CHAPMAN'S DUKE OF BYRON AND APOLLO'S VIRTUE

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The two Byron plays alone of Chapman's six tragedies suggest that goodness can indeed coexist with the possession and exercise of great worldly power. Most critics agree that Chapman intends Henry IV of France closely to approximate the ideal monarch in The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron, the two-part political morality in which a military hero stands between two forces competing for his loyalty. The forces are those of the king whom he has served with great distinction in the civil wars and an alliance of foreign princes seeking by subversion to undo the victories that have secured Henry's legitimate possession of the throne. The extended drama exhibits the conspirators' successful capture of Byron's allegiance through strategies that play upon the two excesses of temperament that serve him well in combat but loom as liabilities otherwise, namely, his "glorious" humor and explosive irascibility. Peter Ure's important study has proposed that Chapman's frequent borrowings from the De Alexandri Magni are a way of importing Plutarch's moralized Alexander into the drama as a touchstone by which to display not only the hollowness of postures Byron learns to strike, but also Henry's status as genuine inheritor of Alexander's virtues. A series of allusions to myths involving Apollo functions in much the same way, I hope to show, in clarifying the relative moral positions of the characters.

If the plays detail Byron's corruption and fall from a position of eminence, there is still no reason to discount the original aptness of the Duke of Savoy's proposal of the sight of him astride his horse as an emblem of prelapsarian man. He seems "a full-sail'd Argosy/ Danc'd with a lofty billow," and, still further, "a hieroglyphic of a blessed kingdom," so exquisitely are ruler and ruled adjusted to one another.

The first play follows the intrigue for Byron's loyalty which this princeling Duke of Savoy initiates at the court in Paris, whither he has come ostensibly to conclude terms of peace for his own territories. He fancies himself the consummate courtier, and his conversation with his entourage as the play opens is appropriately adorned with conceits that strain toward the abstruse and suggest manipulation of others. Statecraft is an alchemical "projection" or is like the physician's art that may indicate
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"desperate med'cine" for a haughty ally or the administration of "physic" to Byron's humor of vaingloriousness. Henry's housecleaning expulsion of La Fin from court elicits Savoy's suggestion that the king's indictment of the vices of this declined and litigious cozener is an exercise in physiognomy that reads "strange characters writ in his face." The expulsion, which affords our first impression of Henry, is in reality a token of his concern for the peaceful ordering of the kindgom, as is his announcement of his forthcoming marriage, which he hopes will produce an heir to secure the succession.

The master plan for taking Byron first unfolds at Brussels, whence he has been sent as Henry's envoy to oversee the peace settlement there. Extraordinary honors and inordinate flattery are heaped upon him. His first tempter, Picoté, spreads a rich carpet in the path he is to take and arranges for music to be played. Byron is soon rapt in a reverie and soliloquizes:

What place is this, what air, what region,
In which a man may hear the harmony
Of all things moving? Hymen marries here
Their ends and uses, and makes me his temple.
Hath any man been blessed, and yet liv'd?
The blood turns in my veins; I stand on change.5

The initial questions, the fantasy of translation to heaven, and the awareness of the harmony of the spheres draw upon a topos that had been expressed in both Scipio's dream and the delirium in which Seneca's Hercules achieves, in the Oetaeus, a foretaste of his eventual apotheosis. The wording of the questions turns back upon Byron, however; it renders verbatim not the phrases of the Oetaeus but the bewildered exclamations of Seneca's other Hercules recovering from the madness that had been accompanied not by the authenticating music of heaven but by the murder of his own wife and children: "Quis hic locus, quae regio, ... Quas trahimus auras?" The rather surprising presence of Hymen is attributable, I believe, to the notion that marriage perfects individuals, especially women. (Marlowe's sophistical Leander would have it that simple loss of virginity suffices equally well.) Byron's overleaping imagination substitutes "apotheosis" for "perfection," apparently.7

A few lines later he exhorts himself to translate vision to action in defiance of all danger. He turns for exemplum to the arrow shot at the sun by an angry Hercules and "into shivers by the thunder broken." By the end of the speech he has indeed preferred himself virtually to the rank of the gods; a second burst of music brings forth the exclamation that "They