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SHAFEEQ, KATHLEEN ANN

THE PROBLEM OF ORDER AND AUTHORITY IN THE JACOBEAN HISTORY PLAYS
OF BEN JONSON AND GEORGE CHAPMAN

The University of Oklahoma

PH.D.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE PROBLEM OF ORDER AND AUTHORITY
IN THE JACOBAN HISTORY PLAYS OF
BEN JONSON AND GEORGE CHAPMAN

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
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BY
KATHLEEN ANN SHAFEEQ
Norman, Oklahoma

1979

THE PROBLEM OF ORDER AND AUTHORITY
IN THE JACOBAN HISTORY PLAYS OF
BEN JONSON AND GEORGE CHAPMAN

APPROVED BY

Program Adviser

Alan R. Velie

Huston Diehl

John S. Cottis

Thomas J. Scanlon

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION--THE JACOBEAN HISTORY PLAYS

During the Jacobean period, Ben Jonson and George Chapman both wrote what today we term "history plays." In these plays they dealt with what were two vital concepts-- order and authority, both political and social. Jonson and Chapman were contemporaries and friends; they even collaborated on an ill-conceived comedy, Eastward Ho (1605), which angered King James. Their approaches to the history play as a literary genre, however, were nearly opposite and thus representative of two major opposing views of history in the Jacobean age. Chapman embraces the definition of a history as a true story which teaches a moral lesson. The "truth," however, is less important than the moral it teaches and if historical facts are not conducive to carrying the proper moral then the dramatist or historian can justly alter his material to suit his didactic purposes. Jonson, on the other hand, represents the newer view of historicity in the Jacobean period. The truth is of vital importance and it must not be drastically tampered with if a history or historical

drama is to have its full impact on the audience. Thematically, however, Jonson and Chapman considered such similar subjects in their history plays as the nature of authority figures, the nature and role of subjects, the function of courtiers, and the image of women as touchstones for society.

The Elizabethans and Jacobeans often did not use fine critical distinctions in determining the definition of a history play. Concerning the problem of defining a history play, Irving Ribner in The English History Play notes:

We must recognize . . . that any definition of a literary genre is essentially an abstract ideal, and that no conceivable definition will apply equally well to every play we choose to call a history. Our definition must describe an ideal to which only some history plays will conform fully; the others fall within the genre by virtue of their striving for this ideal, whether or not they achieve it by any appreciable degree. Our concept of the history play is necessarily a twentieth century construct which we impose upon a relatively homogeneous body of drama which the Elizabethans themselves made no attempt to define but which by its very homogeneity constitutes a separate dramatic genre, whether or not the Elizabethans so conceived it.¹

For both the Elizabethans and Jacobeans a history play could be a play that told someone's life story like Faustus or a play which dealt with a country's history and which attempted to meet some of the purposes that a history was supposed to achieve. Plays which dealt only superficially with historical periods or personages, using them as dramatic background material for an almost entirely fictional plot, can be

¹The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 14.

eliminated from the category of "history play" in a modern definition. Some playwrights attempted to use an audience's curiosity about famous or infamous personages to pique interest in a melodrama or historical romance. However, to qualify as a true history play, the fictional elements must be slight in relation to the quantity of fact and the serious tone which are prerequisites of a real history play. The moral lessons and discussions of social and political problems are also essential elements of the history play as a literary genre. Because the history play was based on what Elizabethans thought was true historical matter (even if its basis was legend), the attitudes of Jonson and Chapman's contemporaries toward history and its purposes must be considered in order to understand the reason why historical drama was written and why it concerns itself with concepts of social and political order and authority.

Generally speaking, in Elizabethan England there were three schools of historiography which had both shared and different purposes and which persisted (with some important modifications) into the Jacobean period. The oldest tradition, growing out of medieval philosophy and attitudes, was the tradition of Christian (or providential) historiography. Ribner describes this tradition as one which saw history as "universal, providential, apocalyptic and periodized."² He

²Ribner, p. 22.

goes on to explain that, "It was anti-nationalistic, emphasized world history and usually began with the creation of Adam. It treated history as above all the illustration of the working out of God's judgement in human affairs, and thus it tended to ascribe little to independent will or judgement of humanity. And--of great importance--it saw in history an intelligible and rational pattern which was inevitably good and which always affirmed the justice of God."³ This philosophy of history was very popular in the early chronicles of English history and in history plays based upon them.

The providential school of historiography persisted throughout the Elizabethan period and was carried over into the Jacobean, but underwent some modifications. Thus, it came to be acknowledged that in addition to the will of God (the "primary cause" of all human events), there were also "secondary causes" determined by the will of individual men.⁴ One of the most influential and popular histories of the Jacobean age, Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World, was written as providential history. Charles H. Firth comments, "The Elizabethans in general held this belief that Providence intervened in the government of the world, and most of them held that it was the business of historian as a teacher of

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

morality to point it out as he related the events."⁵ This philosophy of history served other purposes, too, as Ribner points out: "The rational pattern which Christian historians found in human events . . . fitted perfectly the needs of drama, and this aspect of Christian history came to have a large part in the history play. One of the most important historical purposes of many Tudor dramatists was to show the logic and reason in God's control of political affairs."⁶ Thus the early connection between historical drama and themes of order and authority in political matters was established.

The second great school of historiography which influences the age's attitude toward history and concepts of it was the tradition of the Italian humanist historians. Ribner contends that the humanist philosophy of Leonardo Bruni and his followers had influenced English historical philosophy by the middle of the fifteenth century. Later, the Florentine school of Machiavelli and Guicciardini altered historiography in England by its influence.⁷

The Italian humanists believed that writing history served three important purposes. First, as a form of literature it offered opportunities to practice a particular kind

⁵"Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World," Essays Historical and Literary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 37.

⁶Ribner, p. 23.

⁷Ibid., pp. 15-16.

of style. Second, it was a valuable patriotic tool since it could be used to glorify the past and present triumphs of the native state or country to which it was dedicated. Thus, history could serve a politico-journalistic function by being used to comment on contemporary politics and to censure or to praise living statesmen. Written histories became a useful means to document political theories, and even though Italian humanist historians like Machiavelli presented accuracy as one of their ideals, they often resorted to warping the facts to illustrate their points better.⁸

The most important contribution that Italian humanist history made to English historical thought was its emphasis on morality and didacticism. As Ribner says, "The events of the past were to be studied for the light which they might throw upon the problems of the present and thus serve as a guide to political behavior. There was in this an important Renaissance assumption: that man had some measure of control over his destiny, that by his reason and strength he might determine political success or failure."⁹ This emphasis on teaching by example was a purpose of history which both Christian and humanist historical philosophy shared. As Douglas Bush notes in English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century, the writers of the Tudor chronicles (and their

⁸Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁹Ibid., p. 18.

successors) combined the providential concept of history with the humanistic view "as philosophy teaching by examples, examples of both states and men reaching greatness through virtue and wisdom and brought low by wickedness and folly."¹⁰ Thus, the writers of historical drama could claim when plays were criticized as being immoral that history plays educated and reformed men by example. The didacticism emphasized by humanistic historiography is very prominent in Jonson and Chapman's history plays.

A third historical tradition which influenced the drama of Jonson and Chapman's age as well as earlier writers was the historical school of classical antiquity. In many ways, the purposes of Italian humanist history and classical history were the same since the Italian humanists' views grew out of the humanists' reading of the classics. However, one major difference which Ribner points out is the "strong stoical trend in classical history, a trend most notably present in Polybius."¹¹ For Polybius, "the great value of history was for the lessons which the past might teach the present, and of these lessons the most important was . . . how to bear political misfortune."¹² Thus, as Ribner states, "History for

¹⁰English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century 1600-1660, Oxford History of English Literature, 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 220.

¹¹Ribner, pp. 24-25.

¹²Ibid.

Polybius would not necessarily teach a ruler to avoid the disasters of others; it could, however, teach him to bear them with fortitude and thus to attain a victory over self which Polybius considered more important than a victory over circumstances. The use of history for the exposition of Stoical philosophy as an answer to political problems became, particularly in Jacobean drama, an important dramatic purpose."¹³ Jonson's two Roman plays, Sejanus and Catiline, and Chapman's Caesar and Pompey are examples of the use of historical purposes of classical historiography.

In Jonson and Chapman's history plays the time and place in which each play is set determine the themes which are prominent and the way these themes are presented. Providential historiography is most neglected in Jonson and Chapman's historical dramas set in Rome. The gods of ancient Rome simply do not intrude upon the meaning of the plays' actions or the characters' behavior. Instead the stoicism of classical history is strongly emphasized and the belief of Italian humanist historiography that past events might guide men in present political difficulties is employed. Chapman's French history plays, on the other hand, are set in more contemporary times when Christian teachings and precepts were in effect. Providential historiography with its emphasis on God's control of political affairs can be seen in the more

¹³Ibid.

medieval flavor of Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois, the Byron plays, and Chabot. The very idea that the time and place of a drama determines the view of history to be presented represents perhaps a new synthesis in historical thinking and a sophistication toward historical interpretation not seen in earlier dramas dealing with historical material. Historical method is applied flexibly, not rigidly, to suit the setting and content of the drama in order to gain the maximum dramatic effect.

All three schools of historiography extended their influence into the Jacobean period. As F. Smith Fussner points out in The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640, "Most historical writers of the early seventeenth century thought that . . . history served a moral, a political, or an antiquarian purpose. Often all three purposes were combined, or perhaps confused, as the case may be."¹⁴ History was held in high regard by Elizabethan men of letters and by men of the Jacobean period. Fussner notes that, "The utility of history had, of course, been a constant theme of the ancient Greco-Roman historians and rhetoricians. . . . There was no lack of precedent for belief in the value of historical knowledge." Furthermore, "A catalogue of what history taught would include the

¹⁴The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xvi.

the following: morals, manners, prudence, patriotism, statecraft, virtue, religion, wisdom, truth."¹⁵ In addition, "history was equally an antidote to all opposite qualities. History could have tamed the Irish, and history was a salutary remedy for mental sickness. Knowledge of history helped one to rise in the world, and knowledge of God's providence in history solaced those who, like Raleigh, suffered the onslaughts of adversity. The publicity value of history was well understood by projectors and preachers' and history's value as propaganda was firmly grasped by Court, Parliament, and Convocation. The use of history were almost as various as the understandings of men."¹⁶ Considering the various ways in which historical material was used or felt to be useful, it is no wonder that dramatists, too, found it had possibilities worth exploiting.

Despite the extravagant claims of what history could do for mankind, however, there were those like Sir Philip Sidney who felt that history ranked below poetry in achieving the most important aim of all human learning, teaching men to do good. In his Defense of Poesy (1595) Sidney discusses the differences between poetry and history. According to Sidney man's proper goal in life is self-improvement achieved through learning. Learning, "this purifying of wit, this enriching

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁶Ibid.

of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit" results finally in leading us to "as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of."¹⁷ The greatest perfection derives not from mere well-knowing but from well-doing. Philosophy, history, and poetry all offer learning opportunities but of the three, poetry brings forth the highest results in virtuous action. Sidney paints an unattractive portrait of the historian as an inaccurate, unoriginal, uncreative pedant

loaden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of partiality; better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and better knowing how this world goes than how his own wit runs; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties; a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk. . . .¹⁸

The historian attempts to draw men to good living by examples rather than by precepts but his examples unlike the poet's and philosopher's are not dependent upon "what should be but . . . what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things" so that "his example draweth no necessary consequence and therefore [is] a less fruitful doctrine."¹⁹ The poet can create perfect examples of behavior

¹⁷Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy in The Renaissance in England, ed. Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1954), p. 609.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 610.

to be imitated but the historian "bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal . . . of a perfect pattern, but . . . shew doings some to beliked, some to be misliked."²⁰ Sidney disagrees with the common scenario of a providential history in which virtue is exalted and vice punished because, he contends, daily experience in a "foolish world" teaches that well-doing is not always rewarded and wickedness often succeeds.²¹ The poet with his freedom to embellish life with beauty and justice can present and encourage perfection far better than the historian in Sidney's view. George Chapman probably shared this view of history and attempted to correct history's tendency to display many bad examples of vice rewarded and/or virtue unrewarded by altering historical facts and by omitting or changing those elements which confused the moral of his plays.

The argument that history is inferior to poetry was acceptable to many thinkers and at a later date, Sir Francis Bacon in The Advancement of Learning (1605), makes the same points as Sidney in his distinction between "Fained" history and "True" history:

The use of this Fained Historie hath been to give some shadowe of satisfaction to the minde of Man in those points wherein the Nature of things doth denie it, the world being in perportion inferior to the soule;

²⁰Ibid., p. 611.

²¹Ibid., p. 612.

by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of Man a more ample Greatnesse, a more exact Goodnesse, and a more absolute varietie than can bee found in the Nature of things. Therefore, because the Acts or Events of true Historie have not that Magnitude which satisfieth the mind of Man, Poesie faineth Acts and Events greater and more heroicall; because true Historie propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not as agreeable to the merits of Vertue and Vice, therefore Poesie faines them more iust in Retribution and more according to Revealed Providence; because true Historie representeth Action and Events more ordinarie and less interchanged, therefore Poesie endueth them with more Rareness and more unexpected and alternative Variations. . . .²²

Bacon's use of the words "fained" and "history" together present a paradox to the modern mind for today fiction and history are considered antitheses. To Bacon, however, a history was a story that taught men by example--it could be either fictional or factual, and like Sidney he thought fiction could teach better because it was not limited to a depiction of real life events. Sidney, Bacon, and others thus argued for the superiority of fiction over fact in literature to teach morality. Viewing "history" as an absolute, they believed historical material consisted of recorded facts which any sane and intelligent person could understand and which all men would interpret the same way. In so considering history to be static and universally unalterable, they ignored the fact that much of history's meaning and impact depends on its interpretation. A "true history" thus can be shaped to

²²Sir Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Learning in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (1605-1650), ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-09), p. 6.

present certain political views and specific philosophies as can be seen in the efforts of both historians and historical dramatists like Ben Jonson and George Chapman.

Despite the claims of history's inferior status, however, the tendency grew in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century to regard history (even if less elevated than poetry) as a valuable tool of instruction and with the increased interest in historical aim and method came a tendency to regard historical accuracy as right and necessary. The old tendency of the providential school of historiography to select only the "right" examples for inclusion in a historical work and the tendency of the Italian humanist historians to warp the recounting of factual events to support their own political theories gave way to efforts to meet the humanist ideal of telling the truth about the past, no matter how painful or ambiguous. Ben Jonson adopted the ideal of historical truthfulness wholeheartedly as seen in his scrupulous use of source materials, his documentation in footnotes, and his attempt to meld the philosophies of the period which he was dramatizing with the enlightened political and social views of his own time. George Chapman was more old-fashioned in his approach to historical truthfulness. He based his plays more loosely on recorded historical fact, meeting the requirements of truth and accuracy only in a broad and general way. To teach well Chapman found it necessary to omit

some irregularities in his heroes' psychological makeup and ignore facts which might not serve his moral purpose and even invent material to elevate his characters. Both Jonson and Chapman, however, as artists as well as historians found it necessary to be selective in their use of historical material. They had to shape historical records to fit their themes and teach the lesson that each play was designed to carry. Inevitably then the historical ideal of truth-telling had to be adapted to the demands of the dramas.

The Puritan view that "history is second only to Revelation as a source of truth concerning the workings of Providence" may have been another contributing factor to the idea of truth in historiography.²³ Since the early years of Elizabeth's reign, the Puritan objections to the stage and the drama presented on it had been achieving increasing attention and consideration. Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., notes that "The Puritan attack was essentially a combination of the old Platonic charge against poetry as lying and the traditional Christian condemnation of the theater as immoral."²⁴ Such feelings contributed to the tendency toward factual accuracy as an ideal goal in histories and in historical drama written during the early seventeenth century.

²³Angela G. Dorenkamp, "Johnson's *Catiline*: History as the Trying Faculty," Studies in Philology, 67 (1970), 211.

²⁴"The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument,'" Studies in Philology, 49 (1952), 209.

Another development in the preference for "truth" in historical writing was the substitution of fact (insofar as it could be determined) for legend in historical accounts. As Douglas Bush states, there is "one general topic that touches many authors and illustrates the background of politics as well as the rise of the critical spirit in historiography. That is the slow death of the matter of Brute, New Troy, and Arthur. . . . Our period witnessed . . . the cashiering of three-score princes, the definite separation of legend and history. Henceforth the story of Britain was to begin with Julius Caesar, a more substantial descendant of Venus than Brute."²⁵ Thus in historical writing the emphasis on "fact" and accuracy as important elements in recording history became popular and, to many minds, necessary.

In drama, too, where history was supposed to be a major element of the play in terms of purpose as well as background, historical accuracy came to be considered highly important. Some Renaissance critics went so far as to claim that in tragedy, the best plays were historical. G. Giovanni in "Historical Realism and the Tragic Emotions in Renaissance Criticism" remarks that, "The prescription for historical realism in tragedy was based on a definition current in the Renaissance which made the historical the all-important element

²⁵Bush, p. 222.

differentiating the tragic from the comic plot. . . . In its general outline, the definition found in ancient grammarians . . . and inherited by the Renaissance, runs: a tragedy, which begins in joy and issues in sorrow, is a history, a recital of disasters which happened to heroic persons of a remote past; comedy, which begins in sorrow and issues in joy, is a fiction dealing with familiar things and with humble and private persons in everyday life. This definition, Aristotelian only in its reference to the heroic and to the reversal of fortune, appears, sometimes with an awareness of its ancient source in Giambattista Casalio, Gregorio Giraldi, Scaliger, Castelvetro, Lope de Vega, Lodge, Webb, Puttenham, Vassius, and other critics."²⁶ In the late sixteenth century the arguments in support of tragedy as history were supported by the Italian critics, Castelvetro, Alessandro Piccolomini and Faustino Summo. According to Giovanni, "But despite opposition . . . it became a commonplace in the Renaissance to say, in the words of William Alexander, 'It is more agreeable with the Gravity of a Tragedy that it be grounded upon a true History, where the greatness of a Known Person, urging Regard, doth work more powerfully upon the Affections.'"²⁷

Critics of this persuasion generally agreed the

²⁶"Historical Realism and the Tragic Emotions in Renaissance Criticism," Philological Quarterly, 32 (1953), 305-306.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 307.

"fiction is the essence of poetry in its generic sense, and that therefore, as Scaliger concludes, comedy is perhaps the finest and most genuine kind of poetry," but tragedy was considered an exception.²⁸ Giovanni summarizes their criticism saying:

By the gravity of the subject proper to it, the suffering and death of a noble hero and the fall of kingdoms, tragedy seeks its perfect form, not in the verisimilar of comedy which has only a general reference to actuality, but in historical particulars, which give the verisimilar the force of certitude. Renaissance critics who developed the ancient distinction between the two dramatic forms imagined an ideal spectator familiar with history, whose mind mutinies against a fiction, however verisimilar, which involves grave and painful matters of public moment. He hates a lie about serious matters, so a fiction in tragedy will not move him, or barely move him to pity and fear.²⁹

But although such critics agreed that the best tragedy is historical tragedy, they were in disagreement over how much historical authenticity was necessary to make a tragedy truly effective.

Thus, the importance, use, and purposes of history in literature and drama were debated in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. In response to the changing attitudes toward the purposes of history, men like Edmund Bolton, author of Hypercritica or A Rule of Judgement For Writing or Reading Our Historys (1618?), tried to set down the newest accepted ideas about historiography. Bolton, therefore,

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

takes to task "our ancient Authours" whose greatest faults include too much attention to "Art and Style, which, as they add to the lustre of the Works and Delights of the Reader, yet add nothing to the Truth; . . . For which they so esteemed, as they seem to have regarded nothing else. For without Truth, Art and Style come into the nature of crimes by Imposture."³⁰ The old habits of thought concerning the purposes of history, however, were hard to eliminate completely. Thus, Bolton comments, "The Part of heavenly Providence in the Actions of Men is generally left out by most of the Ethnicks in their Histories. Among whom copious Livy seems worthily most religious, and consequently of theirs the best. . . ."³¹ Lest he seem too old-fashioned in this endorsement of providential historiography, however, Bolton qualifies his criticism saying, "On the other side, Christian Authors, while for their ease they shuffled up the reasons of events, in briefly referring all causes immediately to the Will of God, have generally neglected to inform their Readers in the ordinary means of Carriage in human Affairs, and thereby singularly maimed their Narrations."³² Thus Bolton

³⁰Edmund Bolton, Hypercritica or A Rule of Judgement for Writing or Reading Our Historys (1618) in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (1605-1650), I, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp. 83-84.

³¹Ibid., p. 85.

³²Ibid.

manages to both approve and criticize the providential school of historiography.

To provide guidelines for future historians, Bolton indicates the responsibility of a writer of history. He must "set forth, without Prejudices, Depravations, or sinister items, things as they are." Bolton further admonishes the would-be historian to keep in mind that the best historian is one who is just and indifferent, "For who compelleth to write? and if we write why should we deceive? or if we would not deceive, why do we not use proper and received Terms? even lying Lucan himself gives it for a Precept to his historian that he should call a FIGG a FIGG. . . . Every Man is free to hold his Hand off from Paper; but if one will needs write, then the Nobility of the office command him rather to die than with Injury or Truth to humour Times and Readers and content himself."³³ Bolton devotes quite a bit of space in his Hyper-critica to discussing the duties of an historian in matters of truth-telling for by the Jacobean period historical accuracy was an important ideal. Thus an historical drama by the Jacobean period can be defined as a play which uses history as its setting and historical accuracy as one of its goals because truth is more powerful than fiction in showing men how to act and what to believe. Some alteration in historical reporting may be necessary for the drama to be effective and

³³Ibid., p. 93.

artistically manageable. As Jonson's dramas demonstrate a history play may be quite faithful in small details to recorded fact, but it must be at the very least, as seen in Chapman's plays, broadly true to the outlines of historical record. In subject matter a history or history play must deal seriously with weighty moral and political problems.

The Jacobean dramatist who wished to use historical matter as the background and basis of a play had many historical purposes to keep in mind and several schools of historiography to choose from or combine. Those writing history plays in the older Elizabethan tradition like Shakespeare and Chapman used extant historical narratives as a "quarry of materials from which to fashion a semi-historical dramatic fable" in Bryant's words. Others (mainly Ben Jonson) were more scrupulous in their use of source material and took far less liberty with fact in creating plays to delight and instruct. But whether the playwright subscribed to the old or new view of the purposes and techniques of presenting the historical past, all agreed that its purpose was to teach and often its purpose was seen as instructing men in the proper notions of order and authority. Thus, Thomas Heywood in his Apologia for Actors (1612) claimed that plays "have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our English Chronicles. . . . Playes are

writ with this ayme, and carryed with this methode, to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegeance, dehorting them from all trayterous and fellonious stratagemes."³⁴

Similarly, Edmund Bolton believed two of the four duties of a would-be historian concern the concepts of order and authority. First, the historian must write as a "Christian Cosmpolite, to discover God's Assistances, Disappointments, and Overruling in human affairs, as he is sensibly conversant in the actions of men: to establish the just Fear of his Celestial Majesty against Atheists and Voluptuaries; for the general good of mankind and the World."³⁵ And the aspiring historian must also write as a "Christian Subject, to observe to thy Reader the benifit of obedience and Damage of Rebellions; to establish thereby the regular Authority of Monarchs and Peoples Safety."³⁶ Heywood, Bolton, and their contemporaries thus saw in history a useful tool for educating men in the necessity for order and authority.

Society in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods was

³⁴Heywood, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, I, p. 95.

³⁵Bryant, p. 197.

³⁶Ibid., p. 210.

highly structured and class-oriented. The idea of each person having a distinct "place" in society and duties dependent upon his position was widespread. E. M. W. Tillyard in The Elizabethan World Picture contends that "the conception of order is so taken for granted, so much a part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages."³⁷ Works like Elyot's Governor, the Church Homily of Obedience, the first book of Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, and the preface to Raleigh's History of the World all feature discourses on order and authority. The orthodox Elizabethan or Jacobean believed that, in Tillyard's words, "The principle of headship and of obedient subordination evident in the workings of the universe, must of course be the pattern for human societies. It follows that monarchy is the best form of government and that all men must be contented with their stations in life, so that ambition becomes the most dangerous--and one of the most sinful of all passions."³⁸ Ben Jonson was disturbed by the ambitious strivings of the gentry and attacks that element of disorder in Sejanus.

In discussing their theories of order and authority, the doctrine of correspondences was widely used by both

³⁷The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p. 7.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 7, 11-12.

Elizabethan and Jacobean writers. It was believed, as Ernest William Talbert explains in The Problem of Order, that "portions of the celestial world (the macrocosm) were made analogous with portions of the natural world. The sun among the planets was linked with the king among men, with the head in the body, with the lion among beasts, with the eagle among birds. Justice led all the virtues, being the prime virtue of the king."³⁹ Thus, using the language of correspondences and symbols to emphasize the proper relationship between the king and his subjects, Henry VIII once declared to Parliament, "We at no time stand so high in our estate royal, as in the time of Parliament, when we as head and you as members are conjoined and knit together into one body politic."⁴⁰ In a similar vein, Edward Forset in his The Correspondences: the Individual and the Body Politic (from A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique, 1606), compares the ruler to a soul and the people he governs to the body saying:

As in the creating of man God conjoined a soule for action, in a body passive; so in his ordinance of mans sociable conversing (to make the union of a body politike) he hath knit together a passive subjection to an active superioritie; and as in every man there is both a quickening and ruling soule, and a living and ruled bodie; so in every civill state, there is a directing and commaunding power, and an obeying and subjected

³⁹The Problem of Order (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 12.

⁴⁰J. W. Allen, English Political Thought 1603-1660 (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 4.

alleagance. For as neither the soule alone, nor body alone (if they should be severed) can be a man, so not the ruler alone, nor the subject alone can be a commonweale. Where all will rule, there is no rule, and where none doeth rule, there is all misrule, but to rule well and to be well ruled, is the surest bond of humane societie.⁴¹

In this ideal society, "the ruler should wholly indeavour the welfare of his people, and the subject ought . . . to conforme unto his sovereign; that both of them mutually like twinnes of one wombe . . . maintaine unviolate that compound of concordance in which and for which they were first combined."⁴² In these and similar phrases the commonly held ideas about men and government and their interrelationship were stated during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

In addition to cosmological correspondences, men of the period were quick to perceive historical parallels as well. According to Barbara N. De Luna in Jonson's Romish Plot: A Study of Catiline and Its Historical Context:

It is not merely facetious to suggest that the common or garden variety of educated English gentleman of that society had what might be termed a two-track mind: he tended to see parallels everywhere, to view personal, civic, and especially national affairs in terms of their similarity to the personal, civic, and national affairs of other times and other places. Often the recognition

⁴¹Edward Forset, "The Correspondences: The Individual and the Body Politic" from A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique (1606) in The Frame of Order: An Outline of Elizabethan Belief Taken from Treatises of the Late Sixteenth Century, ed. James Winney (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 90-91.

⁴²Ibid., p. 91.

of these parallels signified nothing more than a childish delight--a half-intellectual, half-emotional thrill--in the force of coincidence for its own sake. But in an era before freedom of speech was a right guaranteed by either constitution or custom, writers frequently seized on historical and literary parallels as the means of covertly commenting on, and criticizing, the events of their own times with relative impunity.⁴³

Ben Jonson and George Chapman were among those who found historical parallels useful for political commentary and didacticism.

One concern of the time especially by the end of the sixteenth century which found its way specifically or obliquely into the history plays of Chapman and Jonson was an attempt by writers and thinkers to crystallize a theory regarding the nature of the office a king or any individual in high authority (like an emperor) holds. George H. Sabine in A History of Political Theory notes that during the sixteenth century, the supremacy of royal power in England prevented the beginning of civil war. But factional struggles in France and Scotland resulted in loss of governmental stability, especially in France where there were eight civil wars between 1562 and 1598.⁴⁴

In France, revolutionary political philosophy was written and printed which eventually was transferred to

⁴³Jonson's Romish Plot: A Study of Catiline and Its Historical Context (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 1.

⁴⁴A History of Political Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961), p. 372.

England and which became most prominent in the English civil wars of the seventeenth century. Sabine notes, "The theory of the people's right as a defense of the right to resist and the theory of the divine right of kings as a bulwark of nationality both began their history as modern political theories in France."⁴⁵ Both theories grew out of medieval theories of government and both could be and were supported by Biblical authority as well as medieval tradition. Thinkers like John Knox in his Appelation (1558) "vigorously denounced what he calls the 'common song on men's tongues that subjects must at all times obey a king.'" Knox felt that "Men who believe that God requires obedience when a command is evil make God the author of Iniquity."⁴⁶ Some men, like John Poynt and Christopher Goodman dared to say that subjects might revolt against their ruler if need be. One work, Vindiciae contra tyrannos, published in 1579, systematized the argument for the rights of the people and became one of the most influential pieces of revolutionary literature in the period. It was republished frequently in England.⁴⁷

In the same year the Vindiciae was published, George Buchanan, Scottish poet, scholar, and tutor to James IV of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 272.

⁴⁶Ruth L. Anderson, "Kingship in Renaissance Drama," Studies in Philology, 61 (1944), 138.

⁴⁷Sabine, p. 377.

Scotland (later to be James I of Britain) published his De jure regni apud Scotos which "rivaled the French work in fame as a revolutionary document and surpassed it in literary merit."⁴⁸ According to Buchanan's teaching, "Power is derived from the community and must therefore be exercised in accordance with the laws of the community; obligation is necessarily conditioned upon the performance of the king of the duties of his office."⁴⁹ His main point of emphasis was the right to resist an unjust ruler and he was outspoken in justifying tyrannicide. Buchanan "stated rather clearly the ancient Stoic view that government originates in the social propensities of men and is therefore natural. . . ."⁵⁰ The Scotsman wrote his book to instruct his royal pupil, who later rejected its precepts vigorously.

The opposing argument to the popular rights view of government was developed in reaction to it by those who wished to preserve the institution of kingship and avoid or resolve civil wars. Ruth L. Anderson notes that "Tudor and Stuart monarchs needed a doctrine of absolute obedience to the throne and such a doctrine their adherents attempted to popularize. . . . It was argued by staunch adherents to the crown that a wicked king is a scourge sent from God and that

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 384.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

rebellion may provoke God to increase his scourge. A people ought rather to endure with sighs and prayers. . . . The effects of rebellion are worse than the tyranny of any prince. The foot cannot judge the head; a people cannot judge the acts of a king. In such phrases and sentiments as the foregoing, sermons required to be read in churches during the reign of Elizabeth stress the divinely imposed duty of obedience."⁵¹ The scholarly James IV offered his version of the same theme in the theory of divine right, first stated in France by Jean Bodin, and found with similar arguments and proofs in James' Trew Law of Free Monarchies, first published in 1598.⁵²

Like the opposing arguments, theories of absolutism and divine right rested heavily on the "proof" found in the Bible and in medieval practice. John Neville Figgis in The Divine Right of Kings explains that, "Without crystallizing into a definite theory of the nature of government or of the limits of obedience in extreme cases, there subsisted throughout the Middle Ages a feeling that kings and all in authority were vicars of God, and that resistance to their commands was, in general, a damnable sin. . . . There remained in the common consciousness some sense that the king's power was of God, that obedience to him was a religious duty, taught and

⁵¹Anderson, 139.

⁵²Sabine, p. 395.

practised by Christ himself and the Apostles."⁵³ Under the attack of the Puritans in England, the Huguenots in France, the Calvinists in Holland and Scotland with their doctrines of popular sovereignty, royal proponents developed the theory of divine right until finally in its completest form it included the following propositions:

1. Monarchy is a divinely ordained institution.
2. Hereditary right is indefeasible. (The right to rule acquired by birth cannot be forfeited in any way.)
3. Kings are accountable only to God and the king's power cannot be limited in any way; all law is a mere concession of his will.
4. God enjoins all men to non-resistance and passive obedience.⁵⁴

The aspect of divine right which received the most attention was not "the will of God in making the king, or the king's duty to govern his people on God's behalf (though no one doubted these points), as much as the subject's duty towards his king. The theory of the divine right of kings resolved itself into a discussion of obedience and resistance."⁵⁵

No matter what commonplace though maintained to be true and universal about the nature of order and authority in terms of rulers and individuals, history both ancient and

⁵³The Divine Right of Kings (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 18-19.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. xxi.

contemporary evidenced many examples of imperfections, inconsistencies, and problems. Playwrights who chose to write history plays found themselves faced with themes involving general topics like the nature of man, the theory of the ideal ruler, problems of justice and law, the rights of the individual versus the demands of figures of authority, and current troubling political theories like sovereignty, absolutism, and divine right, in presenting whatever historical period they selected to cover in a drama. The influence of different schools and purposes of historiography, too, created problems of choice, integration, and interpretation. George Chapman and Ben Jonson were the foremost writers of history plays in the Jacobean period and their dramas offer interesting comparisons and contrasts on the themes of order and authority and in the use of historical method and interpretation. Politically, Jonson and Chapman were conservative and supported the common political beliefs of the period.

Two plays by Ben Jonson, Sejanus and Catiline, are excellent examples of one variety of Jacobean history play. Dealing with similar themes, but using a very different historiographical method is George Chapman. The tragedies of Bussy D'Ambois and Caesar and Pompey as well as the Byron plays and Chabot, Admiral of France are also important history plays written during the period and dealing with the problems of order and authority and related themes. These

plays by Jonson and Chapman illustrate the political concerns of the period in which they were written and various views of historical method.

Both Jonson and Chapman were men of their time. The settings of their plays (republican Rome, for example) or the political views of major characters (such as the rebels Cati-line and Byron) sometimes forced the playwrights into composing political statements that sound very revolutionary. The moral of their dramas is always politically and socially commonplace, however. Jonson and Chapman used various historical points of view from the historical theories and purposes available to them. Both men were true to the political beliefs of their day and tried to match the historical setting of each play with the appropriate view of history it required whether classical, humanistic, providential, or some combination of the three. They found that meeting the demands of history (especially concerning historical accuracy and factual reporting) as well as the demands of drama to be a difficult task. Each man coped differently with the problems involved, but neither achieved a perfect merger of history and drama.

CHAPTER II

JONSON'S ROMAN PLAYS: HISTORY DRAMATIZED

Ben Jonson wrote two important history plays in the Jacobean period. Neither one was a popular success at the time it was written and performed, and for many years critics have pointed out in detail and with justification the flaws in plot and characterization which abound in each play. More recently, however, both Catiline and Sejanus (especially Sejanus) have received recognition for their successful elements, particularly their use of historiography. Jonson tried to blend history and drama in a very special way, combining the elements of both to create an unusual amalgam which would teach and entertain in a factually accurate manner. He attempted to follow the dictates of Italian humanist historiography and to use the stoicism of classicist historiography as well. The result is two plays which succeed better as histories than as dramas.

Jonson had a special interest in history, evidenced by several facts from his life and statements in his writings. For example, for Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World,

Ben Jonson provided not only a set of explanatory verses which appeared on the title page, but he also contributed a few materials to the work.¹ Jonson also stated the conventional attitude toward history's merit in verse:

. . . lighted by the beamie hand
Of Truth that searcheth the most hidden Springs,
And guided by Experience, whose strait wand
Doth mete, whose lyne doth sound the depth of things:
Shee chearfully supporteth what she reares,
Assisted by no strength, but are her owne,
Some note of which each varied Pillar beares,
By which as proper titles, she is knowne
Times witsse, hearald of Antiquitie,
The light of Truth, and Life of Memorie,
(The Under-wood, xxiv, 9-18)²

In addition to these interests in historical writing and the merits of history, Jonson also, in Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr.'s words, "sought and apparently enjoyed the company of the most exacting group of historians of his day, the Antiquarian Society, which included such men as Camden, Speed, Cotton, Selden, and the elder Carew."³ Bryant further states:

We know that he had the respect of these men as well as their companionship, for that is amply indicated by his long association with them, both in London and at Cotton's country home at Connington, and by the freedom with which he used Cotton's excellent library. Like these men Jonson was intensely interested in seeing the production of a great, authoritative history

¹Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument,'" Studies in Philology, 49 (1952), 205.

²In Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-47), VIII, 176.

³Bryant, 206.

of England, and like Edmund Bolton he urged that Sir Henry Savile was the man best fitted to undertake that task. In fact, Jonson was himself something of a historian, though no orthodox specimen of his work in that field survives. His History of Henry V, dealing with "eight of his nine years," perished in the fire that destroyed his books and manuscripts in 1623, as did parts of a much-lamented Heroologia in couplets, which dealt with all other worthies of England.⁴

As shown by his actions as well as his words, Jonson placed history near the top in the ranks of literary endeavors.

The two history plays which he wrote are also strong testimonies to his interest in historiography, especially Sejanus. As Jonas A. Barish explains, "That Jonson took Sejanus seriously as history is plain from the extensive marginal notes he affixed to the Quarto text of the play. This was probably the first time that a work of imaginative literature had come forth buttressed with all the apparatus of critical scholarship; the fact suggests the urgency with which Jonson sought to reunite the two ancient and honorable disciplines, both of which he revered. He found his material mainly in Tacitus, secondarily in Suetonius and Dio Cassius, and also in multitudes of scattered passages of other writers."⁵

C. G. Thayer further notes, "The Rome of Shakespeare's Roman plays is Rome universalized, Rome only incidentally, a

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ben Jonson: Sejanus (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 7-8.

popularized Rome familiar through North's Plutarch, populated by towering figures working out their destinies in epic battles with the universe. Jonson's Rome, on the other hand, is the Rome of Tacitus, Sallust, Dio, Juvenal, and Suetonius. Its culture, topography, customs, religion, psychology, politics are all as authentic as the poet could make them."⁶ Thayer also states that "the battleground in Jonsonian tragedy is the state, not the universe; and history is the guiding and shaping force. For Jonson the tragic muse is really the muse of history and the tragic poet becomes the poet of history."⁷

But Ben Jonson did not recreate the world of ancient Rome merely as a historical exercise. He saw parallels between the history of that time and his own age which he felt were politically and morally instructive. There was a great English interest in Roman history because of the legacy of the Middle Ages and its huge compilations of material on three subjects--the matter of Rome, the matter of France, and the matter of Britain. The English believed that they had a Roman background partly because of the legendary founding of Britain by Brute (Brutus) recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and more historically because of the invasion of England by Julius Caesar. The Elizabethans and the

⁶Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 112-13.

⁷Ibid., p. 114.

Jacobean preferred imperial Rome to republican Rome since the imperial Roman government was more similar to the government of England, an enlightened monarchy. Basically, the concept of a republic or democracy was foreign to the people of Jonson and Chapman's times. Jonson chose his subjects carefully for their didactic effectiveness.

Thayer says, "Shakespeare's and Webster's major tragedies would have been great tragedies even if the history on which they are based had really been fiction; but if Tiberius, Sejanus, Cicero, and Catiline had never actually lived Jonson would simply not have written his plays, which are specifically designed to recreate on the tragic stage certain events whose significance lies precisely in the fact that they did occur, one signifying a period of social decay, the other suggesting the temporary salvation of society."⁸ Jonson believed firmly in the Italian humanist theory that the truth of history has a special impact on an audience and the closer literature adheres to fact, the greater that impact will be. Jonson's first requirement for tragedy, stated in his preface to Sejanus (published in 1605) was "truth of argument" by which he seems to have meant at least in part "historicity of argument."⁹

⁸Ibid., pp. 114-15.

⁹Bryant, 206.

In both Sejanus and Catiline Jonson addresses himself to a theme which also intrigued Chapman, the nature of authority figures. Early chronicle history plays used this theme in a more narrow context of kingship and provided Jonson and Chapman with a precedent for their discussions of the rights and duties of rulers. In addition, there were manuals written by Renaissance humanists like Erasmus (Institutio principis Christiani), Vives (De tradendis disciplinis) and Pontano (De principe), detailing the powers, privileges, and responsibilities of the aristocracy as well as its princely head.¹⁰ Sir Thomas Elyot's The Book Named the Governor (1531) is one famous English example of this class of Renaissance literature. Dedicated to Henry VIII, Elyot's work was designed in his words "to describe in our vulgar tongue the form of a just public weal" and to indicate the educational process needed to shape "them that hereafter may be deemed worthy to be governors of the public weal under your Highness."¹¹ In Books II and III of the Governor, Elyot describes the virtues which characterize an ideal ruler which include nobility, mercy, liberality, justice, fortitude, temperance, and valor. Ruth L. Anderson in "Kingship in Renaissance Drama" adds skill in oration and

¹⁰Sir Thomas Elyot, The Book of the Governor, ed. John M. Major (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), p. 30.

¹¹Ibid.

the ability to detect flattery as two more kingly attributes common in Renaissance treatises on statesmanship.¹²

In Sejanus, the two highest figures of authority are completely corrupted and represent the antithesis of the dramatic tradition of the ideal prince, and his faithful, wise courtier-advisor. Tiberius, who knows what an ideal ruler should be, is a tyrant and willfully perverts all the virtues which he is ideally supposed to practice. In contrast to the evil figure of Tiberius and his favorite, Sejanus, are opposed a large group of morally exemplary characters.

These characters preserve the memory of a good prince, Germanicus, and, in a lengthy dialogue, three of the good citizens enumerate his virtues which include many of the conventional qualities of an ideal prince. Among other things, his virtuous nature was reflected by his outward appearance. In Silius' words:

He was a man most like to vertue; In all,
 And every action, neerer to the gods,
 Than men, in nature; of a body as faire
 As was his mind; and no lesse reverend
 In face, then fame: He could so use his state,
 Temp'ring his greatnesse, with his gravitie,
 As it avoyded all selfe-love in him,
 And spight in others.

(I, 124-131)¹³

¹²"Kingship in Renaissance Drama," Studies in Philology, 61 (1944), 144.

¹³Sejanus, in Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy

When Cordus ventures to compare Germanicus to Alexander the Great, he is at once corrected by Sabinus in a further list of the dead man's virtues:

I know not, for his death, how you might wrest it;
 But, for his life, it did as much disdain
 Comparison, with the voluptuous, rash,
 Giddy, and drunken Macedon's, as mine
 Doth with my bond-mans. All the good, in him.
 (His valour, and his fortune) he made his;
 But he had other touches of late Romanes,
 That more did speake him: Pompei's dignitie,
 The innocence of Cato, Caesar's spirit.
 Wise Brutus temperance, and every vertue,
 Which, parted unto others, gave them name,
 Flow'd mixed in him. He was the soule of goodness:
 And all our praises of him are like streames
 Drawn from a spring, that still rise full, and leave
 The part remayning greatest.

(I, 144-157)

Germanicus, however, has been secretly assassinated by Tiberius and Sejanus, so the only promising leader left to the "good" citizens of Rome is Drusus, Tiberius' son. Drusus is characterized by Arruntius, the choral voice of the play as "a riotous youth,/ There's little hope of him." (I, 106-107). Sabinus replies:

That fault his age
 Will, as it growes, correct. Me thinkes, he beares
 Himselfe, each day, more nobly then other;
 And wins no lesse on mens affections,
 Then doth his father lose. Beleeve me, I love him;
 And chiefly for opposing Sejanus.

(I, 107-112)

Simpson, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-47), IV, 359. All references to the text of Jonson's writings are to this edition, hereafter referred to as Works. References to the text of Sejanus, which appears in Works, IV, are to act and line.

His possible career as leader of the opposition is checked by Sejanus, who poisons Drusus and thus eliminates one more good man from the competition for supreme authority in Rome.

In contrast to the order exemplified by Germanicus and to a lesser degree Drusus with their princely virtues and personal popularity, Tiberius and Sejanus are presented as lords of chaos and misrule. Tiberius knows the attributes of an ideal ruler and affects them before the Senate in Act I. He attempts to appear both becomingly modest and pious as he instructs someone kneeling before him:

Wee not endure these flatteries, let him stand;
Our empire, ensignes, axes, roddes, and state
Take not away our humane nature from us:
Look up, on us, and fall before the gods.

(I, 375-378)

And then he pretends to enjoin his followers not to employ flattery saying:

We must make up our eares, 'gainst these assaults
Of charming tongues; we pray you use, no more,
These contumelies to us; stile not us
Or lord, or mighty, who professe our selfe
The servant of the Senate, and are proud
T' enjoy them our good, just, and favoring lords.

(I, 389-394)

To such words the "good" men in the audience respond with Cordus' "Rarely dissembled" and Arruntius' sardonic comment, "Prince-like, to the life" (I, 395). Silius then sums up Tiberius' pose and the belief that a good prince is the best government:

If this man
Had but a mind allied unto his words.

How blest a fate were it to us, and Rome?

 Men are deceiv'd, who thinke there can be thrall
 Beneath a vertuous prince. Wish'd liberty
 Ne're lovelier lookes, than under such a crowne.
 But, when his grace is meerely but lip-good,
 And, that no longer, he aires himselfe
 Abroad in publique, there to seeme to shun
 The strokes, and stripes of flatterers, which within
 Are leachery unto him, and so feed
 His brutish sense with their afflicting sound,
 As (dead to vertue) he permits himselfe
 Be carried like a pitcher, by the eares,
 To every act of vice: this is a case
 Deserves our feare, and doth presage the nigh,
 And close approach of bloud and tyranny.
 (I, 400-402, 407-420)

Tiberius goes on to call himself "a good, and honest prince"
 (I, 440) and to claim:

we are mortall;
 And can but deedes of men; 'twere glory 'inough,
 Could we be truely a prince.
 (I, 477-479)

The only princely attribute Tiberius can lay claim to is skill in oratory, but, since his high-sounding rhetoric consists of cunning lies and half-truths, there is no real virtue in his ability with words any more than there is in his pretense of humility and piety.

Whenever Tiberius falters or pretends to question his role as an authoritarian completely lacking in ideals, Sejanus supplies the reason and the means to continue an unwavering pursuit of evil. In Act II Tiberius simulates hesitation in attacking and destroying his opponents before they realize what is happening. Sejanus counsels him, but unlike the wise, selfless courtier-counselor of dramatic

tradition, Sejanus' advice is evil, corrupting, and self-serving:

Tiberius: That nature, bloud, and lawes of kinde
forbid.
Sejanus: Doe policie, and state forbid it?
Tiberius: No.
Sejanus" The rest of poore respects, then, let goe by:
State is enough to make th'act just, them
guilty.
Tiberius: Long hate pursues such acts.
Sejanus: Whom hatred frights,
Let him not dreame on sou'raignty.
Tiberius: Are rites of faith, love, piety to be trod
downe? Forgotten? and made vaine?
Sejanus: All fore a crowne,
The prince, who shames a tyrannes name to
beare,
Shall never dare do any thing, but feare;
All the command of scepters quite doth perish
If it beginne religious thoughts to cherish:
Whole Empires fall, swaid by those nice
respects.
It is the licence of darke deeds protects
Ev'n states most hatred: when no lawes resist
The sword, but that it actest what it list.
(II, 170-185)

Later, when Sejanus' ambition leads him to attempt to make plans to depose Tiberius and make himself supreme authority in Rome, the two villains put their principles in action against one another. Tiberius finds a zealous follower in Macro, and secretly begins a plot to topple the upstart Sejanus. In Act III then, Macro states his allegiance to the absolute power of the prince and the principle of state expediency:

I will not aske, why Caesar bids doe this:
But joy, that he bids me. It is the blisse
Of courts, to be employ'd; no matter, how:
A princes power makes all his actions vertue.
We, whom he workes by, are dumbe instruments,

To doe, but not enquire; His great intents
 Are to be serv'd, not search'd. . . .
 The way to rise, is to obey, and please.
 He that will thrive in state, he must neglect
 The trodden paths, that truth and right respect;
 And prove new, wilder wayes: for vertue, there,
 Is not that narrow thing, shee is else-where.
 Mens fortune there is vertue; reason, their will:
 Their licence, law; and their observaunce skill.
 Occasion is their foile; conscience, their staine;
 Profit, their lustre: and what else is, vaine.

(III, 714-720, 734-743)

Jonson indicates the play by these and similar speeches that selfish ambition, reckless individualism, and the adoption of political expediency by those in power result in the political corruption and social disorder that threatens Rome in the play and, by implication, Jonson's nation as well.

K. W. Evans notes in "Sejanus and the Ideal Prince Tradition" that Jonson often espoused the theory that a strong ruler is one key to a successful government and harmonious society. According to Evans, "Whether in the masques, or at a less rarified level in the country house poems, or in the simple statements on monarchy, the education of princes, the role of good men in society, and on the social functions of satire scattered throughout Discoveries, the same medieval and early Renaissance concept of the good society, reflecting the Divine Will, is expounded. All those works show that Jonson's approach to politics belongs in the old ideal prince tradition, even if firm belief has merged into metaphor in his case, and presupposes a hierarchical

society governed on behalf of time-honored notions of private and public virtue."¹⁴ Thus, "Jonson's distrust of the nobility, and his contempt for parliaments and the common people, follow from his conviction that the sole guarantee of social stability is a strong and consecrated monarchy, guided in the exercise of the responsibilities by the few wise men among its subjects."¹⁵ In terms of dramatic tradition and in political beliefs, Jonson's attitude toward authority is conservative and consistent.

In the play the ruler has not only abdicated his responsibilities and lost his nobility by failing to be actively virtuous, but the people have also failed in their role as subjects. Obedience has been replaced by servility, and virtue has been set aside for vice.

The evil prince Tiberius and his favorite not only show what a ruler must avoid becoming, but also point out the weakness of the society in which they exist. Just how Tiberius' faults could be corrected or prevented by the people is not completely clear, but in the play's early scenes Sabinus suggests that the people have permitted Tiberius to become a monster:

. . . oft Tiberius hath beene heard,
Leaving the court, to crie, o race of men,

¹⁴"Sejanus and the Ideal Prince Tradition," Studies in English Literature, 2 (1971), 250.

¹⁵Ibid.

Prepar'd for servitude! which shew'd that, he
 Who least the publique liberty could like,
 As loathly brook'd their flat servilitie.

(I, 51-55)

This same theme that society's weakness has resulted in the rule of Tiberius is repeated by Silius:

Well, all is worthy of us, were it more,
 Who with our ryots, pride and civill hate,
 Have so provok'd the iustice of the gods.
 We, that . . . were borne
 Free, equall lords of the triumphed world,
 And knew no masters, but affections,
 To which betraying first our liberties,
 We since became the slaves to one mans lusts;
 And now to many: every ministring spie
 That will accuse, and sweare, is lord of you,
 Of me, of all, our fortunes, and our lives.
 Our looks are call'd to question, and our wordes,
 How innocent soever, are made crimes;
 We shall not shortly dare to tell our dreames,
 Or thinke, but 'twill be treason.

(I, 56-70)

When one man ventures to blame the times themselves for Rome's sad state, Arruntius replies indignantly:

Times? the men,
 The men are not the same: 'tis we are base,
 Poore, and degenerate from th' exalted streine
 . Of our great fathers.

(I, 86-89)

Thus Tiberius' evil rule is explained by some of the play's reputable characters as a sort of "scourge of God," a popular element of early history plays and a frequent theme of providential historiography. Because the people have fallen away from virtuous living, they are being tormented by a cruel and capricious ruler and his ruthless favorite. On the other hand, the shining image of Germanicus is presented

as what an ideal ruler could be, and the order and social decency he represented as what the proper relationship between ruler and ruled could achieve.

One political theory espoused by some thinkers of Jonson's day was the theory of government by contract. Rather than regard the ruler's power as a divine right bestowed by God, they saw it as a temporary grant given in a mutual compact and agreement between subject and sovereign. A speech by Sabinus glances at this concept:

. . .when the Romanes first did yeeld themselves
 To one mans power, they did not meane their lives,
 Their fortunes, and their liberties, should be
 His absolute spoile, as purchas'd by the sword.
 (II, 167-170)

Taken alone, these words suggest that Jonson might have agreed with the revolutionary thinkers of his time that the power of a ruler is not and should not be absolute. Jonson, however, was politically conservative, and though he easily saw how absolutism might interpret innocent speech and action as treason, he could not condone any overthrow of the figures of authority. Thus, when Latinus counsels revolution to end the tyranny of Tiberius and Sejanus, Sabinus speaks against such action saying:

'Twere better stay
 In lasting darkenesse, and despaire of day,
 No ill should force the subject undertake
 Against the soveraigne, more than hell should make
 The gods doe wrong. A good man should, and must
 Sit rather downe with losse, than rise uniust.
 (III, 161-166)

This same answer to the problem of how to deal with an unjust authority, an absolute power which respects nothing but itself is repeated often in the play. Revolt is wrong; correction is impossible. Therefore, good men must learn to endure. Nor does the play really resolve the problem of an unjust ruler's favorite. Does Sejanus represent Tiberius' will and must he thus be tolerated? Or is he merely an evil man who can be disposed of if the opportunity arises, even if the highest figure of authority upholds him?

In Act III, Silius, who has been falsely accused of treason by the machinations of Sejanus and his henchmen, upbraids his prince saying, "It is your nature, to have all men slaves/ To you, but you acknowledging to none" (III, 306-307). In opposition to this absolute and unjust authority, however, his only recourse is a stoic philosophy and suicide. He valiantly declares:

It is not life whereof I stand enamour'd:
 Nor shall my ende make me accuse my fate.
 The coward, and the valiant man must fall,
 Only the cause, and manner how, discerned them:

 Romanes, if any here be in this Senate,
 Would know to mock Tiberius tyrannie,
 Look upon Silius and so learne to die.

(III, 332-335, 337-339)

Other characters in the ranks of the good and moral in the play advocate stoic endurance, too, the main lesson taught by classical historiography. Agrippina advises her sons to

. . . stand upright
 And though you doe not act, yet suffer nobly;

What we doe know will come, we should not feare.
 (IV, 73-74. 76)

And those who have not yet learned this lesson, like Arruntius, who asks what arts keep Lepidus, an old man, alive and well in such perilous times are instructed thus:

Arts, Arruntius?
 None, but the plaine, and passive fortitude
 To suffer, and be silent; never stretch
 These armes, against the torrent; live at home,
 With my own thoughts, and innocence about me,
 Nor tempting the wolves iawes; these are my artes.
 (III, 293-298)

To the complex question of how one can oppose authority when it is morally wrong and threatens to destroy totally social order Johnson offers only the simplistic answer, "suffer and be silent."

Of course, the purpose of the play was to teach his fellow Jacobeans not to let their own country get into such straits. The explicit moral lessons the play teaches are well meant, but in some ways not very realistic. Jonson uses Sejanus with his unlimited ambition and lack of social responsibility to satirize the upstart members of the gentry reaching for money, power, and glory beyond their proper station in life. Sejanus uses adultery, murder, spies, and, earlier in his life, self-prostitution, to achieve his aims. Such ambition is incompatible with an orderly society in Jonson's view, and Sejanus is thoroughly punished for his evil, self-serving ways. Tiberius represents the way a

ruler with unlimited authority who is oblivious to self-restraint can become a monstrous tyrant.

At the end of the play, the horrible end of Sejanus as he is torn into pieces by a fickle mob (and the unjust destruction of his innocent children) does not mean enlightenment for the majority of Romans who witness the savage spectacle. Instead, Jonson suggests that even worse times are in store as Tiberius continues to rule with Macro as his new henchman and with Caligula and Nero waiting their turns to be the authority of the land. In the struggle between good and evil, Jonson displays his whole-hearted approval of the good characters who represent the correct attitudes toward social order and political authority. But in terms of achieving reform or assuring the victory of virtue over evil, the play ends on a negative note.

Robert Ornstein in The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy states that "Jonson seems to have no political theories" in his plays and that "The only comment on forms of government in his tragedies (and in Timber) is the ubiquitous Renaissance commonplace that the rule of a good Prince is an ideal polity."¹⁶ In so saying Ornstein oversimplifies Sejanus. It would be more accurate to say that Jonson's theories, because they are commonplace, are often not clearly

¹⁶The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 87.

defined or presented. In considering the problem of how to deal with an evil ruler if one does not have an ideal prince, or the question of where the authority of a government should end and the rights of the individual begin, Jonson simply does not present any new, convincing, or well-reasoned answers in his drama.

In Catiline His Conspiracy Jonson is working with a new group of historical and political facts, but his themes are similar. Catiline is set in republican Rome, so there is no prince, ideal or otherwise, to act as highest figure of authority. There is one man, Cicero, who, with his followers, represents the best that society can produce and who is devoted to preserving and serving society. Cicero is opposed by another man, Catiline, who with his cohorts represents unprincipled selfishness and ambition, the antithesis of social harmony and good government.

In Catiline, as in Sejanus, Jonson is more concerned with public figures and political types rather than individuals, so the playwright selectively emphasizes those traits of character which support his themes and eliminates or softens contradictions in personality which might detract from the effect he seeks to create. In Sejanus Jonson depended heavily on Roman historians for his sources and the same is true in Catiline for which he uses Sallust, Cicero, Plutarch, and others for his facts and details.

Despite the many similarities between the plays, Catiline is generally felt to be the less successful of the two and often is judged so partly because in the final acts of the play Jonson devotes so much space to an almost word for word recounting of Cicero's rhetoric in the Senate that all dramatic action comes to a standstill and nothing happens for too long. As G. R. Hibbard says, Cicero's "'prodigious rhetoricke' ruins the play as a play. Jonson's love of teaching and his belief in the importance of 'truth of Argument' combine together here to defeat his dramatic sense. He knew Cicero's orations against Catiline all too well, and reproduces their orotund verbosity all too accurately."¹⁷ In short, for many readers of the play, Jonson's historicity in at least this matter is too complete. Like Sejanus, Catiline was not a success when it was staged in London in 1619.

Catiline opens dramatically with the Ghost of Sylla speaking. This device (indicating the influence of Seneca's Thyestes) is not merely a means of thrilling the audience, although it is successful as such, but it is also, in Hibbard's words, "an effective indication of historical causality, for one of the many motives behind the conspiracy was a desire to see the return of the era of license that had existed while the wars between Marius and Sylla were going

¹⁷G. R. Hibbard, "Goodness and Greatness: An Essay on the Tragedies of Ben Jonson and George Chapman," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 2 (1967), 25.

on. The Ghost of Sylla inspires the action, because the conspiracy was a consequence of the civil strife that had preceded it."¹⁸ Because of Jonson's respect for the faithful rendering of the historical record he would also feel the importance of "the perspective of events occurring in time"¹⁹ in Angela G. Dorenkamp's words. The Ghost's reminder of earlier civil war prepares for the action of the play by providing the audience with an historical perspective. Sylla's Ghost recites the horrendous private evils Catiline has already committed:

Be still thy incests, murders, rapes before
 Thy sense; thy forcing first a Vestall nunne;
 Thy parricide, late, on thine owne onely sonne,
 After his mother; to make emptie way
 For thy last wicked nuptialls; worse, then they,
 That blaze that act of thy incestuous life
 Which got thee, at once, a daughter, and a wife.
 I leaue thy slaughters, that thou didst for me,
 Of Senators; for which, I did for thee
 Thy murder of thy brother, (being so brib'd)
 And writ him in the list of my proscib'd
 After the fact, to saue thy little shame;
 Thy incest, with thy sister, I not name.
 These are too light.

(I, 30-43)

These personal and private sins are to be eclipsed by still worse public wrongs:

Fate will have thee pursue
 Deedes, after which, no mischief can be new;
 The ruine of thy countrey.

(I, 43-45)

¹⁸Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹Angela G. Dorenkamp, "Jonson's Catiline: History as the Trying Faculty," Studies in Philology, 67 (1970), 212.

The Ghost tells Catiline to "Make all past, present, future ill thine owne" (I, 50) and thus Catiline (in Dorenkamp's words) is placed in the line of Sylla and of former despots"²⁰ historically. The use of the Ghost as a dramatic device to introduce Catiline and suggest the coming events of the play is matched by the effectiveness of the device as an historical tool.

The indication of the monstrousness of Catiline's character in the Ghost's prologue is part of a persistent theme in this play as well as in Sejanus. The theme is that personal corruption and immorality reflected in private lives are responsible in part, or at least closely related to, political disorder and the breakdown of authority in government. In Sejanus personal corruption was exemplified by the behavior of Livia, Drusus' unfaithful wife, as well as by the evil committed by Sejanus and Tiberius in their private lives. In Catiline, the depravity of Catiline's character is set forth in the Ghost's prologue, and at the end of Act I the Chorus muses on the fact that in Rome:

Her women weare
The spoiles of nations, in an eare,
Chang'd for the treasure of a shell:
And in their loose attires, doe swell
More light than sailes, when all windes play:
Yet, are the men more loose than they!
More kemb'd, and bath'd, and rub'd, and trim'd
More sleek'd, more soft, and slacker limm'd'
As prostitute: so much, that kinde

²⁰Ibid.

May seeke it selfe there, and not finde.

 Hence comes that wild, and vast expence,
 That hath enforc'd Romes vertue, thence,
 Which simple pouerty first made:
 And, now, ambition doth inuade
 Her state, with eating auarice,
 Riot, and every other vice.
 Decrees are bought, and lawes are sold,
 Honors, and offices for gold;
 The peoples voyces: and the free
 Tongues, in the Senate, bribed bee.
 Such ruine of her manners Rome
 Doth suffer now, as shee's become
 (without the gods it soone gaine-say)
 Both her own spoiler, and owne prey.
 (I, 554-564, 573-586)

The same lack of order and control which has led to the depravity of personal lives in Rome is seen in the political sphere, one element of which is Catiline's conspiracy to destroy the Republic. Personal ambition, the vice decried so often in treatises on order and degree, is assigned the blame for the evil that has destroyed private morality and now threatens the public good.

In both Sejanus and Catiline women represent the morality of Rome. A common Renaissance debate over the relationship of goodness and beauty is at the heart of Jonson's use of women in his historical dramas as moral touchstones. The relationship of beauty to morality was a philosophical problem often explored in moral treatises. For example, in the fourth book of Castiglione's The Courtier, a group of men discuss whether beauty and goodness are complementary or contradictory. One contends that beauty in women causes

disorder, a common medieval attitude, while another maintains that beauty is always good. He states that an evil soul seldom exists in a beautiful body. The reason that beauty is sometimes unchaste, cruel, unkind, and so on is explained by the fact that it is under constant attack and provocation by "lovers, tokens, poverty, hope, deceits, fear and a thousand other matters." Furthermore, the senses can deceive and say something is beautiful when it is not. The definitive statement about the paradoxical nature of goodness and beauty in the debate comes in platonic form: true beauty is an image of the divine and is spiritual not physical in nature.²¹

In his plays Jonson indicates that beauty must be more than physical attractiveness, just as virtue must consist of more than moral speeches and avoidance of evil. Both beauty and virtue must be tested to determine if they are real rather than superficial. Beauty which fails to withstand the corruption of flattery and sexual attraction is merely physical deception. It may promise a goodness which does not exist. Similarly, virtue which is not tried in the arena of daily political life is merely empty rhetoric. The women of Jonson's plays are involved in the sexual and political

²¹Castiglione, The Courtier, translated by Thomas Hoby in The Renaissance in England, ed. Hyder E. Rollins and Herschel Baker (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1954).

relationships which reveal the true state of Rome. Their beautiful exteriors more often than not mask inner corruption and disharmony.

Aside from Agrippina, whose virtue is exhibited by her stoicism and endurance, the women in Jonson's plays are handsome on the surface, but lack true beauty in terms of doing good and resisting temptation. Livia appears only briefly in Sejanus, but her brief encounter with Sejanus in Act II is enough to show her deceptive beauty which suggests an equally beautiful soul and in so doing is false to reality. She has succumbed easily to Sejanus' protestations of love offered through a go-between, Livia's personal physician. During her discussions with Sejanus on how to best poison Drusus, her husband, Livia has a detailed conversation with her physician about her make-up. She seems to be far more concerned with dentifrices, skin creams, and rouges than she is with committing adultery and murder.

In Act II of Catiline, Jonson introduces a Roman lady, Fulvia, and her chief rival for leadership of the women in Rome, Sempronia. Through their conversation and behavior they offer further proof that the moral blight which afflicts Roman citizens is inextricably mixed with the political situation. Sempronia is a supporter of Catiline's conspiracy and is actively involved in plotting the civil war; Fulvia pretends to be on Catiline's side, too, but soon betrays the

plot to Cicero. Both have numerous lovers, and in their outspoken, uninhibited conversation about men they reveal, in Hibbard's words, that "they are living in a state of moral anarchy."²²

Fulvia comments on her relationships with her lovers saying:

They shall all give, and pay well, that come here,
If they will have it: and that, jewells, pearle,
Plate, or round summes, to buy these. I'am not taken
With a cob-swan, or a high-mounting bull,
As foolish LEDA, and EVPORA were,
But the bright gold, with DANAE.

(II, 177-182)

And later Fulvia uses sex to trick Curius into revealing the details of the conspiracy. As Hibbard says, "It is no comic intrusion into a play that is intended to be tragic, but rather a wholly successful dramatization of that same depravity in Roman life of which the conspiracy is only another manifestation."²³ Jonson indicates that, when the social order upheld by morality becomes too lax or is altogether disregarded, the political order has no foundation on which to stand. The difference between right and wrong is so obscure to most of the characters in the play, that overthrowing the political authority of Rome and engaging in civil war can be countenanced as "good" rather than evil.

²²Hibbard, p. 28.

²³Ibid.

Morally and politically, most of Rome's citizens are blinded by ambition and greed because of their futile and frivolous society. The immorality of Roman women is a telltale sign of the corruption which blights all of society in Jonson's two Roman history plays.

The aristocrats in the play who should represent the fruits of Roman society are shown to be less than ideal participants in their government. Some are virtuous but inactive and virtue without activity is neither admirable nor tangible. The rest, the conspirators, are selfishly opportunistic. Willfully evil and decadent, they choose to base their rebellion on a confusion of license with liberty. In Act I Catiline stirs his followers by exhorting them to take part in "this great, and goodliest action." His theme is "liberty" and at first his rhetoric is concerned with defeating tyranny:

. . . now the need enflames me:
When I fore-thinke the hard conditions,
Our states must vnder-goe, except, in time,
We doe redeeme our selues to libertie,
And break the yron yoke, forg'd for our necks.
For, what lesse can we call it? when we see
The common-wealth engross'd so by a few,
The giants of the state, that doe, by turnes,
Enioy her, and defile her!

(I, 340-349)

The main complaint to the conspirators is that the wealth of Rome is not fairly distributed so that

. . . the rest,
How ever great we are, honest, and valiant,
Are hearded with the vulgar . . .

· · · · ·
 Vngrac'd, without authoritie, or marke;
 Trembling beneath their rods . . .

· · · · ·
 All places, honors, offices are theirs!
 Or where they will conferre them!

(I, 353-355, 358-359, 361-362)

Catiline then demands, "Wake, wake braue friends/ And meet the libertie you oft haue wish'd for" (I, 409-410). And his followers respond with enthusiasm. As an ironic conclusion to this meeting, however, Jonson has Catiline list in concrete terms the various components of this liberty, the actual fruits of the freedom they desire:

. . . For our reward, then,
 First, all our debts are paid; dangers of law,
 Actions, decrees, iudgments against vs quitted.
 The rich men, as in SYLLA'S times, proscrib'd,
 And publication made of all their goods;
 That house is yours; that land is his; those waters,
 Orchards and walkes a third's; he has that honor,
 And he that office . . .

· · · · ·
 Is there a beautie, here in Rome, you loue?
 An enemie you would kill? What head's not yours?
 Whose wife, which boy, whose daughter, of what race
 That th'husband, or glad parents shall not bring you,
 And boasting of the office: only, spare
 Your selues, and you have all the earth beside,
 A field, to exercise your longings in.

(I, 453-460, 474-480)

Catiline and the other conspirators obviously do not want to redress truly the wrongs of the authority presently in power. Their idea of reform is to burn the city and slaughter the inhabitants so that they may assume the power of their rivals and enjoy the excess, the vice, and the waste that characterizes the present weak and degenerate state of

Rome. The conspirators' meeting ends with a toast drunk in the blood of an unfortunate, freshly-killed slave; it is fittingly symbolic of the bloody and selfish cause they espouse.

Just as the conspirators refuse to acknowledge the difference between liberty and license, they confuse the qualifications of goodness (virtue) and greatness (in the sense of both hereditary nobility and renown or power). This confusion of values is made evident in Catiline's first soliloquy in the play in which he comments, "The ills, that I have done, cannot be safe/ But by attempting greater. . ." (I, 79-80), after which he reflects on his "greatness":

Was I a man, bred great, as Rome her selfe?
One, form'd for all her honors, all her glories?
Equall to all her titles?

(I, 83-85)

He and his fellow rebels feel "goodness" is unnecessary, for it is enough to be of high social position and to be powerful. Catiline sees virtue as a kind of weakness. Thus, in Act III, when Catulus tries to commiserate with Catiline over his unsuccessful bid for the consulship, Catulus says, "Be still yourselfe./ He wants no state, or honors, that hath vertue" (III, 147-148). Catiline, however, is insulted rather than comforted and sneers:

Did I appear so tame, as this man thinkes me?
Look'd I so poore? so dead? So like that nothing,
Which he calls vertuous?

(III, 149-151)

To maintain their greatness is all that Catiline and his fellows seek. That those in authority have neglected to notice and reward their high social standing with political power and authority is one of their chief complaints against Rome. The traditional virtues of mercy, temperance, justice, patience, and self-sacrifice for the public weal are not recognized or sought by Catiline and his crew. Like Sejanus and Macro, Catiline and his followers represent the antithesis of the traditional role of the aristocracy as courtiers, the best example of what society can produce.

In Act II, Sempronia and Fulvia debate the relationship of virtue to nobility. Sempronia rejects the possibility that Cicero will be chosen as the new consul, saying, "He is but a new fellow" and asks how he can be seriously considered since he is

A meere upstart,
That has no pedigree, no house, no coate,
No ensignes of a family?

(II, 119-121)

Fulvia replies that Cicero has virtue instead. Sempronia sneers:

Hang vertue, where there is no blood; 'tis vice,
And, in him, sawcinesse. Why should he presume
To be more learned, or more eloquent,
Then the nobilitie? or boast any qualitie
Worthy a noble man, himselfe not noble?

(II, 121-126)

Fulvia's answer is obviously the "right" attitude in the debate, "'Twas vertue onely, at first, made all men noble"

(II, 127). As Dorenkamp notes, "These two ideas concerning nobility were common in the days of Catiline when Cicero was suspected because he was a 'new man' and not of the nobility of blood. Needless to say, the differing attitudes were also the basis for lively arguments in Jonson's own time."²⁴ In his earlier play Jonson used Sejanus to attack the new men who put personal ambition and greed above the welfare of the State and its people. In Catiline, the playwright's approval is shifted from the old nobility to the new men, in this case, exemplified by Cicero. This does not so much represent a real change in the poet's attitude toward preserving the traditional social order as it does Jonson's attempt to conform to his own standards of historical accuracy and realism. The historical Cicero was a "new" man, and Catiline was a member of the old aristocracy; the debate over nobility of blood opposed to nobility of character was an aspect of life in Rome, and comparing the two men and the record of history, it is obvious that Cicero was in many ways, the better, more moral leader. Goodness, true nobility of character, is a better support of traditional values like social order and stable political authority than greatness marked by an aristocratic name, fame, and selfish ambition. Ideally, as Cicero points out in a confrontation before the Senate with Catiline, the best leader is one who is both

²⁴Dorenkamp, p. 217.

great (noble) and virtuous. He describes Catiline as:

A man, I must confesse, of no meane house,
Nor no smalle vertue, if he had employ'd
Those excellent gifts of fortune, and of nature,
Vnto the good, not ruine of the state.

(IV, 118-121)

Catiline and his fellow conspirators, however, are oblivious to any good higher than the personal good they seek in the form of power, wealth, and ostentation. Their confidence in the power of their own "greatness" has deadened them to the need for virtue.

At the end of Act II, the Chorus (representing the people) prays for a champion--one who will exercise the nobility of virtue and uphold social order:

O, put it in the publique voice
To make a free, and worthy choice:
Excluding such as would inuade
The common wealth. Let whom we name
Haue wisdom, fore-sight, fortitude,
Be more with faith, then face endu'd.
And study conscience, aboue fame.
Such, as not seek to get the start
In state, by power, parts, or bribes
Ambition's bawdes; but moue the tribes
By vertue, modestie, desart.
Such, as to iustice will adhere.
What euer great one it offend:
And from the' embraced truth not bend
For enuy, hatred, gifts, or feare.
That, by their deeds, will make it knowne
Whose dignitie they doe sustaine;
And life, state, glorie, all they gaine,
Count the republikes, not their owne.

(II, 379-390)

Even if the man who can fit this description is a "meere upstart," he is still a rare individual and Cicero is the

best candidate for the title of "naturally noble" leader in the play.

Ambition, that most dangerous and sinful passion in the belief of most orthodox Elizabethans and Jacobeans, is to blame for much of the discontent and disorder encountered in the drama. Ambition causes men to desire to rise above their rank in the scheme of things and is part of the goodness-greatness debate in the play since ambition encourages men to forsake virtue in pursuit of greatness in the sense of power and fame. Order is the essence of the natural world; ambition is its antithesis. Thus Cicero comments in Act III on Catiline's plot:

Ambition, like a torrent, ne're looks back;
 And is a swelling, and the last affection
 A high mind can put off: being both a rebell
 Vnto the soule, and reason, and enforceth
 All lawes, all conscience, treads vpon religion,
 And offereth violence to natures selfe.
 But, here, is that transcends it! A black purpose
 To confound nature: and to ruine that,
 Which neuer age, nor mankinde can repaire!

(III, 247-255)

The same idea that ambition is unnatural and that order is preserved by a spirit of willing submission to lawful authority is repeated by Cicero in convincing Curius to betray the conspiracy. He says Rome's authority is like that of a parent's authority over its offspring:

No child can be too naturall to his parent.
 Shee is our common mother, and doth challenge
 The prime part of vs. . . .

· · · · ·
 . . . No religion binds men to be traitors.
 (III, 365-367, 369)

The Chorus, too, perceives how ambition "that neere vice/
 To vertue, hath the fate of Rome provoked" (III, 860-861),
 calling it "that restlesse ill, that still doth build/ Vpon
 success; and ends not in aspiring" (III, 864-865). Ambition
 violates both religion and nature because both rely upon the
 maintenance of order, and ambition seeks to subvert order.
 The need for a structured hierarchy throughout the universe
 and the observance of order and authority in the social and
 political spheres are upheld by religion and nature which
 are not respected by Catiline and his followers.

Of the three most interesting and controversial figures
 in the play (Catiline, Cicero, and Caesar), Catiline is
 the most easily understood, especially in terms of the large
 theme of the problem of order and authority. Catiline is
 the typical pseudo-Machiavellian monster, comparable to
 Sejanus and Macro in Jonson's earlier play. Michael J. C.
 Echeruo calls him "a creature of degenerate Rome, and its
 scourge"²⁵ while Dorenkamp describes him as "satanic and
 politically inept," characteristics which can be found in the
 kind of hero which emerged from "Machiavellianism

²⁵Michael J. C. Echeruo, "The Conscience of Politics
 and Jonson's Catiline," Studies in English Literature, 2
 (1971), 346.

misunderstood.'"²⁶ The complexities of Catiline's true character are suppressed by the playwright, for, as Hibbard notes, Jonson "knew from his reading of Sallust and from the admissions of Cicero in Pro Caelio that the chief conspirator was not unmitigatedly evil. . . ." ²⁷ Jonson uses Catiline as his chief symbol of "the monstrosity which is born when a society degenerates,"²⁸ according to K. M. Burton. Catiline provides a lesson by example of the terrible end a traitor to his country and a rebel against lawful authority can rightfully expect.

Cicero presents more of a problem in interpretation, for, although he is obviously a good man and his praises are sung by the other "good" characters in the play, especially Cato, who represents a golden age in Roman politics, Cicero can very easily be accused of using the "policy" of a Machiavel and with good reason. For example, he praises Fulvia's double-dealing with extravagant language:

Here is a lady, that hath the start,
In pietie, of vs all; and, for whose vertue,
I could almost turne loue, againe.

(III, 341-344)

But shortly afterwards while upbraiding Rome for her sickness

²⁶Dorenkamp, p. 215.

²⁷Hibbard, p. 26.

²⁸K. M. Burton, "The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson," Essays in Criticism, 2 (1953), 404.

he reveals the hypocrisy of his praise of Fulvia:

But more, that the first symptomes
Of such a maladie, should not rise out
From any worthy member, but a base
And common strumpet, worthlesse to be nam'd
A haire, or part of thee? Thinke, thinke, hereafter,
What thy needes were, when thou must vse such meanes:
And lay it to thy brest, how much the gods
Vpbraid thy foule neglect of them; by making
So vile a thing, the author of thy safetie.

(III, 448-456)

In addition, he resorts to bribery to induce his fellow consul, Antonius, not to countenance the rebellion, saying:

I must with offices, and patience win him;
Make him, by art, that which he is not borne,
A friend vnto the publique; and bestow
The province on him; which is by the Senate
Decreed to me: that benefit will bind him.
'Tis well, if some men will doe well, for price:
So few are vertuous, when the reward's away.

(III, 474-480)

He further follows the course of policy and expediency by telling Curius to spy and urging Sanga and the Allobroges to use entrapment techniques, by promising the conspirators arms and assistance as well as by having them write incriminating letters which can be used against them in the Senate. He justifies this trickery, saying, "Ill deeds are well turn'd backe, vpon their authors:/ And 'gainst an iniurer, the revenge is iust" (IV, 700-701).

In the view of many modern minds such behavior corrupts or, at least, tarnishes the character of an otherwise "good" man, but, like Shakespeare's Brutus, Cicero knows he must act to save Rome even if the only course of action open

to him is not one he really wants to take. Cicero acts out of necessity, not choice, and uses the weapons available to men in power and in political causes. Robert Ornstein comments that in having Cicero act as he does, it is as if Jonson had perceived that "contemporary attacks on policy [were] protests against history itself."²⁹ Jonson must have perceived a tension between historical accuracy and moral act as he created his true historical dramas. Often the facts of unadulterated historical record were not conducive to the high moral lessons the plays were intended to convey, so compromise was necessary. Either the plays became less factual through omission of facts, or the facts were fictionalized to suit the lesson to be taught. If the material was not altered in order to preserve the historicity of the drama, then the moral lesson might be diluted by ambiguity or contradiction. Jonson and Chapman both wrestled with their problems and either changed facts or muddled the moral lesson, according to the choices they made in each play when historical record and moral art seemed to separate and follow different paths.

Jonson probably perceived how morally ambiguous "policy" can be, but it is difficult to find any tone of condemnation in the play for Cicero's methods of dealing with the crisis. Cato cannot find praise high enough for Cicero and

²⁹Ornstein, p. 104.

urges Cicero to use pragmatism and expediency in order to be an efficient politician/statesman. The Allobroges, struck with Cicero's "noble spirit," find him both good and great and are quite willing to help him by deceit and lies. Fulvia, too, degraded though she may be, knows him to be a superior leader and virtuous man. The only characters to speak against Cicero are the conspirators whose comments are merely "sour grapes" and Caesar and his supporters who envy Cicero his success and popularity. Rather than using Cicero's cunning as a means of attacking the use of "policy" in the cause of order and just authority, Jonson seems to indicate that the ends justify the means.

C. G. Thayer comments, "Many modern readers, no doubt, have thought Cicero far too devious and subtle to be a really virtuous political leader. But Cicero's aim is the salvation of the state and the protection of Catiline's potential victims, and Jonson was not a sentimental liberal. His system is based on the theory that the state must be under the direction of men who are not only just and virtuous, but who also have the ability to manipulate other men for the achievement of the ends of justice and virtue."³⁰ The attitudes of the upright and morally sound characters in the play support this interpretation of the moral rectitude of Cicero's conduct.

³⁰Thayer, p. 126.

Cicero's decision in the play not pursue the rumors of Caesar's alleged participation in the conspiracy is the most troubling element of Jonson's portrayal of Cicero. In Act IV, when Catiline is brought before the Senate and accused by Cicero of treason, many of the Senators advocate condemning Catiline to death, but Cicero argues that it would be only a stop-gap measure to quell the insurrection:

Where, should we take,
Of such a swarme of traytors, only him,
Our cares, and feares might seeme a while relieve'd,
But the maine perill would bide still enclos'd
Deepe, in the veines and bowells of the state.
(III, 417-421)

He advocates instead that Catiline be banished in the hope that all the conspirators will draw together and follow their leader so all such traitors will be known and can be dealt with en masse. Despite his claim to want to hunt out all the conspirators, however, Cicero seems reluctant to investigate certain individuals. When Cato suggests testing Caesar and Crassus to see if they "ring hollow" in their protestations of honesty and loyalty to the state, Cicero says such a course is inexpedient:

it is an vnprofitable, dangerous act,
To stirre too many serpents vp at once.
CAESAR, and CRASSUS, if they be ill men,
Are mightie ones; and, we must so prouide,
That, while we take one head, from this foule Hydra,
There spring not twentie more.
(IV, 528-533)

It is Cicero's reluctance in the play to clean the house of state thoroughly when he has the means and momentum

to finish the task that he has begun that troubles many critics. According to Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "The play ends, with Cato's warning lost, Caesar temporarily checked, but still free to plan and act, and Cicero naively comforted at the destruction of Catiline."³¹ In Bryant's view, the true destructive force in Rome in the play is Caesar, not Catiline, because Caesar succeeds in overthrowing the Republic at a later date while Catiline fails miserably. Another critic, Ornstein, disagrees with this interpretation of Cicero's behavior by characterizing Cicero as a "political realist" who "willingly accepts the disparity between moral ends and political means--between his high ideals and the ambitions of those who help him destroy the conspiracy."³² According to this reasoning, Cicero is an astute politician who accepts compromise, because an ideal solution is not readily attainable. It is enough for such a man to stave off disaster for awhile: the future can be made safe at some other time.

The problem of interpreting Cicero's actions can be approached differently, however. Sallust wrote that Cicero found the rumors of Caesar's complicity to be so obviously

³¹Joseph Allen Bryant, Jr., "Catiline and the Nature of Jonson's Tragic Fable," in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Jonas A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 154.

³²Ornstein, pp. 101-02.

false, that he saw no need to press an investigation. Given his interpretation of Caesar's part in the plot, Jonson could not use this theory as an explanation of Cicero's behavior. For whatever reason, the historical Cicero as a matter of record did ignore warnings about Caesar and Caesar did, at a later date, destroy the Republic. Thus, as Dorenkamp emphasizes, whether Cicero acted as he did because of naïveté or because of policy is less important than the fact that his behavior is an act of history.

Therefore, "it is an error to ascribe to Jonson the approval of Cicero's methods" (or to read into the play an implied condemnation of them) since "in the historical perspective, the restoration of order which the statesman achieves is of the same mode as that which prevailed at the beginning of the play; only now Caesar is the threat. In choosing actions open at either end, Jonson emphasizes the historicity of his matter."³³ Jonson chose to emphasize the facts of the historical record at the expense of his play's moral lesson. Unable to have both historical accuracy and a convincing moral viewpoint, Jonson elected to follow his belief in "truth of argument" and leave the morality of this character's behavior unclear. In short, Jonson simply does not offer a very convincing reason for Cicero's

³³Dorenkamp, 215.

passivity, and this may well be because to Jonson the fact that Cicero did not act is far more important than the reason why he was inactive.

Jonson's ambiguous handling of Cicero's motives may be because Jonson's focus is on the larger aspects of historical cause and effect. Jonson's combined role as dramatist and historian accounts for his greater emphasis on recreating historical events rather than providing believable or logical character motivation. Bryant says, "The reader cannot begin to understand either Catiline or Sejanus unless he is willing to bring a knowledge of history with him to the play and look before and after what he finds there."³⁴ Furthermore, Jonson lets the plot of his drama, the discovery and defeat of the Catilinian conspiracy, "serve as an illuminating symbol for an action of much greater scope: The whole rise and fall of the Roman Republic."³⁵ For this reason the playwright strongly hints about the future in his play by means of the ominous warnings about Caesar which are not acted upon for one reason or another.

Jonson has been charged with neglecting "truth of argument" in his portrayal of Caesar, the third of the play's main characters. Ornstein comments, "If we assume that

³⁴Bryant, "Catiline," p. 157.

³⁵Ibid.

Jonson's controlling purpose in the tragedy was a scrupulously faithful reproduction of history, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for his Machiavellian portrait of Caesar."³⁶ Jonson's major source for the play was Sallust, but, as Ornstein points out, "Sallust's attitude toward Caesar is completely favorable. He brands the charges of Caesar's complicity in the conspiracy as false and views Caesar and Cato as pillars of the tottering state. . . ."³⁷ Obviously, Jonson's presentation of Caesar is not taken from Sallust; he relies upon other sources including Plutarch (who said that Caesar's complicity in the affair was only rumored, not proven), Dio, and Surrentinus.

From these sources, and his own interpretation of the events of history, Jonson has created a historical drama which is, in Bryant's words, "a plausible version of Catiline's conspiracy, but one considerably different from any that had gone before it and vastly different from the one that Sallust had written."³⁸ This is not to say that Jonson distorts the events of history in Catiline His Conspiracy; on the contrary, he is very scrupulous in this matter. But, on the other hand, his interpretation of the meaning implied by certain facts is unusual and perplexing.

³⁶Ornstein, p. 102.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Bryant, "Catiline," p. 151.

Plutarch and other anti-Caesarian historians seem to have regarded Caesar at the point in his career represented in the play as (in Bryant's words) "still only potentially dangerous to the commonwealth."³⁹ In Act IV, however, Caesar and Catiline meet secretly, and Caesar advises Catiline on the Machiavellian method of carrying out a conspiracy:

. . . slip no aduantage
 That may secure you. Let 'hem call it mischief;
 When it is past, and prosper'd, 'twill be vertue.
 Th'are petty crimes are punish'd, great rewarded.
 Nor must you thinke of perill; since, attempts,
 Begunne with danger, still doe end with glory:
 And, when need spurres, despaire will be call'd wisdome.
 Lesse ought the care of men, or fame to fright you;
 For they, that win, doe seldome receiue shame
 Of victorie: how ere it be atchiu'd;
 And vengeance, least. For who, besieg'd with wants,
 Would stop at death, or any thing beyond it?
 Come, there was never any great thing, yet,
 Aspired, but by violence, of fraud:
 And he that sticks (for folly of a conscience)
 To reach it--

.
 Is a superstitious slave, and will die beast.

(III, 503-519)

These kinds of sentiments expressed by Caesar serve to make his character nearly as evil as Catiline's, although he seems more intelligent and self-controlled than the leader of the conspiracy. Thus, in Act V, when Jonson faithfully reproduces Sallust's account of Caesar's proposal to the Senate not to break the law by killing the conspirators, but rather to confiscate their estates and imprison them in

³⁹Ibid, p. 152.

towns away from Rome, Caesar's words are not taken at face value. As Bryant says, "Instead of being the wise counsel of a man conscious that great states should put aside petty vindictiveness and exercise clemency whenever possible, it has now become the shrewd maneuver of a Machiavellian villain to protect the weapons in his private arsenal and keep them in readiness for another attempt to assassinate the body politic."⁴⁰ The Senate rejects Caesar's plan and accepts the advice of Cicero that it would be better to kill the conspirators. Caesar's apparently self-serving advice is wisely rejected and through the consul's efforts, the state is shored up again against the forces which have attempted to topple it.

Why Jonson chose to present Caesar as a destructive force this early in Roman history is a matter of debate. Ornstein feels that Caesar is presented as "the intellectual leader of the conspiracy,"⁴¹ and Bryant contends, "The conspiracy, we see, is not really Catiline's after all, but Caesar's."⁴² Such views are an overstatement of Jonson's presentation of Caesar, who is shown at most as an advisor and inactive supporter of the plot against the authority of the state. Although Catiline does fade in the later acts of

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 151-52.

⁴¹Ornstein, p. 103.

⁴²Bryant, "Catiline," p. 152.

the play into an ineffectual monster who rants too much and does not act until too late, he is still in the beginning of the play "a real force, capable of affecting other men and of initiating action," in Hibbard's words.⁴³ It is never suggested in the play that the plan was created by anyone other than Catiline, and Caesar's intellectual support of the conspirators does not amount to much. When Caesar's understanding of political realities indicates to him the inevitable failure of Catiline, he is very quick to extricate himself from an uncomfortable situation.

Jonson does not seriously violate his claim of "truth" of argument" in presenting Caesar as a participant in the conspiracy. The playwright refrains from altering the facts of the conspiracy in his dramatic presentation; he only offers his own opinion of what certain facts mean. As Bryant says, "Where reliable sources all declare something to be true, Jonson reports it; where reliable sources disagree, he exercises the historian's prerogative to act as a judge; where reliable sources are silent, he exercises the dramatist's prerogative to fill in the gaps as his own judgment and understanding of the facts seem to direct him. The resulting reconstruction of history is, to be sure, a distortion; but it is necessarily so--just as all reconstructions

⁴³Hibbard, 27.

in the past, whether dramatic or non-dramatic, are necessarily distortions, contrived compounds of fact, judgment, and imagination. . . ."44

Jonson chose to use the historical rumors of Caesar's participation in the plot, because they further the moral purpose of his drama. Catiline's threat to Rome is emotional and monstrous, but easily handled by Cicero. Caesar, on the other hand, has more intellect and sophistication. As a man of power and intelligence, he is more of a challenge to Rome's fate than Catiline and much more difficult to deal with. Virtuous actions by Rome's champion saves the city from destruction in the play, but, by leaving Caesar on the scene as a lurking potential evil, Jonson brings home the message that virtue can never relax, never subside into passivity. Tested once, it will be called upon again and again.

Furthermore, in the wide historical perspective which Jonson probably intended *Sejanus* and *Catiline* to be seen in, Caesar's involvement in the conspiracy supports and amplifies later historical events. In a way, the demise of the Roman Republic can be seen in a play that on the surface is about the temporary victory and salvation of the state when it is on the verge of being overwhelmed by anarchists.

Jonson designed *Catiline*, like *Sejanus*, to serve an

⁴⁴Bryant, "*Catiline*," pp. 152-53.

educational purpose by reflecting current history. As Hibbard points out, the Catilinian conspiracy "was seen as the great classical prototype of the numerous plots that disturbed England, and, for that matter, Europe as well, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."⁴⁵ Hibbard continues, "It is not surprising, therefore, that in pamphlet on the Gunpowder Plot . . . the author of 'A Discourse of the Manner of the Discovery of this late intended Treason' should have exploited the parallel by describing Guy Fawkes and his associates as 'those worse than Catilines' who 'thought to have extirpated us and our Memories.' Indeed, he almost had royal precedent for doing so, since James I's speech to Parliament on the same subject suggests that the learned king had the Catilinarian Orations in mind when he composed it."⁴⁶

Jonson attempts to give his drama immediacy and added significance by suggesting a parallel between the events of Roman history and recent happenings in London. Although the lines in Act III in which Catiline gives orders to his followers are based on Plutarch, they suggest the plot to blow up Parliament:

I would have you, LONGINVS, and STATILIVS,
To take charge o' the firing, which must be
At a signe giuen with a trumpet, done
In twelue chiefe places of the citie, at once

⁴⁵Hibbard, 26.

⁴⁶Ibid.

The flaxe, and sulphure, are alreadie laid
 In, at CETHEGVs house. So are the weapons.
 (III, 630-635)

And in Act IV, Cicero reveals the time and place the
 insurrection was to take place, a further parallel with the
 Gunpowder Plot:

Was I deceiued, CATILINE?
 Or in the fact, or in the time? the houre?
 I told too, in this Senate, that thy purpose
 Was, on the fifth (the kalends of November)
 T'have slaughter'd this whole order.
 (IV, 243-247)

Hibbard notes that some critics say that Jonson's way of
 stating the date is "'a crudely literal adoption of the
 Latin 'in ante diem calendas Novembres,'"⁴⁷ but it sounds
 like November 5th rather than October 28th.

Jonson incorporates Sallust's philosophy of history
 into the play, and it, too, serves, as an educative purpose.
 Sallust (who derived his cyclical view of history from Poly-
 bius) believed that "all of man's achievements (institutions,
 cities, states) share the corrupt nature of man's physical
 body and thus they have 'an end as well as a beginning . . .
 rise and fall, wax and wane.'"⁴⁸ Unlike the Greek historian
 Polybius, "Sallust regarded the inevitability of decline in
 man's political structures as the consequences not of some
 natural order but of man's own willful depravity and his

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Bryant, "Catiline," pp. 149-50.

inability to live by reason."⁴⁹ This philosophy must have appealed to Jonson, because he reproduces it in the Chorus' first statement:

Can nothing great, and at the height
 Remaine so long? but it's owne weight
 Will ruine it? Or, is't blinde chance,
 That still desires new states t'advance,
 And quit the old? Else, why must Rome,
 Be by it selfe, now, ouer-come?
 Hath shee not foes inow of those
 Whom shee hath made such, and enclose
 Her round about? or, are they none,
 Except shee first become her owne?
 O wretchednesse of greatest states,
 To be obnoxious to these fates:
 That cannot keepe, what they doe gaine;
 And what they raise so ill sustaine!
 Rome, now, is Mistris of the whole
 World, sea, and land, to either pole;
 An euen that fortune will destroy
 The power that made it: shee doth ioy
 So much in plentie, wealth, and ease
 As, now, th'excesse is her disease.

(I, 531-550)

Since Jonson hopes his audience will see parallels between ancient Rome and contemporary Britain, he obviously expects a lesson to be learned; just as republican Rome through her citizens' greed, ambition, and self-interest is nearing a fall into disorder and social and political ruin, so England may very easily fall, unless her citizens learn to live with self-restraint and reason. The play ends with the temporary restoration of order and authority because of Cicero's devotion to the state and his personal strength,

⁴⁹Ibid.

reason, and leadership abilities. But Caesar remains in the background as a man of few principles and unbounded ambition to suggest that Rome's reckoning for prodigal waste and excess will be finally calculated and paid.

The Chorus, representing the people, too, serves an educative function in the play. At the end of Act I the Chorus pronounces the Polybian-Sallustian theory of cyclical history and comments on the decayed state of Roman society and politics due to greed and excess. At the end of the second act the Chorus joins the forces who support the nobility of virtue over hereditary nobility. In Act III, the Chorus is fearful of the probability of civil war, and ruefully observes the moral blindness which plagues Rome, for "still we loue/ The' evill we doe, vntill we suffer it" (III, 858-859). The fourth Chorus finds the people guilty of misinterpretation of political realities and often incapable of making correct judgments in political matters:

Our thoughts of things, how they did fight,
 Which seem'd t'agree?
 Of what strange pieces we are made,
 Who nothinkg know;
 But as new ayres our eares inuade,
 Still censure so?

 One while we thought him Catiline innocent;
 And, then, we' accus'd
 The Consul, for his malice spent;
 And power abus'd.
 Sicne, that we heare, he is in armes,
 We thinke not so:
 Yet charge the Consul, with our harmes.
 That let him goe.

So, on our censure of the state,
 We still doe wander;
 And make the carefull magistrate
 The marke of slander.

(IV, 849-854, 867-878)

The Chorus concludes that, in the future, it must judge men and their motives more carefully. Thus, in the Choruses, the body politic which is at least responsible (like Tiberius' subjects in Sejanus) for the condition of Rome moves toward self-knowledge. As the people of Rome "learn their lesson" and express the learning process in the Choruses, so Jonson expects his audience to learn from history. Again, Jonson's conviction that true history teaches the best lessons is displayed in this play by Cicero's comments to Fulvia after she has revealed the Catilinarian plot to the Consul:

Sit downe, good lady; CICERO is lost
 In this your fable: for, to thinke it true
 Tempteth my reason. It so farre exceeds
 All insolent fictions of the tragick scene.

(III, 256-259)

The fact that Catiline and his fellow conspirators did exist and did indeed plot to overthrow their government and substitute their idea of "liberty" for stable authority no doubt struck Jonson as a very persuasive argument for the validity of history plays and, especially, factually truthful representations of history.

In Sejanus, too, Jonson deliberately underscored historical parallels between ancient Rome and Jacobean England in particular details as well as general political commentary.

For example, in Act III of Sejanus, Jonson includes the indictment of Cremutius Cordus in the Senate of treason for a twofold purpose. It is a disclaimer of too great a parallel between the affairs of his own nation and the ancient Roman world of the play as well as a criticism of those who would misread history for their own purposes. In the drama Tiberius and Sejanus conspire to accuse Cordus of inciting men to treason by comparing the present ruler to past leaders and finding him wanting. Cordus' own annals were probably (as he maintains in the play) just a record of the past, containing no allusions to the present. In the drama Cordus is found guilty of insinuating topical meanings into his historical text. His books are burned, and he is taken away to be sentenced at a later time.

This episode of the play is a common device of satirists and, in Barish's words, "the disclaimer of relevance that paradoxically clinches the relevance."⁵⁰ Cordus' defense of his work and attack on the willful misreading of historical books is partly one more proof of the injustice of Tiberius' rule which is once again destroying a good and innocent man. But the scene is also Jonson's way of denying that his own play is a commentary on contemporary times,

⁵⁰Barish, pp. 16-17.

even though to a certain degree it is.

Jonson, however, did not protect himself well enough from possible misreading of the play and in 1603 was cited before the Privy Council on charges of treason, possibly because any play, as Barish points out, "performed in 1603 which dealt with the downfall and execution of a powerful favorite, a favorite who aspired to unseat the monarch he served, that monarch, in turn, being notably vacillating and enigmatic in character" might seem to be an allusion to the career of the Earl of Essex "which had followed a roughly analogous course two years earlier and was still one of the delicate issues of the day. . . ."51

Another critic assigns a different cause to the charge of treason saying, "Sejanus, with its acid depiction of the caprice of princes and the folly of favorites, greeted the accession of the leading apologist for the divine right of kings, the future patron of Somerset and Buckingham. Small wonder that it brought Jonson to the Star Chamber."⁵² Barish also hypothesizes that the depiction of a government tyranny establishing itself through the use of informers had its parallels in Jonson's day, especially in the government

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁵²Harry Levin, "An Introduction to Ben Jonson," in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Jonas A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-hall, 1963), p. 47.

treatment of Roman Catholics, and thus would have been objectionable to those in authority.⁵³

Although Jonson was firmly committed to telling the truth in the sense of recording historical events and personalities literally and factually, he was also committed to drawing the strongest possible moral from the facts. Thus Jonson had to do what all historians do; he had to impose order on what in G. R. Hibbard's words "often appears at first sight as an arbitrary and chaotic mass of events"⁵⁴ and he had to be selective about both sources and material. To achieve dramatic effect and tighten the plot, Jonson sometimes presents events out of chronological order, as in the combination of the trials of Silius and Cordus in Sejanus, which were actually separate events in history but which take place at the same time in the play. Jonson also alters the presentation of the personalities in his dramas for moral effect, making the evil characters blacker than even the Roman historians present them and the good characters more noble and exemplary than they appear in the works of Tacitus and Sallust. Critics have often blamed Jonson for ignoring opportunities to add complexity to his characters when creating them from historical personalities. Barish

⁵³Barish, p. 15.

⁵⁴Hibbard, 19.

notes, "His characters display a stubborn fixedness, a refusal to change or grow, and absence of introspection."⁵⁵

Jonson's development of rather simplistic characters reveals his limitations as a writer as well as his focus in art. Unlike Shakespeare, Jonson had neither the talent nor the desire to create complex dramatic personages. In his comedies where he succeeds most, as well as in his historical drama, where his success is not so great, he works with characters as types rather than personalities. With his emphasis on teaching men valuable lessons about politics and society, Jonson does not really attempt to create portraits of life-like men and women. The plays are flawed as dramas because of the lack of strong characterization to create interest and sustain sympathy. Historical accuracy and a high moral tone were more important to the playwright than interesting characters. Jonson's chosen focus in Sejanus and Catiline is thought, not action, detailed albeit plodding plots, and moral lessons rather than fascinating characters.

All of this adds up to two historical dramas in which the purposes and techniques of historical reporting are more prominent than the objectives and methods of drama. Ideally, history shows what men have done in the past, so that a discerning viewer can learn and alter the future for the better.

⁵⁵Barish, p. 9.

Poetry (or drama) erases the inconsistencies of history, putting its events into their proper perspectives and emphasizing better than historical record the lessons that history has to teach. Jonson attempted to combine the two forms of literature and preserve the properties of each. The dramatic elements of his plays, however, are overshadowed by his devotion to "truth of argument." In his tendency to reproduce accurately so many of the details of the historical periods his plays cover, Catiline and Sejanus become too historical to be effective dramas.

CHAPTER III

MORAL AMBIGUITY AND CHAPMAN'S CAESAR AND POMPEY AND BUSSY D'AMBOIS

Like Ben Jonson, George Chapman found history to be a valuable tool to express ideas and teach moral lessons. In each of his five tragedies he deals with a definite historical period. Caesar and Pompey takes place in ancient Rome and the remaining plays including Bussy D'Ambois, the earliest of the four, deal with French history set in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. All except for The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois are legitimate history plays in that they attempt to accomplish at least some of the aims of history. The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois does not qualify because, although it is set in recent historical time, Chapman takes extreme liberties with facts. For example, the hero is entirely fictitious, and one of the main characters, the Duke of Guise, who is based on an authentic historical personage, is killed in the play, even though he was alive when the play was written and produced. The Duke is given

a heroic role in the play although in real life his activities, particularly his part in a religious massacre, were less than admirable.

As G. R. Hibbard points out, "though he followed the tradition of regarding the essential business of tragedy as the dramatization of tragic facts, "Chapman's attitude to the facts was radically different from his predecessors' and at the opposite pole from Ben Jonson's," since he had little respect for 'truth of argument.'"¹

The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois represents Chapman's farthest departure from historical fact and its historical looseness was criticized by Chapman's contemporaries. By this period of time historical accuracy was an accepted ideal for many persons and to a certain extent the critical acceptance of a play was based on its historicity. In The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, Chapman's hero is so saintly that he carries out the play's moral theme very effectively. Fictionalizing the plot considerably aided Chapman's didactic purpose. In contrast, Chapman's attempt to merge the real-life exploits of his hero in Bussy with a high moral tone and lofty sentiment resulted in moral ambiguity. The task of merging history and drama was no easy matter.

When he published The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois in 1613, Chapman prefaced it with a dedication which expresses

¹Hibbard, 30.

his attitude toward the place of "truth" and "fact" in what he felt was an acceptable "history" play. He says:

And for the authentical 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 an authentical tragedy.²

Such a defense looks back to Sir Philip Sidney's defense of drama in which the end (moral instruction) justifies the means (the alteration or even falsification of historical fact). Although Chapman presented this defense of his least historical work, he probably would have felt it sufficient to explain the bending or disregarding of facts in his other plays as well.

In both Caesar and Pompey and Bussy D'Ambois, Chapman's dramas suffer from contradictions between what Chapman intends his audience to see and feel on the one hand and what the actions of the characters in the plays convey on the other hand. Caesar and Pompey opens with three men all eager to make Rome politically stable but all in different ways. Cato seems to be politically and morally the most

²The Tragedy of Caesar and Pompey and Bussy D'Ambois in The Plays of George Chapman: The Tragedies, ed. T. M. Parrott, 2 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), I, 77. All references to the text of Chapman's writings are to this work, hereafter referred to as Tragedies. References to the text of Caesar and Pompey and Bussy D'Ambois, which appear in Tragedies, II, are to act, scene, and line.

virtuous and righteous of the three, but his life-style and philosophy by the end of the play are too private and unworkable except on a personal basis to really bring about political stability for the mass of men. Pompey begins as a morally mediocre man, shows promise as a leader and upright character, but fades into a weakling and moral failure by the drama's end. Caesar is presented at first as a villain, but by the end of the play is in command of the government and shows signs of maturity and true leadership potential.

Chapman's ambiguous handling of the three main characters and his change of didactic allegiance (from condemnation of Caesar to a limited approval of him) is very confused and confusing. Bussy D'Ambois, too, presents a contradictory view of how men should live and act. Presented as a hero, Bussy's behavior is far from heroic and the facts of his life do not encourage emulation on moral grounds since the real Bussy was little more than a philandering soldier of fortune.

Chapman's one play set in ancient history, Caesar and Pompey, is based on Plutarch's Lives of Caesar, Pompey, and Cato Minor. It is not known exactly when the play was written. As Charlotte Spivack notes, "Scholarly estimates of its date . . . vary considerably, ranging from the long accepted view that it is Chapman's latest play, written about 1612, to the opposing view propounded recently that it

is an early play, dating back to about 1605. The playwright himself contributed to the factual confusion in a dedication, dated 1631, in which he admits to the much earlier composition of the play ('written so long since') and apparently without subsequent revision: 'I yet find no fault withal for any such defects.'"³ Whenever it was written, the period of time with which it deals is the period just following the failure of the Catiline conspiracy covered in Jonson's Catiline. Two of the historical personages whom Jonson portrayed at length in his play, Julius Caesar and Cato, are prominent in Chapman's play as well, and many of the same themes are also incorporated into Chapman's work.

Like Jonson in Sejanus and Catiline, Chapman found the setting of ancient Rome ideal for exploration of problems and ideas affecting his contemporaries. Chapman, like Jonson, was concerned with preserving order both social and political and with deciding where political authority properly resided and what its limitations were. Since the historical background of the play is republican Rome on the verge of becoming a dictatorship under Julius Caesar, Chapman was forced by his material and sources to write about the political philosophy and problems of a form of government quite unlike the monarchial system he and his contemporaries knew

³George Chapman (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 144.

firsthand. Imperial Rome was philosophically more compatible with Jacobean political life. The impending civil strife mentioned early in the play, however, was something the English had experienced in the past and greatly feared. Jonson inveighed against civil disobedience and war in Catiline, and Chapman considered these matters again in Caesar and Pompey.

In scene one of Act II, a comic subplot is used to criticize the men and times of this period of Roman history and to parallel them with Jacobean England. Fronto, a "poor and ragged knave," appears on the stage, ready to hang himself since the war between Pompey and Caesar threatens to destroy all ordinary activities by its upheaval, even base and dishonest ones. Suddenly a devil calling himself Ophioneus appears and recommends that Fronto "pretend honesty and piety" in order to succeed in the world. The devil describes the universal disorder present in the play and deplored in Jacobean England, saying, "The world's out of frame, a thousand rulers wrestling it this way and that, with as many religions; when, . . . heaven's upper sphere is moved only by one" (II, 31-40). Fronto assumes he is conversing with a man, but Ophioneus, disgusted by the appellation, verbalizes the Jacobean disillusionment with man's basic nature: "Man! No, spawn of a clot! None of that cursed crew, damned in mass itself, plagued in his

birth, confined to creep below and wrestle with the elements, teach himself tortures, kill himself, hang himself; no such galley-slave. . ." (II, 45-48).

Ophioneus, the cunning Machiavellian type, advises Fronto to "rise by fortune; let desert rise leisurely enough, and by degrees; fortune prefers headlong and comes like riches to a man" (II, 107-110). Therefore Fronto is counseled to become a priest and practice all the vices of modern men of the world (some of which are anachronistic in terms of the play's time period and setting, but which reveal Chapman's ironic and satiric intent). Ophioneus says: "And for discharge of the priesthood, what thou want'st in learning thou shalt take out in good-fellowship; thou shalt equivocate with the sophister, prate with the lawyer, scrape with the usurer, drink with the Dutchman, swear with the Frenchman, cheat with the Englishman, brag with the Scot and turn all to religion. . ." (II, 111-116).

The devil further reveals that accomplished villains, the world's "great" men, have worked hard to get where they are or where they are going, namely to hell: "Think'st thou earth's great potentates have gotten their with any single act of murther, poisoning, adultery, and the rest? No; 'tis a purchase for all manner of villainy, especially that may be privileged by authority, coloured with holiness, and enjoyed with pleasure" (II, 125-130). Thus the man who

would be great in hell (as Fronto desires) is wise to ascend in the world with help from the devil who can provide "chopines at commandment to any height of life thou canst wish." Punning on the fall of man, Chapman has Fronto mourn, "I fear my fall is too low," in order to provide an ironic comment on the way of the world.

Ophioneus sneers: "Too low, fool? Hast thou not heard of Vulcan's falling out of heaven? Light o'thy legs, and no matter thou halt'st with thy best friend ever after; 'tis the more comely and fashionable. Better go lame in the fashion with Pompey, than never so upright, quite out of fashion with Cato" (II, 152, 153-158). Of course, the devil's advice is the exact opposite from what Chapman really desires his readers to perceive as the right way to live. Shortly after this brief subplot, in scene two of Act II, Nuntius announces the results of the first battle between Caesar and Pompey and makes plain the purpose of Chapman's history, saying that here is

. . . set out such a tragedy
As all the princes of the earth may come
To take their patterns by the spirits of Rome.
(II, 41-43)

Those who interpret the play correctly will take the irony and cynicism of Fronto and Ophioneus' conversation to heart and in theory find in the main plot of the play characters to shun and models to emulate as well as lessons about

political instability and order.

Bussy D'Ambois begins with similar reflections on the degeneracy of modern man. Bussy is first seen in a natural setting, a "green retreat," considering the unnatural disorder of the world's affairs in which

Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things,
 Reward goes backwards, Honour on his head;

 . . . great men flourish; and do imitate
 Unskilled staturies, who suppose,
 In forming a Colossus, if they make him
 Straddle enough, strut, and look big, and gape,
 Their work is goodly; so men merely great
 In their affected gravity of voice,
 Sourness of countenance, manners' cruelty,
 Authority, wealth, and all the spawn of Fortune,
 Think they bear all the kingdom's worth before them.
 (I, i, 1-2, 6-14)

In such a world the power of wealth and authority create an artificial "greatness" quite at variance with true worth and moral goodness. Bussy concludes that the wise man "must to Virtue for her guide resort,/ Or we shall shipwrack in our safest port" (I, i, 32-33).

The old problem arises of whether virtue is real if it is not tested in the real world. The invitation to prove his virtue comes to Bussy in the form of Monsieur, the foremost representative of the disordered social world which Bussy has just condemned. Monsieur is the ambitious Machiavellian type, and he is not content with holding second place in the rank of the state's social and political order.

He aspires to the kingship, saying:

There is no second place in numerous state
 That holds more than a cipher; in a king
 All places are contained. His words and looks
 Are like the flashes and the bolts of Jove;
 His deeds inimitable, like the sea
 That shuts still as it opes, and leaves no tracts
 Nor prints of precedent for mean men's facts:

(I, i, 34-40)

Monsieur is a true believer in the powers and privileges of kings, and he covets kingship mightily. He hopes to use Bussy, whom he characterizes as "A man of spirit beyond the reach of fear" (I, i, 46) to prepare his way to the crown.

He reasons:

There's but a thread betwixt me and a crown,
 I would not wish it cut, unless by nature;
 Yet to prepare me for that possible fortune,
 'Tis good to get resolved spirits about me.

(I, i, 41-44)

Monsieur so greatly desires the highest form of power which men can experience that, although he "would not wish" his brother's death, it is obvious he would not object too much to a desperate and ambitious underling bringing about that end for him. Bussy, however, disappoints Monsieur's hopes to use him as a tool to gain the throne. Although he accepts Monsieur's money and patronage, he plays the role of the king's courtier perfectly. Bussy becomes a loyal servant to his ruler, a true counselor and advisor, an incorruptible champion for the king against his enemies, including his patron, the king's unnaturally disloyal

brother. In this area, at least, Bussy serves unambiguously as a perfect model of how the aristocracy should serve its rulers and represent the best of what society can produce in terms of obedience and loyalty. Bussy, the perfect courtier, even lists Monsieur's weaknesses and failures as an aristocratic subject during a bitter argument:

. . . y'are for perjuries the very prince
 Of all intelligencers; and your voice
 Is like an eastern wind, that, where it flies,
 Knits nets of caterpillars, with which you catch
 The prime of all the fruits the kingdom yields.
 . . . your political head is the curs'd fount
 Of all the violence, rapine, cruelty,
 Tyranny, and atheism flowing through the realm.
 (III, ii, 476-481)

Monsieur represents all of the degenerate aspects of human society. He is the primary example of the man who is "great" because of misplaced authority and undeserved power, and who has forgotten his proper place in society as a subordinate to the king. The Guise, too, is an example of the unnatural order now in effect in the world. Monsieur tries to heal the quarrel between Bussy and the Guise by having Bussy apologize first, since the Guise "is the better man" (III, ii, 72). An exchange on the meanings of "great" and "noble" ensues:

Bussy: And, therefore, may do worst?
 Monsieur: He has more titles.
 Bussy: So Hydra has more heads.
 Monsieur: He's greater known.
 Bussy: His greatness is the people's; mine's my own.
 Monsieur: He's nobl[ier] born.
 Bussy: He is not; I am noble

And noblesse in his blood hath no gradations
But in his merit.

(III, ii, 75-78)

Bussy is great in spirit, daring, valor, intelligence and aspiration. He is supposed to be a shining example of what man can be if he follows his best natural instincts and is not deflected from his goals by a decadent society.

Set in sixteenth century France, the drama's themes of kingship and the role of a courtier are natural topics for consideration. In republican Rome, however, the question is what sort of men are to be the supreme authorities and whether power and authority are worth the sacrifices they call for. In Caesar and Pompey, Cato is a strong-willed man of action and contemplation and a natural spokesman for the Stoicism common to classical historiography. Cato has mastered Stoicism completely and accepts all events as the manifestation of the will of the gods. He realizes the political disorder threatened at the opening of the play by the coming clash of Caesar and Pompey's armies and predicts that what is "civil and natural" will soon turn "wild and barbarous." The perfect statesman, he sets more value on the preservation of the state and the present political order than his own safety, saying to Pompey at one point, "My person is the least, my lord, I value" (II, iv, 62).

Although he is outnumbered in the Senate chamber at the opening of the play, he refuses to be outmaneuvered and

speaks out against Caesar, asking,

. . . bear our Consuls or our Senate here
 So small love to their country, that their wills
 Beyond their country's right are so perverse
 To give a tyrant here entire command?

(I, ii, 66-68)

Cato opposes Caesar as a selfish and ever-ambitious politician who would willingly destroy his country to elevate himself. In the Senate he takes sides for Pompey against Caesar, because he believes Pompey

. . . affects not th'Empire,
 . . . since he loves his country,
 In my great hopes of him, too well to seek
 His sole rule of her, when so many souls
 So hard a task approve it. . . .

(I, ii, 134-138)

Chapman makes Cato the main center of interest in the play philosophically as Derek Crawley points out in Character in Relation to Action in the Tragedies of George Chapman.

"Every Stoic statement whether by Pompey himself or by a minor character like Brutus reminds us of him, and every worldly action is seen as an incorrect one because Cato's firm basis of judgment has been established in our minds ('I rather wish to err with Cato/ Than with the truth go of the world besides.')." ⁴ Cato abhors the thought of absolute power in the hands of one man because most men are weak and

⁴Character in Relation to Action in the Tragedies of George Chapman; Salzburg Studies in English Literature Under the Direction of Professor Erwin A. Sturzl, in Jacobean Drama Studies, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg, Austria: Universität Salzburg, 1974), p. 149.

incapable of self-discipline. As Michael H. Higgins points out, Cato cannot accept an authority which he cannot justify by human reason.⁵

When by Act V the republican cause is lost and Cato hears of Pompey's defeat, Chapman uses Cato to demonstrate the aphorism which begins the play, "Only a just man is a free man." Cato decides that the only way to preserve what is left of value in the world--his own moral self-sufficiency and personal freedom--is to pursue his reason which tells him that death is preferable to life under a tyrant. He concludes that the law which forbids suicide is not so binding as his own innate law, his own concept of right and wrong.

The individual has a kind of divinity which a worldly rule should not interfere with. Cato, the embodiment of this theory, cannot accept the idea that his life is "in law's rule, not mine own" as if the laws "Made for a sort of out-laws, must bound me/ In their subjection" (V, ii, 7, 8-10). The only way to escape, "to conquer conquering Caesar" is through death. As he explains to Staltilus, he cannot beg for mercy from Caesar, because that would be asking for justice from a man who is, in Cato's interpretation, unjust and unworthy:

Men that have forfeit lives by breaking laws,
Or have been overcome, may beg their lives;

⁵"Chapman's 'Senecal Man': A Study in Jacobean Psychology," Review of English Studies, 21 (1945), 186.

But I have ever been in every justice
 Better than Caesar, and was never conquer'd,
 Or made to fly for life, as Caesar was.
 But have been victor ever to my wish,
 Gainst whomsoever ever hath oppos'd;
 Where Caesar now is conquer'd in his conquest,
 In the ambition he till now denied,
 Taking upon him to give life, when death
 Is tenfold due to his most tyrannous self;
 No right, no power given him to raise an army
 Which in spite of Rome he leads about,
 Slaughtering her loyal subjects like an outlaw;
 Nor is he better.

(IV, v, 25-39)

Thus Cato comes to the conclusion, shocking to his followers, that suicide is the only way to thwart Caesar. When questioned by Athenodorus about why there is a law forbidding suicide, Cato explains that it exists so that

. . . all

That know not what law is, nor freely can
 Perform the fitting justice of a man
 In kingdom's common good, may be enforc'd.

(IV, v, 68-71)

But he concludes his explanation, saying, "But it is not every man to himself/ The perfect'st law" (IV, v, 71-72)? To help Athenodorus understand his reasoning, Cato uses the language of political divine right to justify the philosophical theory that a just man has the right to dispose of his life as he sees fit:

Then to himself

Is every just man's life subordinate.
 Again, sir, is not our free soul infus'd
 To every body in her absolute end
 To rule that body? In which absolute rule
 Is she not absolutely empress of it?
 And being empress, may she not dispose
 It, and the life in it, at her just pleasure?

(IV, v, 72-79)

Eventually Cato talks all his followers into acceptance of the idea that suicide is not only a convenient way to escape tyranny but is also very nearly a duty. Part of his argument is unhistorical. Chapman evidently felt so strongly in the probability of life after death that he had no qualms about putting his anachronistic Christian tenet in the mouth of his Stoic philosopher. Thus Cato expounds on the reuniting of the body and soul in heaven, a theory which he says is "past doubt" and pronounces, "a good cheerful doctrine for good men" (IV, v, 125, 141). With his belief in the immortality of the soul firmly in mind and with his usual strong resolution unshaken, Cato kills himself and thus remains a free man.

In Bussy D'Ambois Chapman employs the same sort of Stoic argument for self-government that he uses in Caesar and Pompey. Bussy, like Cato, is described as a perfect man in an imperfect world, a naturalist in an artificial setting, and a free individual in a world of slavish imitators.

In the first scene set at court Bussy reveals his natural "noblesse" by courting the most important woman at court, the Guise's Duchess, before her husband, because he deigns to woo a lesser society figure and he enjoys stirring the Guise to jealousy. As Ribner explains, "Bussy, the natural man . . . will not accept the social canons of order and degree, and his baiting of his superior, the Duke of

Guise, wins him another . . . powerful enemy."⁶ Furthermore, the very nature of Bussy's courtship is bold and earthy. Ornstein comments, "His deliberate grossness exposes the sham delicacy of the court even as his sophisticated arguments mock platonism."⁷

To those watching this courtship encounter, Bussy's behavior is perfectly suited to his personality, and it reveals his courageous character, his supreme self-confidence, and self-sufficiency. Monsieur apostrophizes his protégé in an aside, saying:

His great heart will not down, 'tis like the sea,
That partly by his own internal heat,
Partly the stars' daily and nightly motion,
Their heat and light, and partly of the place
The divers frames, but chiefly by the moon,
Bristled with surges, never will be won,
(No, not when th' hearts of all those powers are burst)
To make retreat into his settled home,
Till he be crown'd with his own quiet foam.

(I, ii, 157-165)

By using language heavy with analogies to nature, Chapman makes Bussy a sort of magnificent natural force which men cannot control. Like the sea, Bussy is set in motion by external forces, but he alone determines when he will become calm again. In this he is a kind of Stoic, a law unto himself. Bussy believes completely, like Cato, that his own course of action is the best. He, too values freedom

⁶Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 28.

⁷Ornstein, p. 55.

highly and disdains the thought that being a good man, he must be forced by law or government to do what is right. That, supposedly, comes instinctively to Bussy as it does to Cato. He is, he declares to King Henry, a man who is morally pure and free and therefore his own best ruler:

I crave . . .

.
 That I may so make good what God and Nature
 Have given me for my good; since I am free,
 (Offending no just law), let no law make
 By any wrong it does, my life her slave:
 When I am wrong'd, and that law fails to right me,
 Let me be king myself (as man was made),
 And do a justice that exceeds the law;
 If my wrong pass the power of single valour
 To right and expiate; then be you my king,
 And do a right, exceeding law and nature:
 Who to himself is law, no law doth need,
 Offends no law, and is a king indeed.

(II, i, 191, 193-204)

According to Bussy, a good and just man can correct an injustice from which he suffers without recourse to any higher authority. But if the correction of a wrong or relief from an injustice is beyond the power of an individual, he must look to a sovereign, a higher social authority, whose duty it is to promote the interest of his subjects. It is suggested that a strong individual like Bussy does not really need a king. But those who are morally weak must have the law and sovereignty to protect them from themselves and others.

What prevents all this from being subversive political doctrine is Chapman's use of King Henry as a moral chorus to

approve Bussy's philosophy in theory, if not practice, with its insistence that all men could rule themselves if and only if they were all naturally noble and perfect, which as men like Monsieur and the Guise serve to demonstrate, they are not. Henry, a wise and intelligent monarch, obviously philosophically enlightened and ruling to the best of his ability, realizes Bussy's finer qualities and appreciates his counsel. He tells the Guise he cannot understand the Guise's dislike of Bussy, "a man so good," who

. . . only would uphold
 Man in his native noblesse, from whose fall
 All our dissensions rise; that in himself
 (Without the outward patches of our frailty,
 Riches and honour) knows he comprehends
 Worth with the greatest: kings had never borne
 Such boundless empire over other men,
 Had all maintain'd the spirit and state of D'Ambois
 Nor had the impartial hand of Nature
 That all things gave in her original
 Without these definite terms of Mine and Thine
 Been turn'd unjustly to the hand of Fortune,
 Had all preserv'd her in her prime, like D'Ambois;
 No envy, no disjunction had dissolv'd,
 Or pluck'd one stick out of the golden faggot
 In which the world of Saturn bound our lives,
 Had all been held together with the nerves,
 The genius, and th' ingenuous soul of D'Ambois.
 (III, ii, 90-107)

Bussy represents man in the golden age when all men were free and equal and needed no sovereign to dictate right or wrong to them. With the fall of man came the servility, degeneracy, and injustice which eventually made some men greater than others in power and wealth and finally resulted in one supreme ruler. Both law and sovereignty derive from

man's weakness. If men had preserved their virtue, the ideal state would still exist and neither rulers nor laws would have been invented. Each man individually is responsible, finally, for the kind of political and social world he lives in. This idea is also expressed by Jonson in Sejanus and Catiline where the people and aristocracy are blamed for creating tyrants and rebels. By couching these ideas in language of the golden age, a familiar theme in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, and by making Bussy a very loyal servant to the king, Chapman prevents the speech from becoming shockingly revolutionary and liable to censorship.

In both Bussy and Caesar and Pompey, most men are unable to profit from the example of the heroes. In Caesar and Pompey, Cato's main efforts to propagate his philosophy and preserve the form of government he favors are centered on Pompey. Pompey is the play's chief pupil: as he learns from Cato's precepts and example, the audience is educated as well. At the beginning of the play Pompey is portrayed as a man as impressed by the world's values and as eager to possess them as Caesar. He has, however, a respect for and understanding of Cato which his rival lacks until the end of the play. Unlike Caesar, Pompey's ambitions are not so grandiose and he wins Cato's praise as a man who "affects not th' Empire" and who "loves his country." Like Cato, he rejects political absolutism as the answer to Rome's problems,

saying that reason is against such a political scheme and only a man who puts his faith in good luck would want to rule absolutely:

. . . no reason
Will think one man transferr'd with affectation
Of all Rome's empire, for he must have fortune,
That goes beyond a man; and where so many
Their handfals find with it, the one is mad
That undergoes it. . . .

(I, ii, 179-184)

When Caesar demands Cato to be imprisoned for his opposition and draws his sword to threaten the statesman, Pompey again criticizes Caesar's lust for too much power:

How insolent a part was this in you,
To offer the imprisonment of Cato,
When there is right in him (were form as answer'd
With terms and place) to send us both to prison,
If of our own ambitions we should offer
Th' entry of our armies? For who knows
That, of us both, the best friend to his country
And freest from his own particular ends
(Being in this power), would not assume the Empire,
And having it, could rule the State so well
As now 'tis govern'd for the common good?

(I, ii, 216-226)

In his respect for Cato, his willingness to observe the law, and his modesty regarding his own ambitions and desire to lead men, Pompey is a "good" man of integrity and intelligence. He has his flaws, however, which eventually undo him and ruin his efforts to be true to himself and maintain the world's respect as well. As Crawley says, Pompey "inclines to Cato and Stoicism very strongly" but he "is by profession and by habit immersed in the active world and,

strive as he may, he finds it difficult not to see value in externals, like power and honor."⁸ One of his flaws is a deep sensitivity to criticism. It causes him to speak out on his own behalf before the Senate, accusing Caesar with rather bad grace of winning battles by virtue of good fortune rather than by sheer effort as Pompey has done. In response to Pompey's assertion that one-man rule is folly, Caesar retorts:

Accuse yourself, sir (if your conscience urge it),
Or of ambition, or corruption,
Or insufficiency to rule the Empire,
And sound me not with your lead.

(I, ii, 127-130)

These remarks prompt an outbreak on Pompey's part of jealousy and name-calling ("false Caesar" is merely "politic dross" with a "copper soul") and results in an exchange of insults between the two in such bad taste that Cato protests, "My lords, ye make all Rome amaz'd to hear" (I, ii, 231, 232, 238, 290).

Pompey so deeply desires to follow Cato's advice which he respects and admires that he does not pursue Caesar's troops after Caesar's initial defeat in order to save Roman lives, as Cato has urged. He calls Cato his "truest friend and worthy father" and praises his "infinite merits." When Cato is absent as he is from Act II until Act IV, scene

⁸Crawley, p. 162.

ill omens just before the battle. Brutus urges Pompey to substitute calm decision for fear:

You should not sir, forsake your own wise counsel,
Your own experienc'd discipline, own practice,
Own god-inspired insight to all changes
Of Protean fortune.

(IV, i, 29-32)

But Pompey cannot master his worry that the world will judge him harshly:

I cannot, sir, abide men's open mouths,
Nor be ill-spoken of; nor have my counsels
And circumspections turn'd on me for fears
With mocks and scandals that would make a man
Of lead a lightning in the desperat'st onset
That ever trampled under death his life.
I bear the touch of ear for all their safeties,
Or for mine own!

(IV, i, 45-52)

When the battle is over and Pompey has been decisively defeated, he is still not able to accept the Stoic doctrine that man cannot control or even seek to control the events of his life. As Crawley says, "Only a man like Cato, who does not will events to work out as he would have them, can be free and happy."⁹ Pompey still seeks to lay the blame for his lack of success on others and cannot accept his fate:

O, the strange carriage of their [the gods'] acts,
By which men order theirs and their devotions in them,
Much rather striving to entangle men
In pathless error than with regular right
Confirm their reason's and their piety's light.

(IV, iii, 40-44)

Entangled as he is in consideration of his fortune and its

⁹Ibid., p. 166.

betrayal of him in battle, he is not ready yet to embrace Stoicism.

In the last act of the play when all is lost, Pompey embraces Stoicism wholeheartedly. Thus he declares:

. . . let us still be good,
 And we shall still be great; and greater far
 In every solid grace that when the tumour
 And bile of rotten observation swell'd us.
 Griefs for wants outward are without our cure,
 Greatness, not of itself, is never sure.
 Before we went upon heaven, rather treading
 The virtues of it underfoot in making
 The vicious world our heaven, than walking there
 Even here, as knowing that out home, contemning
 All forg'd heavens here rais'd, setting hills on hills.
 Vulcan from heaven fell, yet on's feet did light,
 And stood no less a god than at his height.
 At lowest, things like fast; we now are like
 The two poles propping heaven, on which heaven moves,
 And they are fix'd and quiet; being above the heavens.
 . . . I will stand no more
 On other legs, nor build one joy without me.
 If ever I be worth a house again
 I'll build all inward. . . .

(V, ii, 181-197)

Pompey's speeches reveal his new understanding of his past failures in not living up to the Stoic code and his determination to be a new man. He sees his past worldly behavior as a moral disease afflicting himself and others like the illness which Empedocles caused:

Empedocles

Recur'd a mortal plague through all his country
 With stopping up the yawning of a hill,
 From when the hollow and unwholesome south
 Exhal'd his venom'd vapour.

(V, i, 217-221)

On a broader scale he sees his former selfish ambition as

symptomatic of the ills inflicted on society by unjust and selfish figures of authority, saying:

And what else
Is any king, given over to his lusts,
But even the poison'd cleft of that crack'd mountain,
That all his kingdom plagues with his example?
Which I have stopp'd now, and so cur'd my country
Of such a sensual pestilence: . . .

(V, i, 221-226)

Pride, self-will, and self-glorification are the lusts of which Pompey has been guilty. He has also sought to control and direct others when he has never really been in control of his own life. He concludes that those in power must know their own weaknesses and limitations and exercise self-discipline lest they corrupt others. Furthermore, those in power have the duty to set a good example for their followers and subjects; Chapman's use of the word "king" in a play set in republican Rome suggests that he meant his audience to apply this lesson to contemporary society.

Pompey's moral victory is short-lived, however, because his assassins come to take his life so soon after he has found a better way to live. He blames the gods for forsaking him:

See, heavens, your sufferings! Is my country's love
The justice of an empire, piety,
Worth this end in their leader? Last yet, life,
And bring the gods off fairer: after this
Who will adore or serve the dieties?

(V, i, 259-263)

Crawley says, "that his doubt of the gods is a relapse, there

is no question."¹⁰ Cato met his death without qualms and with intense faith: "Now I am safe; . . ./ And now will see the gods' state, and the stars" (V, ii, 160-161). At the opening of the play Cato declared:

He that fears the gods
For guard of any goodness, all things fears . . .
And what an aspen soul hath such a creature!
How dangerous to his soul is such a fear!

(I, i, 67-70)

Pompey's fear and despair contrast unfavorably with Cato's behavior and signal a return to his less noble, un-Stoical self. He dies, if not the complete man, at least a very human and sympathetic character.

Cato is the only example of a man completely true to his principles in Caesar and Pompey. In Bussy D'Ambois, the hero fails to really fulfill the task he has set for himself which is to reform the court of Henry and be a paragon of virtue. In both plays most of the characters react to the models for behavior which Chapman has set up, but few of them change for the better. Women in both plays, as in Jonson's Roman histories, serve as moral touchstones for their society.

In Caesar and Pompey, Pompey's wife Cornelia has a minor role in terms of the play's action, but she serves as a moral reinforcement of the play's philosophy that Stoicism

¹⁰Ibid., p. 170.

is the proper means to endure the vagaries of fortune in a cruel political world. Cornelia takes the place of Cato in Pompey's life as an exemplary human being who can educate weaker individuals.

In portraying Cornelia as the learned, noble, and Stoical partner of Pompey, Chapman broke with historical tradition and altered the facts to his own dramatic purposes. As Spivack says, "This ennobled portrait of Cornelia--who according to history was emotionally devastated by her husband's return and swooned rather than philosophized--enriches Chapman's gallery of high-minded heroines."¹¹ Cornelia does not recognize Pompey and his friend Demetrius in the black robes with which they have disguised themselves after losing to Caesar. She debates with Demetrius on the goodness-greatness theme by defending her husband's worth even without his worldly title of "great":

- Cor. . . . he is not worldly, but truly good.
 Dem. He's too great to be truly good; for worldly greatness is the chief worldly goodness; and all worldly goodness (I proved before) has ill in it, which true good has not.
 Cor. If he rule well with his greatness, wherein is he ill?
 Dem. But great rules are like carpenters that wear their rules at their backs still; and therefore to make good your true good in him, y'ad better suppose him little or mean; for in the mean only is the true good.

(V, ii, 135-143)

Finally, her witty exchanges and sincere affection

¹¹Spivack, pp. 148-49.

for her husband cause Pompey to make the final test, asking her if she would accept a fallen husband, and she replies, "if he submit himself cheerfully to his fortune." He throws off the disguise, saying, "I am cheerfully fallen; be cheerful" (V, i, 153, 159). Cornelia's acceptance of him despite his worldly misfortune allows Pompey to come to terms with his defeat. Cornelia's loyalty and self-disciplined courage are the epitome of the best qualities of the Roman character.

While Cornelia, like Cato, represents the strengths of Roman society, Tamyra in Bussy D'Ambois represents the weaknesses of hers. Tamyra, like Bussy, is the victim of her passions, her basic animal nature. The love intrigue of Bussy fits historically and thematically with the play's sixteenth century setting. Courtship and sexual alliances had prominent places in the power struggle of courtly life as they do in Bussy. The theme of women's deceptive beauty paradoxically concealing corruption has its place in Bussy as well as in Jonson's plays. Montsurry complains bitterly of the dangerous deceptiveness of feminine beauty in Act V, scene one, after he knows Tamyra has betrayed his trust:

. . . study
 The errant wilderness of a woman's face
 Where men cannot get out, for all the comets
 That have been lighted at it: though they know
 That adders lie a-sunning in their smiles,
 That basilisks drink their poison from their eyes, . . .
(V, i, 75-80)

Montsurry sees a woman's beauty as antisocial

("errant wilderness") and poisonous (as in "adders" and "basilisks"), but his condemnation is colored by his hurt ego. Chapman makes Tamyra an object of pity as well as a fallen woman. The play emphasizes repeatedly the irresistible nature of instinct and passion. Tamyra understands the principles of honor and resists Monsieur's offer of money in return for sexual favors as well as his threats:

. . . one way I am sure
 You shall not pull down me; my husband's height
 Is crown to all my hopes; and his retiring
 To any mean state, shall be my aspiring:
 Mine honour's in my own hands, spite of kings.
(II, ii, 5-9)

But instinct ("blood" in the play's language) is stronger than reason and society's prohibitions in the play. As the Friar explains, "Our affections storm,/ Rais'd in our blood, no reason can reform" (II, ii, 140-141). Thus Tamyra arranges a love affair with Bussy, despising herself for her violent passion, yet unable to resist:

. . . Fear, fear and hope,
 Of one thing, at one instant, fight in me:
 I love what most I loathe, and cannot live
 Unless I compass that which holds my death:
 For life's mere death, loving one that loathes me,
 And he I love, will loathe me, when he sees
 I fly my sex, my virtue, my renown,
 To run so madly on a man unknown.
(II, ii, 119-126)

Soon lying, hypocrisy, and adultery are part of her daily life. The humour of the blood, associated with sexual passion, controls both her actions and Bussy's. It should be

in harmony with the other three bodily fluids, under the soul's control, but the proper hierarchy has been lost. The disorder of society is thus reflected in bodily disorder and emotional disharmony. Tamyra's inability to correct the unbalanced elements of her own nature results in her torture, the Friar's death, and Bussy's assassination. Her weakness is in part due to the fallen nature of mankind. As in Jonson's plays, women are the weakest members of society morally as well as physically. Whatever is wrong in the social and political spheres of society will be first reflected in the behavior of that society's women.

K. M. Burton in "The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson" characterizes Caesar and Pompey as "Three intertwined exemplary stories . . . each showing the fortunes of one man--of Cato, the just man; of Pompey, the flawed man who learns that goodness, not greatness, leads to freedom; of Caesar, the corrupt individualist who does not learn."¹² As nutshell descriptions, the first two are accurate enough, but Burton's label for Caesar is oversimplified. Cato is as much an individualist as Caesar, for he puts his own integrity first, and although he loves the state and tries to preserve it, he feels his own understanding of right and wrong (natural law) is superior to the state's

¹²"The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson," Essays in Criticism, 2 (1952), 406.

eternal, coercive law. Cato's rationality, self-determination, and independent spirit all mark him strongly as an "individualist." Cato and Caesar differ as individualists in that Cato expends his energy and his life for the state as long as it is possible to do so, whereas Caesar's activities as an individual are almost always selfish. Caesar's corruption, too, which Cato deplors sets him apart from Cato as another type of individualist.

In the beginning of the play Cato describes his enemy's followers, saying:

And such a flock of puttocks follow Caesar,
 For fallings of his ill-disposed purse
 (That never yet spar'd cross to aquiline virtue),
 As well may make all civil spirits suspicious.
 Look how, against great rains, a standing pool
 Of paddocks, toads, and water-snakes put up
 Their speckled throats above the venomous lake,
 Croaking and gasping for some fresh-fall'n drops,
 To quench their poison'd thirst, being near to stifle
 With clotter'd purgings of their own foul bane:
 So still where Caesar goes they thrust up head
 Imposters, flatterers, favourites, and bawds,
 Buffoons, intelligencers, select wits,
 Close murtherers, mountebanks, and decay'd thieves,
 To gain their baneful lives' reliefs from him,
 From Britain, Belgia, France, and Germany,
 The scum of wither country (choos'd by him,
 To be his black guard and red agents here)
 Swarming about him.

(I, i, 14-32)

This sort of description, sounding much like Jonson's portrayal of Sejanus and his followers, creates a very unfavorable impression of Caesar. In the first act Caesar's selfish and opportunistic personality indicates that he is an

accomplished Machiavel. He plots to trick the Senate into letting his troops into Rome in order to overthrow the government. He plans to win over Cato by "honouring speeches," "persuasive gifts," and even "enforcive usage," if all else fails (I, i, 5, 7). In his worldliness he cannot comprehend that Cato lives by other standards and is not corruptible.

But to characterize Caesar a "corrupt individualist" throughout the entire play on the basis of early scenes is to disregard much other material in the drama. It is true that Cato never changes his opinion about Caesar's motives and character, calling him a tyrant and outlaw in Act IV, and in Act V speaking of "th'armed malice of a foe so fierce/ And bear-like. . ." (V, iii, 54-55). But Caesar's behavior is not always so clearly evil as Cato's consistent condemnation makes it seem. Ornstein sees the inconsistencies as Chapman's "willingness to depict an ambiguous Caesar: noble in abilities and temperament, but Machiavellian in ambition; part conspirator, part savior of his country."¹³ The ambiguities are easily found, but Chapman's intentions in his contradictory portrayal of Caesar are uncertain. As Crawley points out, "There are times in the play . . . when we do not know how to regard Caesar or his actions."¹⁴ In the third scene of Act II, for example, Caesar's fortunes

¹³Ornstein, p. 80.

¹⁴Crawley, p. 154.

are at their lowest ebb and he seems to be facing defeat at the hands of Pompey's army. One of Pompey's men, Vibius, has been captured during the battle and is brought to Caesar, who frees him without ransom and sends an offer of peace through him to Pompey. Ennis Rees in The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action sees this offer of peace as a mere trick since, "the peace into which he attempts to deceive Pompey is merely a politic device which, if successful, will allow Caesar to gather more strength."¹⁵

His motivation for offering peace is explained by Caesar as a desire to emulate the patriotism of Cato and Pompey by preventing the killing of more Romans since Pompey, at Cato's urging, broke off the earlier battle to avoid additional bloodshed. Caesar seems to be impressed by this explanation of Pompey's abstention from pressing his advantage in battle and he addresses Vibius, saying:

. . . good Vibius,
 Be ransom'd with my love, and haste to Pompey,
 Entreating him from me that we might meet,
 And for that reason, which I know this day
 Was given by Cato for his pursuit's stay,
 (Which was prevention of our Roman blood)
 Propose my offer of our hearty peace.

(II, ii, 55-61)

Pompey receives the news of a peace offer with suspicion and

¹⁵The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 135-36.

jealousy:

Devices of a new forge to entrap me!
 I rest in Caesar's shades, walk his strow'd paths,
 Sleep in his quiet waves? I'll sooner trust
 Hibernian bogs and quicksands and Hell mouth
 Take for my sanctuary. . . .

(III, i, 99-103)

But Caesar sincerely seems to desire to save Roman lives, as is shown in various places in the play. Just before the final battle, for example, he pledges

. . . my true vows
 For life . . . great heaven, for all my foes
 Being natural Romans!

(III, ii, 83-85)

And after the final battle has been won, he laments, "Oh, we have slain, not conquer'd! Roman blood/ Perverts the event" (IV, iv, 1-3). Furthermore, Vibius and the consuls believe that Caesar made his peace offer in good faith and urge its acceptance. Pompey, too, has been advised earlier by Cato that although Caesar is a man who "will his conquest sell at infinite rate" a "humble offer on his part/ Of honoured peace to you" must be accepted ("Lose no fit offer of that wished treaty") (II, iv, 48-49, 51-52, 55). When Antony suggests that the offered peace is a trick, Caesar denies using Machiavellian tactics:

Ant.	This prepares A good induction to the change of Fortune In this day's issue, if the pride it kindles In Pompey's veins makes him deny a peace So gently offer'd; for her alter'd hand Works never surer from her ill to good On his side she hath hurt, and on the other
------	--

With other changes, than when means are us'd
 To keep her constant, yet retire refus'd.
 Caes. I try no such conclusion, but desire
 Directly peace. In mean space, I'll prepare
 For other issue in my utmost means;
 Whose hopes now resting at Brundisium,
 In that part of my army with Sabinus,
 I wonder he so long delays to bring me,
 And must in person haste him, if this even
 I hear not from him.

(II, iii, 83-89)

It would seem that, being a man of action, Caesar puts more energy into preparing for another battle just in case the peace offer is not accepted than he does in preparing for a cessation of hostilities. But this is not saying that his offer of peace is merely a politic device to stall for time. After Pompey's defeat, Caesar again mentions the unaccepted peace offer, saying that he had no choice but fight since:

However many [there were slain], gods and men can witness
 Themselves enforc'd it, much against the most
 I could enforce on Pompey for our peace.

(IV, iv, 11-13)

All of these instances are presented at face value by Chapman and seem to indicate that, although Caesar is the least sympathetic of the three main characters and is wrong in causing a civil war, he has some redeeming qualities and is not the complete Machiavel later in the play as he appears to be on its onset.

In Acts IV and V Caesar's ambiguous character is further developed. In Act IV, Brutus is brought before Caesar as a defeated enemy and is treated "with generosity and

nobility" as Crawley says "because of his virtue and because of his patriotism."¹⁶ Thus Caesar magnanimously forgives his former foe, saying:

You fought with me, sir, for I know your arms
 Were taken for your country, not for Pompey
 And for my country I fought, nothing less
 Than he. . .

(IV, iv, 26-29)

This statesmanlike pose and noble speech is partly explained by Caesar's desire to visit Brutus' father-in-law, Cato, at Utica as soon as possible so "his love may strengthen my success to-day" (IV, iv, 47). As Crawley explains, Caesar's words seem to mean that, if he can win Cato over as he has just done Brutus, his newly achieved political power will be psychologically strengthened in the eyes of the populace,¹⁷ but Chapman does not comment on Caesar's motives in so speaking.

It is Caesar, Cato's greatest enemy, who pays the final tributes in the play to Cato, the Stoic paragon and model of the perfect statesman. He shows an understanding of Cato's principles and value as an individual after Cato's death which he did not show during the Stoic's lifetime: Thy life was rule to all lives;" (V, ii, 183) "O censure not his acts;/ Who knew as well what fitted man, as all men"

¹⁶Crawley, p. 157.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 158.

(V, ii, 187-188). Yet, as Crawley says, "Caesar's words of praise over Cato at the end of the play are not spoken with tongue in cheek. They are simply the appropriate sentiments for the occasion and are out of keeping with Caesar, who Cato described as a man who bore 'armed malice' toward him, 'a foe so fierce/ And bear-like.'"¹⁸

Caesar is the only one of the three major characters left to pronounce any eulogies. His triumph in battle is hollow as he contemplates the loss of Roman life, the head of Pompey which "wounds" his eyes and "poisons" his thoughts, and the suicides of the Consuls and Cato, who, as the Argument states, "are slaughtered with their own invincible hands" so that Caesar is left alone "(in spite of all his fortune) without his victory victor." Caesar orders the torture and death of Pompey's assassins, so angry is he with their unauthorized action. He fears that this will

. . . confirm the false brand of my tyranny
 With being found a fautor of his murther
 Whom my dear country choos'd to fight for her.
 (V ii, 207-209)

By honoring Cato and Pompey as he does after their deaths, Caesar further redeems his character until at the play's end he has become a strong and wise man, educated by the examples of Pompey and especially Cato.

Chapman's device of blackening Caesar's character at

¹⁸Ibid.

the beginning of the play was perhaps his way of insuring that Cato's unworldliness is properly set off in contrast. Pompey gains, too, as a man who can be admired in the early acts of the play and pitied at the close by comparing him with the ambition, self-centeredness, and success of Caesar. But, as the play draws to a close, Caesar's personality and abilities are enhanced. He, too, is shown as a patriot who wishes the best for his country and who would dispense justice and mercy even to those who have opposed him. His respect and admiration for Cato reveal an understanding of the statesman's worth which he lacked earlier and which was a weakness in his character. Chapman wishes his play to convey lessons about becoming a complete man by finding oneself in spiritual self-sufficiency. As Ornstein says, a political system cannot guarantee liberty--"only a Stoic rises above enslaving circumstances."¹⁹ In relation to these fundamental truths, the form of government Rome takes is relatively unimportant. Caesar at the end of the play is more of a complete man than he was at its beginning and may well be a good ruler if he applies the lessons Chapman means to convey through Cato.

Chapman's treatment of his hero in Bussy D'Ambois is also marked by ambiguity. Chapman uses several incidents from the life of the real-life Bussy as elements of the

¹⁹Ornstein, p. 82.

drama's plot. The historical Bussy allied himself with Henry III's heir and brother (Monsieur) but was later abandoned at the king's request. After retiring to Anjou, where served as the provincial governor, Bussy seduced the wife of the Comte de Monsoreau. He wrote about his conquest to a friend who gave the letter to the king's brother, who passed it on to the King, who showed it to the Comte.

The outraged husband forced his wife to request an assignation in a letter to Bussy and then had his rival ambushed and assassinated in 1570.²⁰ Of course, Chapman characteristically changed several facts to better serve the purposes of his play. Thus the play opens with the stage direction, "Enter Bussy D'Ambois, poor." As Ribner explains, Bussy's poverty ("Chapman's quite unhistorical innovation") "is symbol both of his virtue and of that alienation from the world of men which in a corrupt society must be the price of virtue."²¹ Furthermore, as Hibbard notes, the historical Bussy was attractive to Chapman, because "he had been a minor poet of sorts and had enjoyed something of a reputation for learning so that Chapman saw him as a model of the Renaissance ideal of the courtier."²² Says Hibbard, "To fit Bussy

²⁰Hibbard, 32.

²¹Ribner, p. 27.

²²Hibbard, 34.

further for his role, Chapman, who was convinced that no true scholar or poet was ever wealthy, has no hesitation about presenting his hero, in defiance of historical fact as poverty-stricken."²³

Other incidents and character traits are invented, too, such as Monsieur's lust for and courtship of Tamyra, Chapman's addition to the historical story which is supposed to serve as a contrast between the naturally noble Bussy and the artificially noble heir to the throne. But Chapman manages to incorporate several facts about the life, death, and times of the real Bussy D'Ambois into his play while at the same time elevating what Hibbard calls the "rather brutal adventurer of history"²⁴ into a noble "natural" man. The only other major incident in the play other than its scenes of magic and devils which does not come from the historical Bussy's life is the duel in which Bussy alone survives and five men die. Historically, a similar duel took place in 1578, but Bussy was not involved in it. Chapman changes the facts to show his hero in his role as a celebrated duelist and daring individual.

In selecting a well-known figure as the pattern for his hero, Chapman was obliged to a certain degree to use incidents from that individual's life. The setting of the play,

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

too, is one in which affairs, duels, political machinations, and assassinations are commonplace facts of life. Chapman's problem was showing a man in an environment hostile to naturalism and virtue triumphing over artifice and vice by his example. His main device for his didactic purpose of showing men how they should live in a social setting is to have Bussy's every action praised, even those which might seem rather reprehensible.

During the play Bussy continually rails at the courtier's life as a position in which one must "Flatter great lords, to put them still in mind/ Why they were made lords" and break "All the commandments ere you break your fast" (I, i, 91-92, 98-99). When Bussy argues in Act III, scene one (lines 18-21), that Tamyra should not feel guilty about committing adultery ("Sin is a coward, Madam, and insults/ But on our weakness"), he implies that adultery is an exception in the matter of the keeping of commandments. As a "natural" man it seems that social laws respecting sexual conduct are exempt from Bussy's definition of virtuous living. Ironically, Monsieur, the villain, has earlier used much the same argument with the same woman in the second scene of Act II where he contended that honor is but a word and therefore is meaningless. Evidently, vice in the play depends upon who commits the act, not the commission of the act itself. Monsieur reduces all sexual feelings to lust and women to

prostitutes; Bussy regards sex as natural, instinctive behavior, and he respects Tamyra.

When Bussy decides to give up the contemplative life in nature for the active life of reforming the court, he does so with Monsieur's money. Taking the money, however, will not corrupt him, he says, for Monsieur's policy can never take root in his soul:

He'll put his plow into me, plow me up;
 But his unsweating thrift is policy,
 And learning-hating policy is ignorant
 To fit his seed-land soil; a smooth plain ground
 Will never nourish any politic need;
 I am for honest actions, not for great;
 If I may bring up a new fashion,
 And rise in Court for virtue, speed his plow!
 (I, i, 123-130)

Thus, even accepting an evil man's money is permissible so long as good use of the money is intended. What Bussy does not realize is that as soon as he enters the social world and participates in it (by, for example, purchasing the newest fashions to parade in), he has compromised his virtue. Bussy is a man of passion, not policy, so he meets all challenges with emotion instead of the cold-blooded reasoning and policy which are the play's greatest sins and are the primary traits of Monsieur. It is, however, Bussy's animal passion, his greatest and worst quality, which is the immediate cause of his failures to reform the court and of his death. His basic nature, expressed in society in quarrels, duels, and a love affair, betrays him.

As Henry describes his court, it sorely needs some kind of reformation. The King praises Queen Elizabeth and compares the state of English society with his own country's:

The world is not contracted in a man
 With more proportion and expression,
 Than in her Court, her kingdom. Our French Court
 Is a mirror of confusion to it:
 The king and subject, lord and every slave,
 Dance a continual hay; . . .

However, Bussy's first act at court does not seem appropriate to his chosen task of cleansing the court morally and setting it in order. He courts the Guise's wife a little too enthusiastically for her husband's taste and, when he perceives the Guise's jealousy, provokes a heated quarrel. His next attempt at "reformation" of a court which has been labeled as evil and disordered is to engage in duels against great odds, despite the fact that dueling is legally outlawed. In Act II, scene one, the duel is reported in epic language, and the participants are likened to warriors at the siege of Troy. Bussy is called by the one reporting the conflict "the bravest man the French earth bears" (II, i, 137), and he is acquitted of the charge of murder by King Henry, much impressed by Bussy's claim that he had to defend his honor and uphold his own worth in the face of detractors.

In Act II, scene two, Bussy becomes the lover of Tamyra, wife of the Count of Monsurry, under the auspices of the Countess's spiritual advisor. The Friar, who acts as

their go-between, praises Bussy, saying:

Come, worthiest son, I am past measure glad,
That you (whose worth I have approv'd so long)
Should be the object of her fearful love:

(II, i, 133-135)

Chapman does not condemn Bussy for committing adultery or the Friar for being a pander and practicing magic, although at the play's end the Friar's ghost does show remorse for its part in the tragedy. Furthermore, King Henry serves as a consistently favorable interpreter of all Bussy's acts, making him chief favorite at court and his honored advisor. Thus, inspite of Bussy's many negative qualities and many wrongdoings--his displays of pride and arrogance, his part in murder and adultery, his dabbling in magic and consultations with spirits--Chapman never condemns his titan's behavior.

Similarly, the evil which is condemned so roundly by the "good characters" and which is to be eradicated by Bussy's courage and natural nobleness is not demonstrated very convincingly. Monsieur's policy consists mainly of trying to seduce Tamyra and getting rid of Bussy after he becomes a political embarrassment and a nuisance. Bussy condemns him as the world's worst villain, but, in terms of violent acts and destructiveness, Bussy has the greater body count. Bussy accomplishes nothing tangible in his fight against evil. Chapman's hero explores the corruption of the political scene only verbally in his harangues against

flattery, ambition, authority based on money rather than worth, the use of policy to achieve political ends, and all the other machinations of unscrupulous courtiers. The language of the play suggests that Bussy is a great success, but the plot reveals that he has failed miserably.

The play's ambiguous treatment of the hero arises from various sources. In Bussy D'Ambois Chapman, influenced by the more contemporary setting of the play, seems to have fallen back on the influence of medieval plays and English historical drama in contrast to his use of the newer classical historiography in Caesar and Pompey. Thus Bussy is modeled on the tradition of the Marlovian superhero--Bussy is a Tamburlaine or Hercules-type conqueror. The Herculean parallel is drawn throughout the play, as Eugene M. Waith proves, up to the conclusion of the drama in which the dying hero is told "Look up and see thy spirit made a star;/ Join flames with Hercules. . ." (V, iv, 148-149). It is a final "vision of the hero transfigured like his mythic prototype."²⁵

Like Hercules and Tamburlaine, Bussy is a man of action and his natural field of activity is physical conflict of different varieties. Unfortunately for Bussy, the evils he combats are not so much physical but spiritual and

²⁵Eugene M. Waith, The Herculean Hero (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 93.

philosophical. Chapman relies on the moralizing of the play's good characters to counteract the negative aspects of his hero's violent activities. Bussy is supposed to be a superman, a man to whom the usual standards of judgment do not apply, because he lives by a heroic code outside of society's commonplace rules and regulations. What Bussy intends to do and what his actions symbolize are the important considerations, not what "good" men might ordinarily be expected to do.

Furthermore, in choosing to be generally faithful to the career of a well-known historical figure, Chapman is forced to use the exploits of the real-life personage as the plot of his play unless he is willing to forego historicity in favor of unambiguous didacticism. Unfortunately, the real Bussy D'Ambois was not an exemplary character. Chapman would have had a hard time in his age or any other age finding an historical personage whose life could be a perfect model to carry his didacticism without some ambiguities or inconsistencies. There are not a great many Catos available in any age.

Bussy's tragedy lies in his inability to succeed at making virtue rather than vice the ruling spirit at court. Bussy's "perfection" is hampered and limited by his humanity. He aspires to greatness and the other characters perceive his possibilities, but the times he lives in and the people he

must associate with drag him down. Chapman realizes that even a paragon of strength and virtue can succeed only in the right environment. Cato, Pompey, and Caesar, too, are all men of potential but they also live in the physical world and are limited by their social and political environment. As morally great and exemplary as Cato is, he cannot keep his ideals intact and at the same time live. When men live in a morally ambiguous world, it would seem that there can never be a clear-cut victory over evil. Death is the only release and escape from life's uncertainties for Cato, Pompey, and Bussy. Caesar alone is left on stage with a victory that seems meaningless and empty because of its high cost.

CHAPTER IV

AMBITION AND PRIDE: THE MEDIEVAL SINS OF CHAPMAN'S

BYRON PLAYS AND CHABOT

In 1608 two more plays by Chapman dealing with recent French history were published. The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron dramatize the fatal attempt of the Duke of Byron to overthrow Henry IV and make himself king of France. Of all his history plays, Byron's Conspiracy and Tragedy are probably most historically accurate. Since Byron's fate was very recent history and was well-known in England, Chapman could not swerve far from the facts without the knowledge of his audience. Furthermore, the facts themselves were tragic enough to need little adulteration and the political problems of order and authority which Byron's treason illuminated were just the sort of material on which Chapman built his didactic dramas.

Chapman's last history play, The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France, also is set in contemporary France. Written sometime between 1612 and 1635, Chabot represents a synthesis of many of Chapman's most cherished theories about

virtue, law, and morality in relation to order and authority. Because of the contemporaneity of the plays' settings in a period of time and in countries where religious doctrines of the proper relationship of morality and government would be in force, the plays are much more medieval in flavor than Jonson's works or Chapman's Caesar and Pompey. The Byron plays and Chabot have a historical precedent in materials like A Mirror for Magistrates and the chronicle plays, dealing with the rise and fall of prominent individuals and written with a didactic intent.

William Baldwin's stated purpose in A Mirror for Magistrates is to demonstrate through stories about men in authority that "if the officers be good, the realm lieth in the goodness or badness of the rulers."¹ Furthermore, God ordains officers of state and punishes those who do not carry out His rules. "For it is God's own office, yea his chief office, which they bear and abuse. For as justice is the chief virtue, so is the ministration thereof the chiefest office; and therefore hath God established it with the chiefest name, honoring and calling kings and all officers under them by his own name, gods."² Chapman's French history plays have a similar purpose and message. In the

¹William Baldwin, A Mirror for Magistrates in The Renaissance in England, ed. Hyder E. Rollins and Hershel Baker (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1954), p. 270.

²Ibid.

Byron plays and Chabot the playwright attempts to define by example the nature and roles of good subjects, the role of the courtier as a counselor, and the nature of authority figures in the forms of kings and ministers. The Stoicism of Caesar and Pompey is replaced by traditional Christian values by which subjects and rulers are measured.

Like Jonson in his history plays, Chapman tries to make his historical dramas more effective by drawing parallels between Jacobean England and the state of affairs in France during the period in which the Byron plays are set. For example, he makes several parallels between Byron and Henry's relationship and conditions in Tudor and Jacobean England. Byron's well-known career and execution were commonly considered in England as parallel to Essex's conspiracy against Queen Elizabeth. Thus in scene one, Act IV, of the Conspiracy when Byron returns from England, his parting conversations with Queen Elizabeth are recounted. In a deliberate reference to Essex, she warns Byron against overmighty subjects who plot to overthrow their sovereigns. And in Act V, scene three, of the Tragedy Byron also points out a parallel between himself and Essex as he says:

The Queen of England
Told me that if the wilful Earl of Essex
Had us'd submission, and but asked her mercy,
She would have given it past resumption.

(I, iii, 142)

Chapman and his audience probably saw echoes of the more

recent Gunpowder Plot against James, too, in the treason of the Duke of Byron.

Chapman not only parallels Byron with Essex, but also he seems to try to parallel Henry, the ideal and virtuous King of France, in the play with his own ruler, King James. The parallels are more subtle than the Essex-Byron ones but are no doubt planned to bring the play's lessons home to the audience and flatter James as well. Along these lines Chapman introduces mention of civil wars and religious conflicts. Thus in Act III, scene one, of the Tragedy, Byron says that "king's revolts/ And playing both ways with religion" are "Fore-runners of afflictions imminent: (III, i, 45-46, 47). These lines allude to Henry IV's problems with the Huguenots and also may refer, as Edward D. Kennedy points out, to James' "difficulties with the Puritans and Roman Catholics and to his emphatic support of the Established Church."³ The horror of civil war which Henry mentions in Act I, scene one, of the Tragedy would bring to English minds the War of Roses and the chaos and waste of such conflicts. Henry speaks of "former massacres" (line 123) and the time when:

. . . this state ran like a turbulent sea
 In civil hates and bloody enmity, . . .
 When guilty [lust] made noblesse feed on noblesse--
 All the sweet plenty of the realm exhausted--

³Edward D. Kennedy, "James I and Chapman's Byron Plays," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 64 (1965), 686.

When the nak'd merchant was pursu'd for spoil,
 When the poor peasants frighted neediest thieves
 With their pale leanness (nothing left on them
 But meagre carcasses sustain'd with air,
 Wand'ring like ghosts affrighted from their graves),
 When with the often and incessant sounds
 The very beasts knew the alarum bell,
 And, hearing it, ran bellowing to their home.
 (I, i, 117-118, 124-133)

Byron, too, says in reference to civil conflict, "The kingdoms of the earth/ Decline and wither" when "the lamp of all authority goes out" (III, i, 38-39, 41). James was well received when he first ascended the English throne, because the dangers of civil war after Elizabeth's death seemed averted by his assumption of the crown. He also often emphasized the past dangers of civil war and the contentment and security of England and Scotland joined together (rather than in conflict as in the past) due to his rule.⁴

The special emphasis which Chapman places on the fact that Henry IV was born in a foreign land, Navarre, that was later united with France, is Chapman's way of making a further parallel between Henry and James. Henry says at one point in the Conspiracy:

Though I am grown, by right of birth and arms,
 Into a greater kingdom, I will spread
 With no more shade than may admit that kingdom
 Her proper, natural, and wonted fruits;
 Navarre shall be Navarre, and France still France:

⁴Ibid., 683.

If one may be the better for the other
 By mutual rights, so; neither shall be worse.
 (I, i, 118-124)

As Kennedy points out, Chapman's mention of Navarre and France is a "significant addition" to Chapman's source material,⁵ because "Henry's birthplace is not mentioned in the part of the Inventorie that concerns the conspiracy and death of Byron; and such a reference is hardly necessary to the play."⁶ It does serve, however, as a topical allusion to and a justification of James' hope for a true union of Scotland and England as well as a reminder of James' frequent avowals (like Henry's) to not prefer one country above the other.

In Chabot, too, the historical events of the play are made to correspond with similar events in Jacobean England to give the play more immediacy and to strengthen the lessons it teaches. Chapman's main source for the play was Étienne Pasquier's Les Recherches de la France. Some aspects of the play, however, differ from the material in Pasquier's work. The generally accepted explanation for these discrepancies is that the subject matter was altered to strengthen the parallels between Chabot's trial in

⁵Chapman's primary source was Edward Grimeston's, A General Inventorie of the History of France, translated from the French chronicle of Jean de Serres.

⁶Kennedy, 686.

France under Francis I and the trial in England under King James of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, patron of George Chapman.⁷ In her book, Stuart Politics in Chapman's Tragedy of Chabot, Norma Dobie Solve finds that Chabot's role in the play corresponds with the fall of Somerset from King James' favor, while Montmorency stands for Buckingham, who replaced Somerset as the King's chief favorite. Poyet represents Sir Francis Bacon, the chief engineer of Carr's trial.⁸

Another theory of the play's relation to English history of the time is offered by Irving Ribner, who proposes that the play "was conceived without regard to the affairs of Somerset or Bacon and probably is anterior to them, the contemporary allegorical significance having been added in a later revision which did not alter the play's basic structure."⁹ Since James Shirley's name was recorded on the title page of the 1639 quarto with Chapman's, Ribner hints that Shirley might have strengthened the historical parallels at a later time for greater effect. Considering the censorship of the period and the play's discussion of the delicate topic of the relationship between ruler and subject and the difference between royal prerogative and law as well

⁷Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy, p. 36.

⁸Stuart Politics in Chapman's Tragedy of Chabot (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1929), pp. 41-56.

⁹Ribner, p. 36.

as Chapman's earlier problems with the authorities over material in the Byron plays and Eastward Ho, Chapman would have been very daring to have staged the play at all. Whether or not Chapman was directly responsible for the historical parallels in Chabot, the themes of the play are typical of his histories.

In both the Byron plays and Chabot Chapman implicitly favors the theory of divine right of kings (their power limited, however, by law) which he seemed to disfavor in his use of Cato as a hero and political statesman in Caesar and Pompey. The setting of the plays accounts for the discrepancies in political doctrine of the plays. The theory that limited democracy in the form of republicanism makes the best political system was necessitated by the place and time of Caesar and Pompey. In his French dramas, Chapman falls back on contemporary accepted theories of government. Considering Chapman's close association with King James' son Henry and his ties with the government in the form of an honorary office, Chapman must have been more comfortable with monarchical France as his setting than he was with republican Rome.

Divine right and absolute rule, political theories dear to James' heart and championed mightily by him in speeches and tracts, are given favorable treatment by Chapman in the Byron plays, as they are espoused by King Henry, Byron, Queen Elizabeth, and others. Thus in the Conspiracy,

Byron when leaving England, is reported to have praised Elizabeth for her absolutism, saying:

Your Empire is so amply absolute
That even your theatres show more comely rule
True noblesse, royalty, and happiness
Than others' Courts.

(IV, i, 111-114)

King Henry, too, is an absolute monarch who believes that he must rule with a firm hand in order to maintain order and justice. There is no question in his mind that a king rules by God's direction and with divine aid and approval. Thus in the Tragedy he speaks of "that sacred power. That hath enabled this defensive arm" to "front a king/ Far my superior" (I, i, 100-101, 102-103). God, he believes, will not allow a "traitorous subject" to foil him and "so end/ What his [God's] hand with such success begun" (I, i, 106-107). In Act II he expresses his hope that his son will be guided by his "father's Angel" in a peaceful reign and speaks of the "religious sword of justice" which will prevent "unchristian broils" (II, i, 115, 134-135). Byron also believes in divine right, saying that God "knows kings are not made by art,/ But by right of Nature" (III, i, 10-11). He philosophizes that

Religion is a branch, first set and blest
by Heaven's high finger in the hearts of kings,
Which whilom grew into a goodly tree;
Bright angels sat and sung upon the twigs,
And royal branches for the heads of kings
Were twisted of them: but since squint-eyed Envy
and pale suspicion dash'd the heads of kingdoms

One against another, two abhorred twins,
 With two foul tails, stern War and Liberty,
 Enter'd the world. The tree that grew from heaven
 Is overrun with moss; the cheerful music
 That heretofore hath sounded out of it
 Begins to cease.

(III, i, 25-37)

Byron does not perceive the irony of his words and seems genuinely sincere about the close relationship between God and His chosen kingly representatives despite his own attempt to unseat a king. Such a contradiction between Byron's thoughts and behavior demonstrates Byron's stubborn blindness to his own wrongdoing on one hand and Chapman's willingness on the other to allow the "correct" political attitude to be conveyed by a major character, regardless of whether the character would logically voice such a self-damaging view. King James no doubt would have found Chapman's political opinions concerning absolute rule and divine right in the Conspiracy and the Tragedy very compatible to his own views of the best form of government.

In both the Byron plays and Chabot Chapman is partly concerned with the role of the courtier as the King's counselor and honest friend. Chabot is an example of the best his society can produce. He is an aristocrat morally as well as socially. Byron, on the other hand, has many flaws and is the antithesis of a loyal subject.

In his characterization of Byron Chapman depicts a man who is in many ways like his earlier character, Bussy

D'Ambois. Thus Hardin Craig finds various points of comparison between them: "Byron's temper is like that of D'Ambois, choleric, self-confident, unrestrained. Both are in a certain way Titans. Bussy is the individualist in love, Byron is the individualist in politics. Byron is more boastful than Bussy, more excessive in his pride and ambition, and more unstable. Bussy's faults are clearly those incidental to his overflowing spirit. He remains the man of virtu betrayed by noble instincts in a base world."¹⁰ Byron is in many ways a more complex and interesting hero than Bussy. Chapman treats Byron with more fairness and less undue flattery, finding in his hero a man who has both achieved much and failed greatly. The theme of greatness versus goodness, so prominent in Chapman's history plays, is present in the Byron plays also. But as Hibbard points out, in The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron, "Chapman weighs the claims of greatness and the claims of goodness against each other in a much fairer and more objective manner than he does elsewhere in his tragic dramas."¹¹

In the prologue to the play Chapman indicates how Byron's behavior is to be regarded and also introduces the

¹⁰Hardin Craig, "Ethics in the Jacobean Drama: The Case of Chapman," in The Parrott Presentation Volume: Essays in Dramatic Literature, ed. Hardin Craig (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935), p. 34.

¹¹Hibbard, 40.

goodness-greatness theme, saying:

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 murtherous breaches, and made pale Despair,
 Leave her to Ruin, through them all, Byron
 Stepp'd to her rescue, took her by the hand;
 Pluck'd her from under her unnatural press,
 And set her shining in the height of peace,

 He touch'd heaven with his lance, nor yet was touch'd
 With hellish treachery; his country's love
 He yet thirsts, not the fair shades of himself
 Of which empoison'd spring when Policy drinks.
 He bursts in growing great, and, rising, sinkes:
 Which now behold in our conspirator,
 And see in his revolt how honour's flood
 Ebbs into air, when men are great, not good.
 (Prologus, 1-9, 17-24)

Bussy was praised no matter how far his actions strayed from his good intentions, but Byron is judged according to both his actions and his intentions. He is praised by all in the play for his courage, heroism, daring, and service to his country, but the final judgment to be made is one of morality and he is judged to be flawed. Byron chooses to pursue greatness over goodness, his own welfare over the good of the state and his ruler, and thus creates his own tragic downfall.

The most prominent flaw in his character is his limitless vanity. In the Conspiracy, the Duke of Savoy's ambassador to France, Roncas, assesses Byron's character and names his greatest weakness:

He is past measure glorious; and that humour
 Is fit to feed his spirits, whom it possesseth,

With faith in any error, chiefly where
 Men blow it up with praise of his perfections.
 (I, i, 71-74)

Byron believes so strongly in his own perfection that he can easily be tricked by others who use his vainglory to further excite his ambition. Thus at Brussels, where he is royally entertained, the way to his seduction into treason is prepared by Picoté, who spread a carpet depicting "this history of Catiline" which will "make his feet so tender they shall gall/ In all paths but to empire:" (I, ii, 15, 19-20). Byron misses the significance of the carpet, but the audience should not. Later Savoy arranges to have an artist follow Byron about, "secretly" sketching a portrait while two courtiers are "accidentally" overheard by Byron praising his appearance. Savoy knows what such flattery does to Byron. He explains:

Twill inflame him:
 Such tricks the Archduke us'd t'extol his greatness,
 Which compliments, though plain men hold absurd,
 And a mere remedy for desire of greatness,
 Yet great men use them as their state potatoes,
 High cullises, and potions to excite
 The lust of their ambition.
 (III, ii, 13-18)

The well-engineered albeit obvious devices have their desired effect. Byron's self-love cause him to accept all the outlandish praises as sincere admiration. He even offers to present Savoy with a brass statue of himself which will portray him much better than a mere painting. As Hibbard

says, Byron's vanity is "the root cause of Byron's undoing."¹² He cannot see himself as man of both vices and faults as well as gifts and virtues. Thus, "Incapable of seeing himself as he really is, he is easily made to feel that his true merit has never received the recognition it deserves. . . ." ¹³ His sense of injured worth propels him into intrigues, treason, and finally self-destruction.

Byron is not totally blind to the dangers inherent in becoming a tool for other men to manipulate. Robert Ornstein claims that, "At the onset Byron is a loyal subject who claims that he will support his politic flatterers in any office except treason; but he is easy prey to their sophistries, because he lacks the primary attribute of the whole man, intelligence."¹⁴ Yet he has enough intelligence to perceive that:

. . . 'tis dangerous and a dreadful thing
 To steal prey from a lion, or to hide
 A head distrustful in his open'd jaws;
 To trust our blood in others' veins, and hang
 'Twixt heaven and earth in vapours of their breaths;
 To leave a sure pace on continuate earth,
 And force a gate in jumps from tower to tower,
 As they do that aspire from height to height:
 The bounds of loyalty are made of glass,
 Soon broke, but can in no date be repair'd;

 So, when men fly the natural clime of truth,

¹²Ibid, 42.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ornstein, p. 62.

And turn themselves loose out of all the bounds
 Of justice and the straight way to their ends,
 Forsaking all the sure force in themselves
 To seek without them that which is not theirs,
 The forms of all their comforts are distracted,
 The riches of their freedoms forfeited,
 Their human noblesse sham'd, the mansions
 Of their cold spirits eaten down with cares,
 And all their ornaments of wit and valour
 Learning and judgment, cut from all their fruits.

(I. ii, 137-146, 154-164)

So although he can intellectually grasp the foolishness and wrongness of a man's seeking more than he is meant to have because of uncontrolled ambition, Byron cannot act on his perception of the truth. When he is confronted by Henry over Byron's closeness to La Fin, "that ill-aboding vermin" and "La Fiend," as Henry calls him (Conspiracy, III, ii, 215, 226). Byron, seeing himself as a strong and self-sufficient individualist, still affirms the Stoic principle of depending on oneself, not outward circumstances or other people. He declares in lines that echo Pompey's speeches:

Be what he [La Fin] will, men in themselves entire
 March safe with naked feet on coals of fire:
 I build not outward, nor depend on props.

(III, ii, 227-229)

But none of it is true. He has succumbed to an aspiration which his rational mind condemns as foolhardy and self-destructive, but which he nevertheless will not deny.

The ambition which motivates Byron to commit treason, however, is similar to the ambition which Jonson condemned so heartily in his history plays, but is disguised by higher

motives through Byron's soliloquies. In the second scene of the Conspiracy, when Byron is given the royal treatment at Brussels, he walks on the carpet depicting the history of Catiline and listens to heavenly music. He muses on what an individual may aspire to:

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
 And shall dissolve in changing; 'tis so full
 Of pleasure not to be contain'd in flesh;
 To fear a violent good abuseth goodness,
 'Tis immortality to die aspiring,
 As if a man were taken quick to heaven,
 What force hath any cannon, not being charg'd,
 Or being not discharg'd? To have stuff and form,
 And to lie idle, fearful, and unus'd
 Nor form nor stuff shows; happy Semele,
 That died compress'd with glory! Happiness
 Denies comparison of less or more,
 And not at most with nothing; like the shaft
 Shot at the sun by angry Hercules,
 And into shivers by the thunder broken,
 Will I be if I be burst: and in my heart
 This shall be written: 'Yet was high and right.'

(I, ii, 22-44)

Byron sees in his ambition to be king the reason for his existence and pictures himself like the heroes of classical antiquity, including Hercules. He seems to believe that he shares the virtue of Hercules because of his former martial achievements, but in so thinking he further deceives himself. The images and language he uses are as violent and destructive as his ambition. The image of Semele, for example, whom he calls "happy," because she "died compress'd

with glory" has additional implications of which Byron is unaware. Semele was consumed by flames when Zeus (in his divine splendor) visited her. Chapman suggests that Byron's passion to take on the divine role of king may well consume him, too, and not happily. The concluding line of Byron's speech again indicates his tendency to dangerous self-deception for what he is tempted to do (commit treason) is anything but high and right.

Byron is wrong in the way he chooses to realize his ambitions. In seeking the highest goal he can achieve as an individual, he chooses political greatness, shuns morality, breaks the law, and defies the demands of society. By Act I of the Tragedy he has so convinced himself of the rightness of his actions that he thinks treason (a word he never applies to himself) is justified. He unjustly condemns Henry's court of immorality and, echoing Bussy, declares the social world is topsy-turvy:

The world is quite inverted, Virtue thrown
At Vice's feet, and sensual Peace confounds
Valour and cowardice, fame and infamy.

(I, ii, 14-16)

The only solution is a drastic one according to Byron, who is pictured much like Milton's Satan, musing about how to make Hell resemble Heaven:

We must reform and have a new creation
Of state and government, and on our Chaos
Will I sit brooding up another world.
I, who through all the dangers that can siege

The life of man have forc'd my glorious way
 To the repairing of my country's ruins,
 Will ruin it again to re-advance it.

(I, ii, 29-35)

Byron is oblivious to the false logic and irony of his own words. He wrongly suggests that reform and total destruction ("Chaos") are synonymous. His egotism is evident in his assumption that since he repaired his country's ruins once, he has the right to destroy her completely now. He sees his previous martial success as an indication that he can succeed in everything, including the creation of a new state, but there is nothing to substantiate his view. Byron's willingness to ruin his country is completely selfish and unpatriotic; his claim that such destruction will somehow "re-advance" it is illogical and irresponsible. He thinks only of his own self-aggrandizement and nothing of the human suffering such a course of action would entail.

Byron's search for self-realization is confused by his false self-image and blindness to obvious truths. Henry's court and kingdom are not disorderly and unjust; Henry is an ideal king and far better suited to rule than Byron. The Duke sees no further than the struggle to gain what he desires crowned with success and in him selfish individualism crowds out all societal obligations. Furthermore, what is "high and right" in Byron's eyes is a questionable goal in the eyes of King Henry and other responsible characters

in the drama.

Byron frequently asserts his intense desire to be the greatest that he can be. Thus in Act III of the Conspiracy he seeks an astrologer, La Brosse, to determine his fate. He has already decided that whatever he is told, "on go my plots, be it good or ill" (III, ii, 294). La Brosse tells him that his horoscope reveals that he will lose his head. Byron's rage is uncontrollable for awhile, but then he declares "I am a nobler substance than the stars" and decides to pursue his destiny no matter what the obstacles. He calls "all worthy spirits" to be free and

. . . stretch yourselves for greatness and for height
 Untruss your slaveries; you have height enough
 Beneath this steep heaven to sue all your reaches;
 'Tis too far off to let you, or respect you.
 Give me a spirit that on this life's rough sea
 Loves t'have his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
 And his rapt ship run on her side so low
 That she drinks water, and her keel plows air.
 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.

(III, iii, 130-145)

The same belief that a just man rules himself (in harmony with an orderly society) appeared in Bussy and Caesar and Pompey, but in Byron's mouth it is ironically mocking since he is plotting treason against the state. Despite his awareness that his course of action may well result in disaster and death, Byron is determined to persevere in his

chosen course of action. The ship he describes is in danger of capsizing, but what counts to him is not possible ruin, but the daring effort which must be made if one is a striving and aspiring individual.

As a strong individualist Byron is committed to a senseless and impossible goal in his quest for complete self-realization. He is the archetypal "overmighty subject" striving against the natural order of the universe and God's chosen representative on earth. Until the very end the Duke is unable to see that the highest material achievement or greatest political power will not really fulfill him. The Captain of the Guard in Act IV of the Tragedy speaks bluntly to his leader about his purposeless struggle:

Yet doth that senseless apoplexy dull you?
The devil or your wicked angel blinds you,
Bereaving all your reason of a man,
And leaves you but the spirit of a horse
In your brute nostrils, only power to dare.

(IV, i, 106-110)

Death is finally the only solution to Byron's restless spirit and implacable desire to destroy whatever order exists and replace it with his own ungovernable personality. He does not know until his execution is imminent what the astrologer knows--men cannot completely control their fates through will or effort. La Brosse muses:

O strange difference 'twixt us and the stars;
They work with inclinations strong and fatal,
And nothing know; and we know all their workings.
And naught can do, or nothing can prevent!
Rude ignorance is beastly, knowledge wretched;

The heavenly Powers envy what they enjoin;
 We are commanded t'imitate their natures
 In making all our ends eternity,
 And in that imitation we are plagued,
 And worse than they esteem'd that have no souls
 But in their nostrils, and like beasts expire,
 As they do that are ignorant of arts,
 By drowning their eternal parts in sense
 And sensual affectations; while we live
 Our good parts take away, the more they give
 (Conspiracy, III, iii, 5-19)

In Byron Chapman created a character who is admirable in many ways and very gifted. Ironically, in using his gifts to their fullest extent Byron becomes an enemy to the peace and well-being of his country and a traitor to his king. He pursues the extension and full-realization of his potential as an individual to dangerous extremes by neglecting his duties as a citizen, a subject, and a moral human being. Although Chapman treats Byron with some sympathy, undoubtedly the playwright felt that Byron's intense individualism was wrongly expressed in political activity. Chapman's lesson in the plays is that Byron's destructive and egoistic nature is to be condemned and avoided, because political order and social harmony are greater goods than a selfish expression of pride.

By the end of the Tragedy Byron's life-voyage has come to a predictable end. King Henry orders Byron to stand trial for treason and La Fin offers indisputable evidence against him. When arrested, Byron begs, "let me have the honour/ To die defending my innocent self" (IV, ii, 247-248) and Henry

blasts him with the truth:

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, ii, 250-253)

During the trial Byron refuses to acknowledge any wrong-doing by first denying any treasonous activities and then, when confronted by La Fin's evidence, claiming that he has been tricked by witchcraft and entrapment techniques. He asks:

Is it justice
To tempt and witch a man to break the law.
And by that witch condemn him?

(IV, ii, 156-158)

And he offers in his defense a question which is, he believes, rhetorical: "What man is he/ That is so high but he would higher be" (IV, ii, 168-169). The judges reply with *sententiae* that point out the flaw in his first argument, saying, "Witchcraft can never taint an honest mind" and "True colours will any trial stand untouch'd" (IV, ii, 174, 175). To his argument that men must naturally aspire to higher positions there can be no reply for it is true of Byron. Most individuals, however, can modify their ambitions and accept their niche in the social and political order.

Finally in the play's last scene Byron accepts the fate that he deserves and reconciles himself to an ignominious end to his quest for self-fulfillment. At the end he asserts his high self-esteem again and his complete self-sufficiency as an individual. Calling the Bishop who tries to prepare him

for death a "Horror of death," he rejects the Bishop's counsel and commands:

Let me alone in peace,
 And leave my soul to me, whom it concerns;
 You have no charge of it; I feel her free:
 How she doth rouse and like a falcon stretch
 Her silver wings, as threatening Death with death;
 At who I joyfully will cast her off.
 I know this body but a sink of folly,
 The ground-work and rais'd frame of woe and frailty.
 The bond and bundle of corruption,
 A quick corse, only sensible of grief,
 A walking sepulchre, or household thief,
 A glass of air, broken with less than breath,
 A slave bound face to face to Death till death:
 And what said all you more? I know, besides,
 That life is but a dark and stormy night
 Of senseless dreams, terrors, and broken sleeps;
 A tyranny, devising pains to plague
 And make men long in dying, racks his death;
 And Death is nothing; what can you say more?

(V, iv, 24-44)

And so Byron welcomes the executioner after much raving about the injustice of his sentence and after vain expectation of a reprieve. France is left in the hands of an able and highly moral ruler.

Chabot, in comparison to Byron, is the perfect courtier. Out of all his historical heroes Chapman has created in Philip Chabot the most perfect example of a "good" man. Like the other heroes Chabot strives to realize his full potential as an individual. Unlike Caesar, Pompey, Bussy, and Byron, however, he does not actively seek the greatness of a court position or political power. Nevertheless, in exercising his special qualities of integrity, modesty, and intelligence he is rewarded with material success and

"greatness" as a favorite of the king. Chabot seeks to perfect and refine himself through his devotion to the principles of justice and law which he conceives as being absolute, perfect, and inviolate. Allegre characterizes Chabot as an individual who, "truly will all styles deserve/ Of wise, just, good; a man, both soul and nerve" (I, i, 79-80). When Chabot is confronted by an injustice, as Allegre reports, "His blood boils over, and his heart even cracks" (I, i, 44). Like Henry, the ideal king of the Byron plays, who feared condemning a man unjustly and prayed for guidance, Chabot fears any misuse of the law in his hands so that

. . . as a fever held him, he will shake:
 When his is signing any things of weight,
 Lest human frailty should misguide his justice.
 (I, i, 55-57)

As Henry was presented earlier as the model of the ideal ruler, Chabot becomes Chapman's model of the ideal subject. Devoted as Chabot is to high principles, his loyalty to his sovereign is equally firm and high-minded. When Francis demands that Chabot make an unjust decision on a legal matter at the instigation of another favorite, Chabot's loyalty to his king and his ideal of perfect justice cause him to refuse. As Charles W. Kennedy explains, "devotion to principle is an inherent element in his concept of loyalty to sovereign. This loyalty must be guided by moral integrity and love of justice. It may not be blind or unreasoning or passive. It must be so deeply rooted that, if

occasion arise, it can put self aside as in the case of Chabot, and, if necessary, attempt to force the king to that course which is in his interest and for the good of the state."¹⁵ Thus Chabot explains his uncooperative behavior:

. . . if the king himself
Should own and urge it, I would stay and cross it;
For 'tis within the free power of my office,
And I should strain his kingdom if I pass'd it.
(I, i, 110-113)

To the King he adds, "'Tis for your love and right that I stand out" and "Not for my good but yours, I will have justice" (II, iii, 38, 58). The King regards Chabot's behavior as an act of ingratitude and disloyalty because for Francis there is no higher authority than himself. In Chabot's correct and unwavering view, however, the law is supreme. As Ornstein explains, "To Chabot, the king is a dispenser of justice, not a creator of authority. He believes, as did the medieval theorists, that the rule of law in his commonwealth is a legal reality as well as a political idea."¹⁶ As Chabot tells his sovereign, "'tis justice only,/ The fount and flood both of your strength and kingdom's" which results in an orderly nation and preserves a king in his authority (II, iii, 15-16).

¹⁵"Political Theory in the Plays of George Chapman," The Parrott Presentation Volume: Essays in Dramatic Literature, ed. Hardin Craig (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935), p. 85.

¹⁶Ornstein, p. 78.

The philosophical and moral antithesis to Chabot is Poyet, the Lord Chancellor, a Machiavellian type who is solely interested in the material profit and the power of greatness. Poyet schemes to remove Chabot from power for, as Allegre explains:

. . . great men are not safe
 In their own vice where good men by the hand
 Of kings are planted to survey their workings.
 (I, i, 20-22)

Poyet argues that individuals all desire to rise in the world and to satisfy this instinctive hunger the end justifies the means:

. . . you must know . . . that even in nature
 A man is animal politicum;
 So that when he informs his actions simply,
 He does i[t] both gainst policy and nature;
 And therefore our soul motion is affirm'd
 To be, like heavenly natures', circular;
 And circles being call'd ambitious lines,
 We must, like them, become ambitious ever,
 And endless in our circumventions;
 No tough hides limiting our cheveral minds.
 (I, i, 184-193)

The Chancellor's advice to Montmorency is to be a ruthless politician:

Friendship is but a visor, beneath which
 A wise man laughs to see whole families
 Ruin'd, upon whose miserable pile
 He mounts to glory. Sir, you must resolve
 To use any advantage.
 (I, i, 234-238)

Macro and Sejanus would agree completely with this immoral advice. To such men "justice" is merely a word and law is only a tool to be used to one's advantage. The Lord

Chancellor trumps up a false and minor charge against Chabot in the trial he has staged and coerces the judges with threats to pronounce a death sentence against an innocent man.

In addition to the moral extremes of Chabot and Poyet stands Montmorency who, in Ribner's words, is a "via media" between the Admiral and Lord Chancellor. As Ribner says, "He has all the virtues and vices of ordinary man, and he fully accepts his role in the social order. He is reluctant to use base means against his rival, for he has a sense of justice."¹⁷ Chabot's father-in-law, a wise man and a choric voice in the play, characterizes Montmorency, saying "Good man would he be, would the bad not spoil him" (II, ii, 27). Montmorency regrets his part in Chabot's destruction and finally acts morally by persuading first the Queen and then the King that Chabot has been unjustly treated. He recognizes very early in the play his responsibility to act as a moral individual and loyal subject by following his conscience. He lacks Chabot's courage to stand alone, however. Montmorency asks his tempters, the Treasurer and the Chancellor, how he can conscientiously break his word to be reconciled to Chabot. He inquires, "With what assurance shall the King expect/ My faith to him that break it to another?" (I, i, 210-211) and voices his misgivings at

¹⁶Ribner, p. 41.

taking part in the plot against the Admiral. He wishes to fulfill his role as a courtier through honest loyalty. Ambition and the pressure of his peers, however, cause him to deny his conscience until he finds his moral courage again later in the play.

Byron and Chabot represent the two extremes in the role of courtier. Similarly King Henry in the Byron plays and King Francis in Chabot serve as examples of the ideal king on one hand and a weak ruler on the other. Byron and King Henry are portrayed as temperamental and political opposites in the Conspiracy and the Tragedy. Byron is subject to fluctuating moods and uncontrollable rages. Henry, on the other hand, is in complete control of his emotions and firm in his goals and political wisdom. Hibbard characterizes Byron as "the anarchic individualist who finds fulfillment in strife, the born soldier" while Henry is "the mature statesman, whose paramount concern, at the time when the play begins, is to give his country the peace, the order and the direction it needs. . . ." ¹⁸ Byron thinks only about other people according to how they serve his ambition or enhance his vain-glorious self-perception through flattery. Henry, however, is a sort of enlightened and benevolent absolute monarch. He is concerned with dispensing justice and mercy to those under his rule and is immune to the flattery which

¹⁸Ibid.

poisons Byron. He attempts to adapt his policies to fit the occasion, saying of Byron, for example, when told of the Duke's inclination toward intrigue, "we must fit/ Our government to men, as men to it" (Conspiracy, II, ii, 33-34). For men of policy like La Fin, the basic Machiavellian type, Henry has nothing but contempt. Thus he says to La Fin:

I will not have my train
 Made a retreat for bankrouths, nor my court
 A hive for drones: proud beggars and true thieves,
 That with a forced truth they swear to me
 Rob my poor subjects, shall give up their arts,
 And henceforth learn to live by their desserts;
 Thou art at peace with nothing but with war,
 Hast no heart but to hurt, and eat'st thy heart,
 If it but think of doing any good:
 Thou witchest with thy smiles, suck'st blood with praises,
 Mock'st all humanity; society poison'st,
 Cozen'st with virtue; with religion
 Betray'st and massacrest; so vile thyself,
 That thou suspect'st perfection in others:
 A man must think of all the villanies
 He knows in all men to decipher thee,
 Thou art the centre to impiety:
 Away, and tempt me not.

(Conspiracy, I, i, 151-162)

Byron, unfortunately, allows himself to be tempted by La Fin and his cohorts, lacking Henry's discerning ability to see the real nature of men. It is rather disconcerting to find in the Tragedy that Henry (after declaring himself morally repelled by La Fin) is using him as a double agent to report Byron's treasonous activities. Chapman does not bother to give the details of Henry's changed view of La Fin or La Fin's change of allegiance.

Henry's gratitude for Byron's past service and respect

for him as a brave and heroic man cause him to seek Byron's repentance in the Conspiracy. He goes to great lengths to convince Byron of the errors of his ways and forgives him with great magnanimity. In so doing, Henry acts as both king and saviour and thus embodies both the Divine Right and the Divine Role. But Byron stubbornly refuses to be permanently saved. The Tragedy contains very nearly the same set of circumstances as the Conspiracy. Byron is again scheming unwisely with foreign powers and trusting the wrong people who use his vanity to control him. Henry, with his strong desire to serve his country and its citizens as well as be served, is distraught by Byron's unfaithfulness.

The king ponders:

. . . I must both grieve and wonder,
 That in all by care to win my subjects' love
 And in one cup of friendship to commix
 Our lives and fortunes, should leave out so many
 As give a man (contemptuous of my love
 And of his own good in the kingdom's peace)
 Hope, in a continuance so ungrateful,
 To bear out his designs in spite of me.
 How should I better please than all I do?

(III, ii, 31-38)

In the case of Byron, the answer to the King's question is that nothing he can do will ever be enough. When Henry finally decides that Byron must be eliminated for the good of the state, he still refuses to act like the tyrant which Byron portrays him as. He orders Byron to undergo a fair and impartial trial and prays that his action is right and

just:

O Thou that govern'st the keen sword of kings,
 Direct my arm in this important stroke.
 Or hold it being advanc'd; the weight of blood,
 Even in the basest subject, doth exact
 Deep consultation in the highest king;
 For in one subject death's unjust affrights,
 Passions, and pains, though he be ne'er so poor,
 Asks more remorse than the voluptuous spleens
 Of all kings in the world deserve respect.

(Tragedy, IV, ii, 63-71)

That Henry takes his responsibilities as a ruler so seriously and strives so hard to fulfill them is most commendable and completely opposite to Byron, who does not fulfill his corresponding duties as a subject at all. He owes Henry obedience, service, and loyalty, but will not recognize a debt to anyone but himself.

In contrast, Chapman portrays the king in Chabot as a less than ideal absolute monarch because of selfish pride. Although obviously intelligent, well-meaning, and generous, he has serious limitations as a ruler. Hibbard calls Francis a man with a "tyrannical will" who is not "wholly or even mainly evil, but . . . originally fair and just who has been spoiled by the long exercises of power to such an extent that he cannot imagine that he may have been wrong."¹⁹ Chabot's ruler is a firm believer in divine right and royal prerogative and sees his will as the supreme authority in the kingdom. Francis would rule by his will alone, favoritism being

¹⁹Hibbard, 49.

one of the whims of his royal will. Ornstein comments, "Because the throne is the direct source of all authority in the realm, it is the center of unending struggle for royal favor. "However, the very existence of favoritism produces instability, because there are no objective or absolute standards of public service. . . ." ²⁰ Francis expects complete subservience from his favorites, and Chabot's independence, righteousness, and insistence that justice is not the same as royal prerogative enrages the King. He first demands that Chabot give in on the legal question concocted by Chabot's enemies as a way of repaying the King's past favors; he desires to impress upon Chabot the Admiral's tenuous position in society and the lowliness of his original station in life. Chabot responds by saying he never sought riches, titles, and honors, but "my merit still thy equal sings" (II, iii, 174). The King cannot accept the idea that Chabot deserves all that he has been given; it implies an equality through merit which is (to him) intolerable.

In addition Chabot maintains that he has achieved moral perfection in his pursuit of absolute justice and has never made a wrong judgment in pursuing his duties. The familiar theme of testing virtue comes into play. He invites Francis to investigate his behavior, saying, "The more you

²⁰Ornstein, p. 77.

sift,/ The more you shall refine me" (II, iii, 107-108), and Francis feels his authority being shaken to its very foundations. It is the idea of natural sovereignty, discussed so often in Chapman's other histories, that unnerves Francis:

Beshrew my blood, but his resolves amaze me--
 Was ever such a justice in a subject
 Of so much office left to his own swinge
 That, left to law thus and his sovereign's wrath,
 Could stand clear, spite of both?

(II, iii, 122-126)

The king rejects the theory that a man can be so good and independent, because it would mean that he could rule himself. As Ribner says, "If a man can be as virtuous as Chabot claims to be, the necessity for kingship disappears. This very challenge to the king's authority makes necessary Chabot's destruction."²¹

Francis ponders Chabot's self-confident righteousness and asks, "Can one so high as his degrees ascend? Climb all so free and without stain?" (II, iii, 181-182). He reasons that it is the nature of men to be imperfect and therefore unjust. As Ribner explains, Chabot's "affirmation of complete innocence is a denial of the fall of man, and thus of the necessity of kingship," because "it was a commonplace of medieval and Renaissance theologians that all human inequality, the very existence of kingship and degree became necessary only after the fall of man, and that these reflected

²¹Ribner, p. 44.

the disharmony into which the entire universe was thrown. . . ."22 Being still disturbed by the possibility of the truth of Chabot's claims, Francis calls on the Chancellor to deliver him from a "subject's fetters/ The worst of servitudes" (II, iii, 186-187) by finding Chabot guilty. Francis cannot understand that justice must be impartial and that royal interference brought about by a favorite's request corrupts the law. Ornstein observes that "While he talks a great deal of justice, Francis (like Chapman's monarch, James I) cannot conceive of justice as an ideal above and beyond kingly prerogatives."²³ The king's behavior demonstrates the flaws in absolute rule and the imperfection of human justice.

Chapman does not attack the principle of absolute rule in the play. A man like Chabot can try to make his king do what is right by doing his duty as a subject, but he cannot be disloyal. When Chabot's wife criticizes Francis for giving Chabot to his enemies for trial, Chabot rebukes her:

"no more: the king is just. . . . His sacred will be obey'd"
(III, i, 12, 15). And the Father reminds Chabot's wife:

[Subjects] are bound to suffer, not contest
With princes, since their will and acts must be
Accounted one day to a Judge supreme.

(III, i, 163-165)

²²Ibid., pp. 43-44.

²³Ornstein, p. 77.

Such a conservative philosophy keeps Chapman's play from venturing into dangerous political areas like antimonarchism.

On the other hand, Chabot does indicate what should be the limits of absolutism, not only in legal matters but on more humanitarian levels, too. Thus a great deal of attention is placed on the human suffering which the king's pride and whims have caused. There is discussion of the torture of Chabot's innocent and loyal servant, Allegre, for example, and a touching reunion between servant and master, when both, broken by the king and ministers' cruelty (one physically, one emotionally), are given their freedom again. And the theme of a ruler's responsibility to his subjects is presented in Act III of the play where the Wife and Father are confronted by a jealous and vengeful Queen. Chabot's wife becomes an emotional extension of Chabot's personality; the Queen represents her husband's point of view. When the Queen taunts Chabot's wife for being formerly proud of her husband and for now being made humble by his disgrace, the Father dares to remind the Queen of her responsibilities as a human being:

I must confess
 I am a man out of this element,
 No courtier; yet I am a gentleman,
 That dare speak honest truth to the Queen's ear
 (A duty every subject wo' not pay your),
 And justify it to all the world. There's nothing
 Doth more eclipse the honours of our soul
 Than an ill-grounded and ill-followed passion.
 Let fly with noise and license against those

Whose hearts before are bleeding.

(III, i, 98-106)

The old man fulfills one of his duties to his ruler by speaking the truth, not flattery, as princes so often hear, and then his daughter speaks up to again make the point that those who rule have a duty to be fair, humane, and exemplary to their subjects. She outlines both her duties as a subject and her rights as an individual:

You are my Queen; unto that title bows
The humblest knee in France, my heart made lower
With my obedience and prostrate duty;
Nor have I powers created for my use,
When just commands of you expect their service;
But were you Queen of all the world, or something
To be thought greater, betwixt heaven and us,
That I could reach you with my eyes and voice,
I would shoot both up in defence of my
Abused honour, and stand all your lightning.

(III, i, 117-126)

The Queen dislikes this spirit of self-justification and righteousness as well as the Wife's statement that "with what freedom of my soul I can/ Forgive your accusation of my pride!" (III, i, 132-133). To the Queen this sounds like a rebellious diminution of her power and authority:

'Forgive'? What insolence is like this language?
Can any action of ours be capable
Of thy forgiveness? Dust, how I despise thee!
Can we sin to be object of thy mercy?

(III, i, 134-137)

Like her husband in an earlier scene, the Queen cannot admit to any limits to her power or any imperfections in her judgments or actions. Francis could not perceive any higher authority than his prerogative; his Queen will not

accept the idea that her subject's soul is equal to hers even if there is an extreme social gulf between them. The Wife continues her lecture:

. . . When sovereign princes dare
 Do injury to those that live beneath them,
 They turn worth pity and their pray'rs, and 'tis
 In the free power of those whom they oppress
 To pardon 'em; each soul has a prerogative
 And privilege royal that was sign'd by Heaven.
 (III, i, 140-145)

The "natural sovereignty" theme is again stated (diplomatically altered and softened) in Chabot, as it was in Bussy, Caesar and Pompey, and in the Byron plays. The Queen reconsiders her part in Chabot's treatment and concludes that she must help right the wrongs caused by dishonest people. She now knows "How much a prince's ear may be abus'd!" (III, i, 204) when she thinks of Chabot's unjust condemnation.

The Queen's impulse to humble a subject who is deemed to be too proud and self-sufficient is repeated in the King's decision to pardon Chabot in Act IV. The King is pleased to hear the Admiral has been found guilty, because it reinforces his conviction that all men are corruptible and imperfect.

He admits

I joy
 This boldness is condemn'd, that I may pardon
 And therein get some ground in his opinion,
 By so much bounty as saves his life;
 And methinks that, weigh'd more, should sway the balance
 'Twixt me and him, held by his own free justice;
 For I could never find him obstinate
 In any mind he held, when once he saw
 Th'error with which he laboured; and since now
 He needs must feel it, I admit no doubt

But that his alteration will beget
 Another sense of things 'twixt him and me.
 (IV, i, 167-177)

The King, however, finds that the mere power to pardon or condemn unless it is justly employed will not impress an individual with integrity like Chabot's. The Admiral refuses the pardon because to accept it would mean an admission of guilt and he is innocent. The King concludes that this is a cheap trick to try to force Chabot to feel inferior ("This was too wild a way to make his merits/ Stoop and acknowledge my superior bounties," IV, i, 289-290). He then investigates the charges, the trial, and the Chancellor's conduct and realizes his mistake in persecuting Chabot.

Chabot is finally restored to favor and the Chancellor has the tables turned against him as the King commands a new trial, one in which there is to be "nothing urged but justly" and the judges, "ever make their aim ingenuous justice,/ Not partial for reward or swelling favor" (IV, i, 440, 444-445). The two trials, however, are very much alike. Both are in prose and both show the prosecutors of the state's case as bombastic, verbose hypocrites indulging in ranting digressions and strewing their presentations with Latin for effect. As Ribner says, "The two trial scenes . . . were obviously meant to parallel one another, the abuse of the guilty Poyet to recall to the audience that of the innocent Chabot and to remind us [that] there is little real difference

in the two situations."²⁴

Although the King says he has learned the meaning of justice and the importance of the law, it is difficult to see that his behavior has undergone any modification. He tells the judges that Poyet is guilty before he orders them to conduct a fair trial and the Advocate who is to accuse Poyet takes his cue from the King's attitude and responds, "He shall be guilty of what you please" (IV, i, 401). It is Chabot's intervention which saves Poyet from Francis' harsh judgment. The collapse of justice in France brought about by a struggle for power and a king's pride results finally in Chabot's death from a broken heart. He cannot recover from his own devastating experience with injustice at the King's hands. Francis sees Chabot's loss as the symbol of his failure to order the kingdom correctly:

I see it fall;
For justice being the prop of every kingdom,
And mine broke, violating him that was
The knot and contract of it all in him;
It [is] already falling in my ear.

(V, iii, 174-178)

Justice does triumph in Chabot's vindication and the King's professed education in law and justice, but Chabot's death indicates how dangerous the excesses of absolutism can be.

Chapman does not indicate in the play how the abuses of absolutism can be prevented or curbed; he merely indicates

²⁴Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy, p. 46.

How badly problems can be handled even by well-intentioned rulers. Early in the play the Father indicates that one means of enjoying justice in life is to avoid greatness which he tells Chabot will "Engulf thee past rescue!" (I, i, 14). But Chabot and others like him must exercise their personalities and abilities in the world as active, not passive, individuals, so this is not a practical solution. Evidently in this "vile, degenerate age" as it is labeled early in the play (I, i, 16) men must simply persevere. As Ornstein says, Chapman "suggests no way by which rule of law can be enforced against absolute prerogative except perhaps by the courage and high purpose of royal ministers."²⁵ Such individuals must know their own strengths and weaknesses and be self-reliant. They must know that "the Almighty Wisdom" has given

Each man within himself an apter light
 To guide his acts than any light without him
 (Creating nothing not in all things equal)
 It seems a fault in any that depend
 On others' knowledge, and exile their own.
(I, i, 102, 103-107)

A good man can then rely upon himself to do what he knows is right and thus morally be his own sovereign while still observing at the same time the necessary rule of kings in the political sphere and maintaining his correct place in the social order.

²⁵Ornstein, p. 79.

In the Byron plays and Chabot Chapman presents by example the traditional values of medieval and Renaissance political thinkers. Byron typifies the overmighty subject, the antithesis of the faithful courtier-counselor whose support and advice are so essential to a ruler according to the political commonplaces of the period. Chabot, on the other hand, is the perfect example of a loyal subject and trustworthy advisor. In his hands both the law and the traditional relationship between the governor and the governed are preserved to the best of his ability. King Henry and King Francis serve to demonstrate the extremes, both good and bad, of monarchs. In their use or misuse of political authority, Chapman conveys his characteristic moral lessons. The medieval flavor of the dramas, appropriate because of the plays' settings, is emphasized by the presentation of pride and ambition as men's worst sins in the political sphere. The fall of man is in the Byron plays, Chabot, and Bussy as well as the reason for the moral degeneracy of men and the jealousy felt by evil men toward goodness which leads to the tragic conclusion of each play.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In writing their history plays both Ben Jonson and George Chapman drew on three major historical traditions: providential historiography, classical historiography, and Italian humanist historiography. Neither writer felt committed to reproducing an absolutely pure or complete representation of the views of just one historical tradition in each play.

All three traditions have overlapping elements and some shared views. Jonson and Chapman drew on different elements of the three historical traditions according to both the plot and the setting of each drama. Thus in a play set in ancient Rome, Jonson depends heavily on the tradition of classical history in accordance with the historical philosophy of his sources and the play's setting. But he makes a reference in Sejanus, for example, to the providential historical view that an evil ruler may be a scourge sent by God to punish sinners.

Similarly, George Chapman gives his dramas set in France the strongly medieval flavor and tradition of providential historiography with its religious support of established political patterns like the divine rule of kings. However, Chapman also introduces Stoicism, the main philosophical belief of classical historians in his depiction of heroes like Bussy D'Ambois and Chabot. Thus the two playwrights achieve a kind of synthesis in their use of historical traditions. Neither one felt forced to be exclusive in his historiographical choices: they chose historical methods according to the lessons the plays were to convey to an audience and according to the setting of each play. For both Jonson and Chapman the play's message was of primary importance; how the message was conveyed was secondary.

From the tradition of providential history Jonson and Chapman derived their political conservatism. Even in plays set in republican Rome, the same political messages appear. The best form of government is an enlightened monarchy; an evil ruler must be endured for rebellion against such a ruler is in opposition to the natural order of the world and God, and subjects must know and accept their place in the social order if harmony is to be achieved and maintained. Jonson distrusted the ability of most men to rule themselves because of their lack of self-control and reason. Chapman believed in theory that a good man can rule himself, but in the

decadent societies he presents in his plays such self-rule can be only private, not political.

The Italian humanist historical tradition with its emphasis on current political commentary, morality, and didacticism can be seen in the efforts of both Jonson and Chapman to make their historical dramas more effective by reflecting recent political events. Thus the playwrights work into the body of their plays references to the Gunpowder Plot, Essex's rebellion, and James I's political situations and theories. Both men sincerely believed that past historical events could teach valuable political and social lessons so that men might avoid the errors of the past. Even while Chapman's Stoical heroes learn in painful ways that they cannot control their own destinies and must submit to fate, Chapman's didactic history plays suggest that he thought his plays could teach by example. By employing their powers of reason, men might learn and then control their state's political fate to some degree.

Classical historiography also obviously contributed to the philosophy of Jonson and Chapman's Roman history plays. Stoicism is the philosophy which the heroic characters embrace in these history plays. In addition, the tradition of classical historiography provided Jonson with a cyclical view of the historical process (derived from Sallust and Polybius) in which political institutions rise and fall in

inevitable cycles because of the moral decay of a state's citizens and public apathy and lack of reason.

Both Jonson and Chapman view their own time and the time settings of their plays as periods of political and social degeneracy. In the plays set in Rome the disorder of the world is due to social decay. Men and women in Sejanus, Catiline, and Caesar and Pompey have been seduced from high moral standards by luxury, power, and ease. Ambition further corrupts them into rebellions, civil wars, and irrational behavior. In Chapman's French history plays, the social and political disorders are due to man's fall from grace. Men are innately drawn to rebellion, unnatural ambition, and disloyalty because of their fallen natures. Even those who have the spark of man's original good nature in them like Bussy and Chabot are extinguished by their jealous inferiors.

Thematically, Jonson and Chapman cover many of the same topics. In exploring the role and nature of authority figures, Jonson suggests that the ruler's will is the law of the land and written laws are subordinate to the ruler's desires or decrees. Thus Tiberius must be tolerated and his tool, Sejanus, must also be endured. There is no earthly authority greater than Tiberius in Jonson's first history play. In contrast, Chapman adopts a different view of the relationship between the law and a ruler. In Chabot,

Chapman supports the medieval theory that the law is apart from and superior to a ruler. Thus the ruler's power is bounded by the law which is the supreme authority. Aside from this difference in views, Jonson and Chapman are in agreement on the nature of an ideal ruler, the responsibilities of courtiers to be examples of the best that society can produce, and the obligations of subjects to their social and political superiors. Both Jonson and Chapman also use women in their plays as moral touchstones for society. Jonson's most important women characters reveal the falsity and impurity of the society they are members of. Chapman's women, too, both the good ones and the flawed, test by their behavior the quality or genuineness of the world in which each play is set. Chapman's attitude is more sympathetic toward feminine weakness than Jonson's, but his criteria are much the same. Sexual attractiveness and moral purity are linked and tested as indicators of society's corruption. In addition, both playwrights set loyalty and humility against selfish personal ambition and pride in the dramatic trials of their women characters.

The main difference between Jonson and Chapman's use of history is their treatment of the accuracy of historical fact. Jonson was willing to subordinate the dramatic requirements of each play to the demands of factual accuracy. He felt fidelity to the historical record was the best way to

achieve his didactic purposes. As a result of his devotion to historicity his plays are condemned for lack of action, inconclusive and dissatisfying plotting, one dimensional characterization, and verbose, lengthy reproduction of historical speeches. Chapman, too, put didacticism above all other considerations, but in an entirely different manner. For him historical accuracy was relatively unimportant. What mattered was that history convey truths about human nature and experience in the most effective manner. If the historical record obscures the moral lesson it is meant to convey, then the playwright is perfectly justified in changing the facts so long as the play is generally true to fact and completely true (if possible) to the lessons to be taught.

Both men found the ideal merger of history and drama a difficult task to accomplish. Chapman was hindered by the selection of his materials. In choosing main characters whose historical exploits were well-known to his fellow Englishmen, Chapman could not deviate too far from the facts without being criticized for being unhistorical. But his efforts to follow the careers of historical figures like Bussy D'Ambois too closely made the didacticism difficult to convey. Such characters might encourage the wrong kind of emulation and cloud the moral to be taught. Jonson, too, found that even an historical dramatist devoted to his

material had to edit and select in order to achieve the desired results. All historians must make judgments about the material with which they are working. History is in its very nature a reconstruction of the past so that those reconstructing it must bring their own prejudices to the material, and, in using imagination and judgments as well as facts, distort it. Thus both Chapman's loose use of history and Jonson's precise, factual historical reporting created problems for each of them. The difficulty of the task of merging history and drama equally and successfully is partly responsible for the relative obscurity and unpopularity of Jonson and Chapman's history plays.

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