

**The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France / La  
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***The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France.* George Chapman and James Shirley. Ed. and trans. Gilles Bertheau. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016. 394 pp. €48.**

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Editions of George Chapman's works are rare, so Gilles Bertheau's fine edition and French translation of *The Tragedy of Chabot* (1639) is most welcome, especially as he manages to reassess this lesser-known play and to give it its rightful place in early modern English drama.

Ever since Jean Jacquot's book about Chapman's life and works (1951) and edition and translation of *Bussy D'Ambois* (1960), there has been an academic interest in Chapman in France. The reason for it could be Chapman's choice of French subjects for most of his tragedies, taken from France's contemporary and historical events. Following in Jacquot's footsteps, Bertheau is able, as a French speaker, to delve into Chapman's French sources and to suggest new ones.

This is a very complete edition, with, apart from the English text and its French translation on the facing page, an introduction of more than a hundred pages, a chronology of Chapman's life and works, textual notes, variants, and an extract from Etienne Pasquier's *Recherches de la France* (Chapman's main source, in its 1621 French edition), as well as a glossary, a summary, a bibliography, and an index.

Bertheau starts with historical facts about Philippe de Chabot, one of Francis I's favorites who was accused of embezzlement, tried, and condemned to a confiscation of his estates and a heavy fine. He later obtained his pardon, and his accuser, Chancellor Poyet, was arrested, imprisoned, and deprived of his offices. In the play, Chabot is condemned to death, then pardoned by the king, but refuses the pardon, because he is innocent, and dies—presumably of grief.

Bertheau goes back to Pasquier's original text in order to give a precise analysis of Chapman's borrowings and shows that, more than just the story, it was also Pasquier's anti-absolutist ideology and his denunciation of political arbitrariness that must have attracted the English poet. Bertheau also suggests a source that has never been envisaged before, a French allegorical poem of 1544, the *Debat d'Eole et de Neptune*, and shows the possible parallels between the French and the English texts. A common interpretation of the play shows it to be an analogy of the Overbury scandal in which Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, was accused of murder, condemned, and then pardoned, after having been one of James I's powerful favorites. Bertheau does not reject such interpretation outright but thinks that Chapman was mainly interested in French history and

sees the play as a fine-tuned exploration of the playwright's interest in the confrontation of a great noble and an authoritarian, absolute monarch. It would have been impossible to write such a play about English current affairs—such as the Earl of Essex's rebellion. Bertheau shows that Chapman's main questioning in his tragedies had been consistent since *Bussy D'Ambois* (1607): a conflict between a great aristocrat who sees himself as an autonomous subject, and an absolutist, if not tyrannical, king. *The Tragedy of Chabot* is Chapman's achievement in the exploration of this confrontation.

Even more importantly, Bertheau provides an insightful reassessment of Chapman's work, not only political but also aesthetic. He sees the form of the play as *classique*, and even talks of “pre-Cornelian” (9) drama since, contrary to Chapman's previous tragedies, there is no physical violence on stage: Chapman relegates torture off stage, as in seventeenth-century French tragedies, or in the so-called closet English drama of Fulke Greville or Samuel Daniel. This allows Chapman to put the stress on the dialogue between the king and the hero—or between the secondary but important characters of Chabot's wife, father-in-law, and the queen—and to create a play of ideas: the king's “absolute power” (4.221) against Chabot's stubborn ethics. The play ends on a note of irony directed at the king, who, symbolically, loses his power and his kingdom.

Finally, Bertheau devotes several pages to Chapman's style and imagery, and justifies his difficult but successful choice of translating Chapman's blank verse in French—mostly unrhymed—alexandrine, except for some passages that he left in prose, mirroring the original text. It is an enjoyable read in its bilingual form. The translation is impeccable and very elegant, as is the whole volume.