

On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays

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It has been long established that the main historical source of George Chapman's *Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* was Edward Grimeston's *A Generall Historie of France, Written by Iohn de Serres vnto the Yeare 1598. Much Augmented and Continued unto this Present, out of the Most Approoued Authors That Have Written of That Subiect*¹. But it is far from being exclusive of classical sources, as Thomas Marc Parrott showed in 1908², A. S. Ferguson in 1918 and 1920³, Franck Schœll in 1926⁴, George G. Loane in 1938 and 1943⁵ and Jean Jacquot in 1951⁶. The play — which cannot have been written before 1607, because Grimeston's book was published that year — was published and acted in 1608.

That was also the year when William Shakespeare's fourth Quarto of *Richard II* was published. It was in that quarto that a first version of the deposition scene (4.1.155-318) appeared "perhaps derived in some way from a theatrical performance", as Charles

¹ The book was published in London in 1607 by George Eld, and again in 1611. See Frederick S. Boas, "The Source of George Chapman's *The Conspiracy of Biron*, and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*," *The Athenaeum*, 10 jan. 1903, pp. 51-52.

² "The Text of *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*", *Modern Language Review*, 4 (oct. 1908), pp. 40-64.

³ "The Plays of George Chapman", *Modern Language Review*, 13 (1918), pp. 1-24 and "The Plays of George Chapman II", *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920), pp. 223-39.

⁴ *Études sur l'humanisme continental en Angleterre à la fin de la Renaissance*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1926.

⁵ "Notes on Chapman's Plays", *Modern Language Review*, 33 (1938), pp. 248-54 and "More Notes on Chapman's Plays", *Modern Language Review*, 38 (1943), pp. 340-7.

⁶ *George Chapman (1559-1634), sa vie, sa poésie, son théâtre, sa pensée*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951.

Forker puts it⁷. Before that, in the first three quartos (1597-1598), this scene was omitted for censorship reasons. It appeared as a reliable text only in the 1623 Folio, but was always performed on stage from its inception in 1595, when it had probably been performed by the Chamberlain's Men at James Burbage's Theatre. It was also certainly performed on 7 February 1601 "at the behest of Meyrick, one of Essex's followers"⁸.

If one considers the dates, there is every possibility that Chapman could attend a London performance of *Richard II*. His first published work appeared one year before the first performance of the play: *The Shadow of Night*, published in London by William Ponsonby in 1594. We know that Chapman resided in or near London in these years. It is therefore very probable that he should have retained a number of specific details from *Richard II* when composing his Byron plays. My contention is that *Richard II* is one of the sources of *Byron*.

Richard II is the only play by Shakespeare to stage "the dethronement of an unsuitable anointed monarch by an illegitimate but more able one"⁹, while George Chapman's *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* deals with a subject's failed attempt at overthrowing a legitimate king, Henry IV of France. Drawing a parallel between them may seem paradoxical since King Richard and Marshal Byron stand at the two opposite ends of the issue of political obedience: the former falls as a victim to organized and wilful rebellion, while the latter entangles himself in the meshes of a somewhat pathetic — and unsuccessful — conspiracy against an absolute king. Yet both eventually meet their deaths in a tragic way, and one of the reasons that lead to this catastrophe is both characters' incomprehension of "modern" politics, as wielded by Bolingbroke / Henry IV on the one hand, and Henry IV of France on the other hand.

Thus, after a close reading of the Byron plays — but more specifically of *The Tragedy of Byron* — the paradox vanishes as the text reveals similarities and textual echoes of Shakespeare's *Richard II* which point at the analogies between the deposed king and the

⁷ William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker, London: Thomson Learning, 2002, p. 165. All subsequent quotations from this edition.

⁸ Charles R. Forker, pp. 120-121.

⁹ Charles R. Forker, p. 1.

"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"

executed rebel, and also reinforce their constitutive ambiguity as characters. Both are guilty and victimized at the same time. Byron is guilty of being a bad subject; Richard is guilty of being a bad king. Byron is condemned ("for depositions of a witch"¹⁰) in an iniquitous trial and eventually executed, while Richard is illegitimately deposed and eventually murdered.

Reading *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* as it unfolds, one can see how the echoes of Shakespeare's play make sense. In fact, apart from one in the "Prologus", all these references are to be found in *The Tragedy of Byron*. In the "Prologus" to the double play, Chapman speaks of "the uncivil civil wars of France" (v. 1)¹¹. When the action of the play starts, these wars belong to the past and Henry IV's kingdom lives in peace. The polysemy of those two related epithets, "uncivil" and "civil", creates a pun, the first one gainsaying the second one, which can also be found in Shakespeare's play, when Northumberland feigns to dismiss the idea of English civil war — a recurrent theme of *Richard II* — after its evocation by the king himself. He says: "The King of Heaven forbid our lord the King / Should so with civil and uncivil arms / Be rushed upon!" (3.3.101-103). The parallel is — I think — particularly striking, especially if one considers that among the eight occurrences of the word "uncivil" in the Shakespearean corpus¹², the only time when it is associated with "civil" is in this scene of *Richard II*. In the rest of the "Prologus", Chapman evokes a wounded and ruined France, which is reminiscent of Bolingbroke's evocation of England in case of military conflict with Richard:

If not, I'll use the advantage of my power
And lay the summer's *dust* with showers of *blood*
Rain'd from the wounds of *slaughter'd* Englishmen:
The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
It is, such crimson tempest should bedrench
The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land,

¹⁰ *The Tragedy of Byron*, 5.4.88.

¹¹ All references to the play are from John Margeson's edition: *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*, The Revels Plays, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988 [1608].

¹² Martin Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968-80, vol. 6, p. 3692.

My stooping duty tenderly shall show. (*Richard II*, 3.3.42-48, my italics)

The images of dust, blood, rain and slaughter are taken up by Chapman, although in a different context (that of Byron's ascent):

When the uncivil civil wars of France
 Had *pour'd* upon the country's beaten breast
 Her batter'd cities; press'd her under hills
 Of *slaughter'd* carcasses; set her in the mouths
 Of murderous breaches, and made pale Despair
 Leave her to Ruin, through them all, Byron
 Stept to her rescue [...].
 And now new cleansed from *dust*, from sweat, and *blood*,
 And dignified with the title of a Duke,
 As when in wealthy Autumn, his bright star,
 Wash'd in the lofty ocean, thence ariseth,
 Illustrates heaven and all his other fires
 Out-shines and darkens [...]. (1-7; 10-15, *my italics*)

But in both plays, war — whether civil or not — belongs either to the past or to the future. Richard goes and suppresses a rebellion in Ireland, but does not combat Bolingbroke militarily. On the other hand, Henry IV's France — after the Treaty of Vervins signed in 1598¹³ — lives in peace, although Chapman mentions the threats represented by the discontented duke of Savoy, allied with Spain. Still, these evocations of civil war remind us of the instability of political power: Richard II experiences it at his own expense while Byron unsuccessfully tries to provoke it.

The reason for both characters' failures partly lies in their lack of political intelligence, in their confidence in themselves and their own statuses: as a divinely ordained king for Richard, and as France's rescuer for Byron (cf. "Prologus", v. 7). Shakespeare and Chapman, each in his own way, show the efficiency of Machiavelli's lessons when understood by Henry IV of England and Henry IV of France¹⁴. Apart from the similarity of these two kings' political methods, the two texts mention Italy in a way that can be taken as an oblique

¹³ Cf. *The Conspiracy of Byron*, 1.2.212.

¹⁴ See Gilles Bertheau, "Machiavélisme et raison d'État dans la tragédie historique: Shakespeare et Chapman", *Shakespeare et ses contemporains*, éd. Patricia Dorval, Actes du congrès de 2002, Paris, Société Française Shakespeare, 2002, pp. 25-44.

"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"

reference to the Florentine historian. In *The Tragedy of Byron*, before consulting an astrologer, the marshal declares to his accomplice, the count of Auvergne:

there are schools¹⁵
 Now broken ope in all parts of the world,
 First founded in ingenious Italy,
 Where some conclusions of estate are held
 That for a day preserve a prince, and ever
 Destroy him after [...]. (3.1.2-7)

The association of "ingenious Italy" with "conclusions of estate" implicitly points to Machiavelli, but only to condemn his doctrine: "from thence men are taught / To glide into degrees of height by craft, / And then lock in themselves by villany" (3.1.2-9). This feature is all the more remarkable as it constitutes a major departure from Edward Grimeston's account of the Byron affair. In the pages devoted to his captivity, the author writes:

Hee should have knowne that Machiavels councell (who saith that private men never rise from a base to a high fortune but by fraude and force) is ruinous, and that humaine lawes beeing grounded upon divine, suffer no confusions of deseignes whilst that every one doth limit them by this condition, & that hee knows that God doth distribute powers for the government of people: that it is alwaies dangerous to play with his maister [...].¹⁶

This reintroduction of Providence into history is actually due to one of "the Most Approoued Authors" Grimeston translated and compiled: the French historian Pierre Mathieu, who wrote *Histoire de France et des choses mémorables aduenues aux prouinces estrangeres durant sept annees de paix du regne de Henry III Roy de France et de Nauare*

¹⁵ Cf. Innocent Gentillet: "Vous semble-il, illustres Seigneurs, voyans en ce temps la pouvre France (...) tant desolee et dechiree par les estrangiers, que vous la deviez du tout laisser perdre et ruiner? Devez vous permettre qu'ils sement l'atheisme et l'impieté en vostre pays, et qu'ils y en dressent des escolles?" (in *Anti-Machiavel*, éd. C. Edward Rathé, Les Classiques de la pensée politique 5, Genève, Librairie Droz, 1968, pp. 37-38, reprint of *Discours svr les moyens de bien gouverner... Contre Nicolas Machiavel Florentin*, 1576).

¹⁶ Edward Grimeston, *A Generall Historie of France, Written by Iohn de Serres vnto the Yeare 1598. Much Augmented and Continued unto this Present, out of the Most Approoued Authors That Have Written of that Subiect*, Londres, George Eld, 1611 [1607], p. 1115.

(Paris, 1605) and who was Henry IV's official historiographer, and therefore an important agent of the royal propaganda.

In *Richard II*, the Duke of York explains to John of Gaunt that the king is deaf to all reasonable advice of government because of the flatteries and praises he is more inclined to listen to:

No, it [the king's ear] is stopped with other, flatt'ring sounds,
 As praises, of whose taste the wise are fond;
 Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
 The open ear of youth doth always listen;
 Report of fashions in proud Italy,
 Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation
 Limp after in base imitation. (2.1.17-22)

Commenting upon these lines, Charles Forker says that "Italy was regarded as the quintessential source of folly and wickedness"¹⁷. But the mention of "venom" shows the lethal power of such flattering words and the profound contempt of York for the country it comes from. This word can be compared to the "poison" Jean Bodin refers to when speaking of Machiavelli's "tyrannical deceits" in the preface of his *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, published in Paris in 1576, and translated into English by Richard Knolles in 1606. Besides, given that the views of monarchy which Gaunt and York advocate in the play are in total opposition with that of Bolingbroke, a true disciple of the Florentine, this reference to "proud Italy" may well be taken as a reference to Machiavelli, whose name is not uttered, but whose teachings Bolingbroke applies to seize power. In both cases, Italy is viewed — quite conventionally — as a source of infection for national genius.

As Byron gets nearer his death, the analogies with *Richard II* become more numerous. In a striking passage — of Chapman's own invention, since it does not appear in Grimeston — the French king addresses a violent accusation against his marshal:

Come, you are an atheist, Byron, and a traitor,
 Both foul and damnable. Thy innocent self?
 No leper is so buried quick in ulcers
 As thy corrupted soul. (IV, 2, 250-53)

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"

The first line of this speech is peculiarly interesting as it reminds us of Bolingbroke's invective at Mowbray in the first scene of the play: "Thou art a traitor, and a miscreant" (1.1.39). Here, the association of treason with impiety / atheism creates a parallel between Bolingbroke and Henry IV of France and points to the similar Machiavellian usage both characters make of religion in government.

Now, the echoes that have been identified above can be taken as hints of the context in which both Richard and Byron see their lives become tragedies: a background of intestine conflict where politics shift from providential justification to practical Machiavellianism. The following echoes will enable me to show how telling the analogies between both characters are, insofar as they enhance the ambivalence of their statuses as both agents and victims of their tragic ends.

Four of the five passages of *The Tragedy of Byron* which will be analyzed are concentrated in act V, scene 4, that is to say the last moments of the Marshal of Byron, which are strongly reminiscent of the last moments of Richard II. The first detail in this series immediately will allow us to qualify the notion of paradox used at the beginning of this article. Just before the duke of Byron goes up onto the scaffold, Harlay, one of his judges, tells him that the sentence must be read publicly one last time before the execution: "My lord, it is the manner once again / To read the sentence" (5.4.75-76). But Byron refuses to comply with the ultimate formality of this ceremony and asks to be dispensed with this infamy: "Suffice it I am brought here, and obey" (5.4.82). The chancellor insists ("It must be read, my lord, no remedy", 5.4.84) and Byron finally answers: "Read if it must be, then, and I must talk" (5.4.85). Thus Harlay eventually reads the sentence (5.4.86-120), interrupted by the vehement protestations of innocence of the duke.

This emphasis on the respect of ceremonies is strongly reminiscent of Northumberland's attitude during Richard's deposition. To Richard's question, "What more remains?" (4.1.222), Northumberland answers:

No more, but that you read
These accusations, and these grievous crimes
Committed by your person and your followers

Against the state and profit of this land,
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily deposed. (4.1.222-27)

The parallel is striking and enhances the will of both kings to display an ostentatious respect for forms which is rejected by their subjects, since Richard asks Northumberland: "Must I do so?" (4.1.228)¹⁸. But, while in *The Tragedy of Byron* the judge reads the sentence publicly, Richard does not comply with Northumberland's insistence (4.1.243, 253 and 269), and Bolingbroke eventually yields: "Urge it no more, my Lord Northumberland" (4.1.271). What replaces the expected reading of the accusations before the Commons is the mirror speech of Richard (4.1.276-91). In both cases, the playwrights show that the ceremonial procedure is all the more respected as it serves to conceal Byron's unfair trial, on the one hand, and to give a formal legitimacy to Bolingbroke's usurping of power.

After Harlay has read the fifteen lines of the sentence, Chapman has Byron ask: "Now is your form contented?" (*The Tragedy of Byron*, 5.4.121), the word "form" echoing the word "manner" used by the judge (5.4.75). This question — and in particular the word "contented" — sends us back to *Richard II*, when Bolingbroke asks Richard: "Are you contented to resign the crown?" (4.1.200). The difference is that in the first case, the word means "satisfied", whereas in the second one, it means "willing". Now in *The Tragedy of Byron* the Marshal is also asked to "resign" something of importance — it is not the crown, obviously, but his sword: "Resign your sword, my lord. The king commands it", orders Vitry, the captain of the guard in charge of Byron's arrest (4.2.229).

The deaths of these two characters are not similar (Richard is murdered whereas Byron is legally executed), but in each case, the playwrights have introduced a character whose voice — and speech — offers an interesting counterpoint to the version of the story framed by both kings. A couple of minutes before Byron's beheading, Chapman has a soldier intervene in a strange way, who sums up the ambiguity of the play:

¹⁸ This question points to the necessity of Richard's deposition, as Gisèle Venet wrote: "la déposition d'un roi légitime dont tous les motifs politiques et dramatiques avaient eu le temps de souligner l'inévitable et regrettable nécessité" (*Temps et vision tragique. Shakespeare et ses contemporains*, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002 [1985], p. 183).

*"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"**Soldier.*

Now by thy spirit, and thy better angel,
 If thou wert clear, the continent of France
 Would shrink beneath the burthen of thy death
 Ere it would bear it.

Vitry.

Who's that?

Soldier.

I say well,
 And clear your justice, here is no ground shrinks;
 If he were clear it would; and I say more,
 Clear, or not clear, if he with all his foulness,
 Stood here in one scale, and the King's chief minion
 Stood in another, here, put here a pardon,
 Here lay a royal gift, this, this in merit,
 Should hoise the other minion into air. (*The Tragedy of Byron*,
 5.4.214-24)

His speech is ambivalent: while justifying the execution of the duke, whose guilt he publicly confirms, he, at the same time, reveals the injustice of this condemnation as compared with the lot of "the King's chief minion", a phrase which most probably refers to Maximilien de Béthune, baron of Rosny, afterwards duke of Sully (1606). Besides John Margeson's note¹⁹, Berthold Zeller confirms this idea in quoting Pierre de L'Estoile²⁰. After Biron's death²¹, some people vented their discontent in epigrams, poems, and songs, some of which L'Estoile noted down:

Ce néanmoins, quelques restes de cette racaille de ligue ne
 laissèrent, au désavantage de Sa Majesté, d'en écrire et discourir en
 sa faveur, condamnant cette exécution comme du tout injuste et
 méchante; même, en détestation d'icelle, furent publiés et semés
 partout les vers suivants, faits contre le seigneur de Rosny, qui en la
 personne du valet attaquaient le maître:

Si, pour avoir trop de courage,
 On a bien fait mourir Biron,
 Rosny, crois que le même orage

¹⁹ George Chapman, *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*, p. 268.

²⁰ Berthold Zeller, *Henri IV et Biron, Sully et l'alliance anglaise, 1600-1604, extraits des Économies royales de Sully et des mémoires-journaux de L'Estoile*, L'histoire de France racontée par les contemporains (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1888).

²¹ Biron is the spelling we use when referring to the historical figure (1562-1602).

Peut bien tomber sur un larron:
 Car déjà le peuple en babille,
 Et vous appelle, ce dit-on,
 Lui cardinal de la Bastille,
 Et vous prélat de Montfaucon.
 Mais que troupes bien dissemblables
 Iront visiter vos tombeaux!
 Car il a des gens honorables,
 Et vous n'aurez que des corbeaux,
 Desquels la charogne mangée
 Fera marque, aux âges suivants,
 De ton insolence enragée
 Sur les morts et sur les vivants.²²

By inserting this soldier's outburst, Chapman conveyed his own well-informed interpretation of the allusion reported by Grimeston:

At these words²³ the teares fell from the souldiers eyes. All those of his profession sware by his Spirit, and by his Angell, as the Ancients did by that of their Prince. The poorest souldiar was cherished by him [...].²⁴

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare used the same device when in act V, scene 5 he introduced the character of the groom. While Richard is pining in his prison, "a Groom of the stable" comes and tells him how much aggrieved he is by his former master's lot:

I was a poor groom of thy stable, King,
 When thou wert king, who, travelling towards York,
 With much ado, at length have gotten leave
 To look upon my sometimes royal master's face.
 O, how it erved my heart when I beheld
 In London streets, that coronation day,
 When Bolingbroke rode on roan Barbary,
 That horse that thou so often hast bestrid,
 That horse that I so carefully have dressed! (5.5.72-80)

²² Berthold Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 89. This poem is not reprinted in the edition of L'Estoile's *Journal de Henri IV (1595-1601)* (Paris: Tallandier, 1982), a reprint of a previous edition (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1879).

²³ "what a pity is it [...] to die so miserably, and of so infamous a stroake?" (Edward Grimeston, *op. cit.*, p. 1133), which corresponds in *The Tragedy of Byron* to: "Is it not pity I should lose my life / By such a bloody and infamous stroke?" (5.4.212-13).

²⁴ Edward Grimeston, *op. cit.*, p. 1133.

"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"

Before taking leave of Richard, he says: "What my tongue dares not, that my heart shall say" (5.5.97). Shakespeare, as Chapman did a few years later, developed a short passage in Holinshed²⁵ into a means of attracting the audience's sympathy for Richard. Chapman went even further by showing, through the soldier's speech, that the popular opinion of the Biron affair was at odds with the official version put down in the sentence read by Harlay. In both cases, the soldier and the groom compare their former masters with figures of power. While the groom of the stable imparts to Richard — whom he calls "King" — his grief at seeing the coronation of the new king — whom he calls "Bolingbroke" —, the soldier implicitly attacks Henry IV through Rosny, as indeed L'Estoile had understood (see above).

Finally, to emphasize even more the pathetic situation of Byron, Chapman has him pronounce last words which are similar to those of Richard. Byron exclaims: "Fly, fly commanding soul, / And on thy wings for this thy body's breath, / Bear the eternal victory of Death!" (*The Tragedy of Byron*, 5.4.260-62), while Richard's last words are: "Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high, / Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward here to die" (*Richard II*, 5.5.111-12).

To paraphrase Gisèle Venet, who speaks of "*Richard II*, tragédie du 'roi en majesté'"²⁶, I would say that *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* is a tragedy of Man in majesty. While Richard gives up his crown into Bolingbroke's hands, Byron is forced to give up his sword to Vitry, Captain of the king's guard. Byron's sword assumes the same symbolic function as Richard's crown: it is the visible sign not only of his status but also of his entire self, and just like Richard, once he is deprived of it, he becomes nothing. "Ye had as good / Have robbed me of my soul," he tells Vitry (4.2.281-82), while Richard

²⁵ "The king had verie few about him of his freends, except onelie the earle of Salisburie, the bishop of Carleill, the lord Stephan Scroope, Sir Nicholas Ferebie [...] and Jenico Dartois a Gascoigne that still ware the cognisance or deuse of his maister king Richard, that is to saie, a white hart, and would not put it from him, neither for persuasions nor threats; by reason whereof, when the duke of Hereford vnderstood it, he caused him to be committed to prison within the castell of Chester. This man was the last (as saieih mine author) which ware that deuse, and shewed well thereby his constant hart toward his maister, for the which it was thought he should haue lost his life, but yet he was pardoned, and at length reconciled to the dukes faour, after he was king" (Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. London, Henry Denham, [1587], III, p. 500, l. 54-70).

²⁶ Gisèle Venet, *Temps et vision tragique*, p. 14.

answers Bolingbroke's question with the famous words: "Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be. / Therefore, no 'no', for I resign to thee" (4.1.201-202).

The similarities cited above underline the prominence of a concept dear to Chapman: that of the "royal man". Marshal Byron, during his second interview with La Fin, tells him that friendship, fame and loyalty are but "mere politic terms" which enslave "the free-born powers of royal man" (*The Conspiracy of Byron*, 3.1.31). This idea had already been expounded in *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois* (1607) by the eponymous character. After the triple duel in which Bussy killed Guise's favourites, Monsieur is begging his brother's pardon on behalf of his protégé, who then declares: "Who to himselfe is law, no law doth neede, / Offends no King, and is a King indeede" (2.1.203-204). His assertion of autonomy²⁷ is later supported by the king himself, who defends Bussy against the insolence of the duke of Guise by explaining that Bussy represents "man in his natie noblesse" (3.2.90).

Chapman takes up the idea when he stages Byron's reaction to the astrologer La Brosse's predictions:

There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is; there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge, neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law.
He goes before them and commands them all
That to himself is a law rational. (*The Conspiracy of Byron*,
3.3.140-45)²⁸

²⁷ Cf. Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1984, chapitre 11 ("Bussy D'Ambois (c. 1604): A Hero at Court"), p. 186.

²⁸ The passage comes from Plutarch's "De fato", as Franck Schœll first showed in *Études sur l'humanisme continental en Angleterre à la fin de la Renaissance* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1926), p. 211. Jacques Amyot translated it into French as follows: "S'il y auoit homme qui fust suffisant de sa nature, ou par diuine fortune engendré & né si heureusement qu'il peut comprendre cela, il n'auroit que faire de loix qui luy commandassent: car il n'y a ny loy ny ordonnance qui soit plus digne ny plus puissante que la science, & n'est pas loisible qu'il soit serf ny subiect à personne, s'il est véritablement & realement franc & libre de nature, ains doit commander partout" (in *Les Oeuvres morales et meslees de Plutarque, traduites de Grec en François, reueuës et corrigees en plusieurs passages par Maistre Iaques Amiot Conseiller du Roy et grand Aumosnier de France. Divisees en devx tomes, et enrichies en ceste édition de Annotations en marge, avec deux Indices. Le premier des traités, Le*

"On Shakespearian Echoes in Chapman's Byron Plays"

These lines of monologue, which express a revolt against the decree of the stars, will transform into an obvious challenge to the king's authority when Byron, infuriated by Henry's refusal to give him the government of the citadel of Bourg [Bourg-en-Bresse], finally tells him: "But I will be mine own king" (*The Conspiracy of Byron*, 5.1.137). From that point of view, Byron's enterprise is a total failure which stands as the inverted image, as it were, of Richard's. Whereas *Richard II* stages a king whose tragedy is to betray himself into becoming a man²⁹, *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Byron* stages a subject whose tragic treason is his ambition to become his "own king"³⁰.

Second des choses memorables mentionnees esdites Oeuvres, trad. Jacques Amyot, Paris, Barthélémy Macé, 1587, p. 559^r C).

²⁹ "I find myself a traitor with the rest; / For I have given here my soul's consent / T'undeck the pompous body of a king" (*Richard II*, 4.1.247-49).

³⁰ Gisèle Venet calls his ambition: "la revendication hyperbolique d'une catégorie nouvelle, d'une catégorie 'moderne', la catégorie de l'individuel" (*Temps et vision tragique*, p. 321).