

Gunilla Florby. 2004. *Echoing Texts: George Chapman's Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*. Lund: Lund Studies in English 109. pp. 181. ISBN 91-974023-8-9.

Two decades after *The Painful Passage to Virtue*, her study of Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois tragedies, Gunilla Florby has produced another highly illuminating volume on Chapman's drama. The focus this time is on the closely linked pair of dramas published in 1608 that trace the fall of Henry of Navarre's great marshal, Byron, texts even more neglected than the Bussy plays. As in the earlier volume, Florby is intent on demonstrating Chapman's dramatic artistry—rarely acknowledged in modern scholarship—as well as explicating his sometimes elusive moral and political philosophy. But *Echoing Texts* differs from the earlier work by offering in addition an extended theoretical meditation on issues of intertextuality.

Wishing to avoid the limitations of both positivistic source study and “the radically poststructuralist vision of intertextuality associated with Kristeva and Barthes” (15), Florby in her introduction works out an “intermediate approach” (14) indebted to Claes Schaar's method of locating “vertical context systems” by which the reader creates meaning through the interaction of surface text and intertexts. In defining the intertexts to consider, Florby is above all practical and attuned to the distinctive nature of Chapman's plays, recognizing that their author employs familiar chronicle material and alludes to recognizable classical texts even as he operates within the “larger cultural discourse” (17) that includes contemporary politics and the ideological contestations of Jacobean England.

The second chapter outlines the *Conspiracy's* indebtedness to the collectively authored French chronicle translated by Chapman's cousin Edward Grimston, revealing how the playwright reshaped the historian's material and to what effects. Through “changes in emphasis, whether caused by condensation or by elaboration and addition,” Chapman is shown to bring out “the opposing forces working on Byron's mind” (33). Attention then moves to Plutarch, Homer, and Seneca, whose works are “the most vital ones that nourish the text and contribute organically to the meaning” (38). With varying degrees of explicitness, Chapman introduces such figures as Diomedes, Hercules, Alexander and Oedipus to entwine his hero in “a dense net of ill-boding

correspondences" (46) that conflicts with the celebratory vocabulary also characterizing him. The result is a remarkable "heroic ambiguity" that is Chapman's principal means of creating depth of character. Such ambiguity is the source of the remarkable disagreements his French tragedies have spawned.

Florby turns her attention in chapter 4 to the *Tragedy*, which adheres more closely to Grimeston's narrative and relies less on the complicating effects of classical allusion. The most important intertexts of the latter play are less literary than historical, as Chapman displays a greater willingness to use the French setting as commentary on English reality. Although the *Tragedy* "voices its protest in a guarded fashion" (127), it does manage to employ images of sexual libertinage, adumbrations of homosexuality, and reference to the 1601 revolt of the earl of Essex to create "contradictions and ruptures" that "undermine the image of the ideal king" (109). Florby interprets this carefully calibrated transfer of heroic ambiguity onto King Henry as criticism of James' pacifism and ideology of absolute, patriarchal monarchy. This criticism relies in the most general sense upon the "vital ideological context" (153) generated by such early modern anti-absolutist theorists as Beza and Plessis-Mornay, and it is directed, most specifically, toward the followers of Prince Henry, who formed a potential center of opposition to James. She returns to the complexities of Chapman's "rhetoric of opposition" in a brief closing chapter, rejecting the standard readings of a "bad Byron and good Henry" and the less standard, but no less misleading and reductive readings of a "good Byron and bad Henry" (159).

Admirable both for its subtle and richly contextualized readings of the two plays and its development of a framework for reading such plays that is both theoretically astute and pragmatic in application, *Echoing Texts* will appeal to both students of Jacobean drama and theorists of intertextuality.

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