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## **Book Dedications and the Death of a Patron: The Memorial Engraving in Chapman's Homer**

John A. Buchtel

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**Book Dedications and the Death of a Patron**

The Memorial Engraving in Chapman's *Homer*

# John A. Buchtel

The death of a patron could be devastating. In early modern England, most writers depended upon the patronage of the nobility, as the numerous book dedications of the era bear witness. These dedications, whose pleadings for patronage, protection, and place we almost unthinkingly label "fulsome" and "sycophantic," can be difficult for us to take seriously today. Yet, considered as integral physical parts of the books in which they appeared, book dedications provide significant insights into the operations of the patronage system and the expectations early modern writers had of their readers.<sup>1</sup> Particularly rich opportunities for exploring how dedications frame their works arise in changes made following a patron's death, a situation that often forced former clients to confront anew the conventional language of their dedications. **[End Page 1]**

This essay explores the significance of the changes George Chapman made to his translation of Homer following the death of his patron, Henry, Prince of Wales (1594-1612), focusing in particular on the iconography of the Columns of Hercules in Chapman's memorial engraving commemorating the lost prince. Chapman's iconography creates a myth of Prince Henry as the Herculean hero who embodies the balance between the outward power of Achilles and the inward equanimity of Ulysses: Chapman's understanding of the relationship of Homer's two epics becomes clear only in a reading that takes the book's front matter into account. Chapman links the engraving's imagery to his laments for Prince Henry's unfulfilled patronage in the memorial sonnet that appears beneath the columns, attempting thereby to reinforce his contemporaneous appeals to the king and Privy Council. Forming a subtext to all of Chapman's appeals for patronage after Prince Henry's death, including the curious dedication of his *Epicede* to one Henry Jones, is a serious indebtedness revealed by a lengthy lawsuit between Chapman and his creditors, a lawsuit whose pressures add a note of desperation to Chapman's patron seeking. Chapman's Herculean ideal, and its loss, as expressed in the memorial dedication to Prince Henry, link inextricably with his own laureate ambitions and their failure.

By the time *The Whole Works of Homer, Prince of Poets, in his Iliads, and Odysseys* was published in 1616, Prince Henry was already some three or four years in the grave—yet *The Whole Works* retains the dedication of the *Iliad* to Henry unaltered from the two editions printed during his lifetime, in 1609 and 1611.<sup>2</sup> The retention of a dedication to a dead patron was a common enough practice in early modern England, but it occurred mostly in reprints of works by writers who were themselves deceased. For new editions of books by living authors in need of continued patronage, the normal pattern involved rededication, as Chapman had done following the death of the *Iliad*'s first dedicatee, the Earl of Essex.<sup>3</sup> The stakes involved in retaining the dedication to Prince Henry were high. As the future Henry IX, Prince Henry had stood at the center of potential opposition to the policies of his father, King James; by voicing too loud a lament for the lost prince, Chapman risked offending the king.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Prince Henry, already growing powerful as a young patron in 1608 or 1609, when he first commanded Chapman to finish his translation of Homer, had promised Chapman the handsome sum of £300 and "a good pension" upon completion of the translation, a promise that went unfulfilled at Henry's death.<sup>5</sup> Chapman had served without pay in the prince's household, and his hopes for substantial remuneration seem only to have compounded his genuine grief at the loss of the prince.<sup>6</sup>

The publication of *The Whole Works of Homer* as a substantial folio in 1616 introduced two notable additions to Chapman's book, in the form of **[End Page 2]** two new plates in the preliminaries: a memorial...

## BOOK DEDICATIONS AND THE DEATH OF A PATRON



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[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)



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