thomas Hoby. Books I, XLV. Available online at <http://www.luminarium.org/renaissance-editions/courtier/courtier.html>.
- <sup>30</sup> Hoby, I, XLII.
- <sup>31</sup> Hoby, I, XLII.
- <sup>32</sup> Ascham, Roger. *The Scholemaster*. London: John Day, 1570, 18.
- <sup>33</sup> Hexter, J.J. “The Education of the Aristocracy in the Renaissance,” *The Journal of Modern History*, XXII (March 1950) 1-2.
- <sup>34</sup> Hexter, 2.
- <sup>35</sup> Alberti, Leon Battista. *I Libri della Famiglia*. Available online at <http://www.filosofico.net/albertifamiglia4libri.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Ascham, 14<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Ascham, 22<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Castiglione, I, xvii.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York : Avon Books, 1965, pp. 349-350.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, 175-6.