

An Accident of Note: Part 2 (Continued from the June Newsletter)

Why did George Chapman Bear Witness to Oxford in *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*?

Answering this question, **Robert Detobel** argues for a Stoic dimension to *Hamlet*.

IV. The Stoic Hamlet

Of Hamlet's words: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.10-11) Harold Jenkins remarks, "the present passage shows Hamlet recognising a design in the universe he had previously failed to find." The existence of such a design, 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.

Such is life, Seneca writes, 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 end, Hamlet answers to Horatio, who recommends he listen to his ominous feelings and avoid the fencing match with Laertes: "Readiness is all" – in a passage profoundly Stoic:

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.ii.215-220).

For nearly all the constituents of this answer, a fairly close match can be found in Seneca's *Moral Epistles*

HAMLET

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. Let be.

Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

SENECA

EPISTLE LVIII: ON BEING

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

EPISTLE IV: ON THE TERRORS OF DEATH

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.

EPISTLE CVII: ON OBEDIENCE TO THE UNIVERSAL WILL

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

MORAL ESSAYS: TO POLYBIUS ON CONSOLATION

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.

EPISTLE LXIX: ON REST AND RESTLESSNESS

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.

Using an epithet Chapman coins for his hero Clermont D'Ambois, we are fully justified to say 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's accomplices. The parallels in Chapman's play are obvious.

Hamlet is sent to England to have him killed far from the court for two motives Claudius explains to Laertes: "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 a 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.i.11-14)

Clermont's brother-in-law justifies his treachery, with the argument that public weal in an absolute monarchy is centered in the king:

Treachery for kings is truest loyalty:
Nor is to bear the name of treachery,
But grave deep policy. (II.ii.32-34)

With 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.iv..7-18)

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

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.i.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, Grimston'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."

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.ii. 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 sends him to England:

Hamlet: Good.
King: So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.
Hamlet. I see a cherub that sees them. (IV.iv.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.ii.208-9) Thereon 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 to view 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.iv.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 after his meeting Fortinbras and his army. Like Horatio to Hamlet, so a friend, the Marquis de Renel, suggests to Clermont he cancel his journey. To which Clermont replies by stating some Stoic principles:

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.iv.32-36)

The contempt of fearing death in the first line 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 later 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 Hamlet, especially the Hamlet of act V, Clermont D'Ambois and the 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). It is not death itself, Epictetus taught, that is 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. 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.

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.iv.66-75).

Like Hamlet in V.ii, 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 . . .

links 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.iv. 49-57).

Oxfordians might be tempted into supposing that Chapman was writing this with the Earl of Oxford in mental view. This may be a debatable viewpoint, but at least two arguments can be made in support. It cannot be readily seen how the phrase "though of noble birth, my birthright had little left it" would apply to the Clermont of the play. It suggests that he was somehow impoverished and in 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". A third argument will be unfolded in the following section.

V. Clermont D'Ambois and the Earl of Oxford.

While Clermont shares many features with Hamlet, he definitely also shares 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.iv.72). Clermont calls Oxford "the most goodly-fashion'd man I ever saw" (III.iv.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. i.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.iv.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'idolatrour vulgar,
His scorn of all things servile and ignoble,
Though they could gain him never such advancement.
(IV.iv.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 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 ... (III.iv.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.iv.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.iv. 110-114)

What the meaning of the comparison between Oxford and his countryman Sir John Smith (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 ought to be spoken of.

In 1975 Professor 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" following his discovery of a manuscript and of what is considered as a sequel poem, "I Joy not in no Earthly Bliss". 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: "Yet it is entirely possible that Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, is responsible for this perennially favourite 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 poem "My Mind a Kingdom is" it is alluded to 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, most probably wrongly attributed to Sir Philip Sidney, are:

Wert thou a king, yet not commaund contente;
Where empire none thy mind could yet suffice.

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

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 the majority of verses in either poem against a sentence of Seneca (see table in appendix).[This will be published in the next issue of the Newsletter - Ed.]

VI. Oxford and Sir John Smith

At the risk of being repetitious, I must again stress that Chapman's statement is not a communication alien to his play, but an integral part of it, 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 behaviour 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 into 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.iv.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.iv. 78-9)

So it would 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 dispensed with. Caution, however, will require us to speak in the conditional: it would be an extraordinary coincidence that Chapman met the Earl of Oxford in a situation similar to that of the Count d'Auvergne in Edward Grimeston's translation and which he chose to weave into the fabric of a play about an entirely fictitious hero, Clermont D'Ambois.

Frederick S. Boas seems to have had some doubts. 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.

Immediately, a difficulty crops up. Count John Casimir raised troops which he led into the battle of Dormans, where he was defeated on 10th 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, this was not in Germany but in Burgundy. 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 Count John 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 seems not 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.iv.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 have had either to have accompanied the Earl of Oxford to Italy or travelled 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 play to Sir Thomas Howard, the second son of the Earl of Suffolk, Chapman writes:

And for the autentic 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 autentic tragedy.

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.iv. 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." 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 17th Earl of Oxford, has been made by Hilda Amphlett. 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." 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 ..."

Was it to this event Chapman referred? Again it must be asked how Chapman could have seen Leicester's letter? Of course, a mustering is mentioned in the letter. But it nowhere appears what part Oxford took in it or if he took part in it at all. Moreover, Leicester's letter presents Sir John Smith as a queer or bizarre man whose behaviour, though, was rather reluctant and querulous than servile. Nothing in the letter indicates that it was this event 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 recalcitrant 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 firearms, probably the odd ordering of weapons Leicester refers to. Among technical reasons he also adduced an educational one: the exercise of the longbow will keep both body and mind "unweakened". In 1595 he was imprisoned for having publicly vituperated against corrupt mustering practices and tried to obtain pardon by declaring he had been drunk. Certain it is that Sir John Smith cannot be said to have been a servile observer of the common practices of his time, nor did he shrink from challenging the public order. So 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 after a digression return to him.

VI.i 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.ii.83-7). Of Oxford it is said that he "Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects" (III.iv.93), which Bussy D'Ambois "for his valour's season, lack'd/ And so was rapt with outrage oftentimes/Beyond decorum." (II.ii.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." 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."

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

honestum et quod honestum est decet, “what is proper is honest and what is honest is proper”. The word “honestum” is best translated as “honorable”, though in the 16th century Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Book of the Governor* (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 in the first place between “refinement” and “uncouthness”, in the second place between “learning” and “military prowess”, or, as it was often expressed, between “letters” and “arms”. 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, which is also a characteristic of Hamlet, who thought himself far from being like Hercules.

VI.ii Common nobles’ fashions

It is perhaps less 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 16th century the Spanish Marquis de Santillana exhorted the nobility to abandon their prejudices. “Letters neither slacken the spear nor weaken the sword in the hand of the knight.”

In the first quarter of the 16th century Castiglione wrote the *Book of the Courtier*. It was not published until 1528 but it 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 in 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.”

Despite this obvious preference he has little to say on arms and plenty on letters; he underscores the necessity for the courtier to be universally educated and to behave with grace and elegance. He has Count Lodovico declare that, “Frenchmen know only the nobleness of arms, and pass for nothing beside: so that they do not only not set store 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.” To which Magnifico Giuliano replies: “You say very true, this error indeed hath long reigned among the Frenchmen. But if Monseigneur d’Angoulême have such good luck that he may (as men hope) succeed to the Crown, the glory of arms in France doth not so flourish nor is had in such estimation, as letters will be, I believe.”

Even positing that Roger Ascham was laying it on a little thick in the 1560s to draw the attention of his readership, he found it nevertheless not superfluous to add this passage from Castiglione (without expressly referring to it) to his other warnings in the address to 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.

The symmetry should be marked: “ashamed of good learning, and never a whit ashamed of good manners,” and “some young gentlement 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.

At the end of the 15th century and during the first quarter of the 16th 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 much the same thing. The well-born were indifferent to learning, and they preferred to stay that way.

A gentleman told the humanist Richard Pace that he had rather his son were 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.” Even about halfway into the 15th century in Renaissance Italy this attitude seems to have still prevailed. The famous

humanist Leon Batista 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. 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.” In other words: you, aristocrats, will be displaced from the helm of the state 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.” 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.iv.109-115)

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

VI.ii Sprezzatura versus vulgar chivalry

Cicero wrote that considerateness and self-control gave a sort of polish to life. In the 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 in the *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.

Sir John Smith, it would seem, was cast in the same mould. According to Sidney Lee, he prided himself on 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”. In other words: immobilized in old fashions.

CONCLUSION

Did Count John Casimir really ask that Oxford view his troops? Or did Chapman invent the anecdote? Either case seems possible. Perhaps Chapman, having woven the episode about Count D’Auvergne into his play, remembered a similar proposal to be made to Oxford. Or perhaps he, Chapman, merely invented it.

Our option, which not everybody will want to share, is in favour of the latter assumption. As a preliminary it should be indicated that our option 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 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 aright, the temporal sequence may be reversed. But the more extensive part of the dream always corresponds to the principal clause.

We should also call to mind that 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...

Let us suppose that Chapman wanted to communicate to us a certain relationship between Hamlet and the Earl of Oxford, be it that Chapman considered him the author of *Hamlet*, or the person who had stood model for Hamlet, or both. As this had remained concealed, Chapman could only state it by indirect references and/or allusions. He had established a connection path between his play and *Hamlet* by picking up the episode on the Count d'Auvergne. This selection allowed him to put Clermont, conceived as an ideal Stoic, in phase with the Stoic Hamlet in V.ii of Shakespeare's play. If he wanted to communicate: Oxford wrote *Hamlet*, or Oxford is the model for Hamlet, or Oxford both wrote the play and is the model of its protagonist, this scene III.iv was the ideal place to introduce Oxford. We have, then, answered Boas's question as to why he introduced Oxford there 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. Cermont describes an ideal Stoic man and mentions an attribute particularly stressed by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus: "One should do only what is in one's powers." Then he associates Oxford with a similar situation to that with which Clermont is confronted in the play.

Oxford, Clermont or Chapman tells, "cast it only in the way to stay and serve the world." "It", as has been said before, is: virtue, civility, valour, 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. 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 Thomas Nashe's witness on Ver in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. "What I had, I have spent on good fellows," says Ver. It also accords with the liberality Nashe praises in William Beeston, alias Apis Lapis.

Using Roger Ascham's terminology for "cultivation": "honesty", that is, Chapman also tells us that Oxford wanted to "cross the vulgar", to generate or, with a metaphor "to sow honesty". This is what, at about the same time, Sir John Davies of Hereford tells us ... of Will Shakespeare.

Chapman also tells us that Oxford was a very different man from his countryman Sir John Smith,

who was more devoted to military matters. And that Oxford, using Ben Jonson's formula, was more concerned about "brandishing lances at the eyes of ignorance."

In the next issue, Robert Detobel's third article will show how Oxford, too, translated Senecan thought into poetry.

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