

Alison A. Chapman. *Patrons and Patron Saints in Early Modern English Literature*.

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Following a number of stimulating essays on early modern literature, Alison Chapman's first book tackles the transformation of the medieval elision of patron saint and patron in a number of writers in Protestant England. We might usefully read it as one of many responses to Weber's over-stated but seductive observation about the disenchantment of post-Reformation culture. The remaining traces of the medieval Catholic world of magical correspondences, providential history, and (specifically here) the intervention of saints, does not die, but is fragmented, reassembled, and often paradoxically reenchanting. Chapman critiques the widely assumed, over-generalized "archeological vocabulary" of many scholarly discussions, which often assume something coherent buried beneath the surface: where the culture does become Protestant, she points out, it does not become so "in any uniform or secure way" (6). In that discrimination lies the main strength of her study: she shows how in Donne, Shakespeare, Drayton, and Jonson, there are vacillations, confusions, even simply stubborn unwillingness to let the past go; even in ideologically more militant writers like Spenser and Milton, the fragments of that old world surface, variously, often against the intention of the author. Saints and patrons carry complex intellectual and emotional baggage that isn't easily assimilated to a triumphant evolutionary overview of history, Weberian or other.

The book's starting point is the seemingly quiet observation of "how comparatively empty the patronage landscape was for Protestants" (16) and yet how in distinctive ways and to differing extents writers in Protestant England managed to repopulate it. They did so in quite different ways. As an especially strong example, Spenser's "increasing ambivalence about patrons and the traditional systems of patronage" (46), both the supernatural and human kind, is finely drawn: Chapman points to the irony of Spenser writing Protestant saints' lives while living in his Irish

plantation surrounded by hundreds of local saints, some of whose influence invades his writings. While *The Faerie Queene* affirms that the “English and Anglo-Irish system of patronage and preferment has more to offer him than the saintly Irish Catholic one” (27), and his great poem attempts to make Elizabeth herself the “presiding saint figure” (30), there is nonetheless if not disillusion with the Elizabethan court, a lesser illusionism (47).

The Spenser chapter exemplifies a mode of fine distinction that is matched in other chapters. Chapman carefully charts Jonson’s hagiographic parody in *Bartholomew Fair*, all the more interesting because of his religious vacillations. She also looks at how the lack of saintly patron for actors is transformed in Shakespeare’s “muting” and “brushing aside” the saints in favor of more human patrons, but how that gesture includes a slight nostalgia for the lost “thaumaturgic power” of the monarchy (91). Donne’s familiar “hagiographic tolerance” is also finely discussed, but especially impressive are Chapman’s analyses of how both Drayton and Milton attempt to relocate the powers of the saintly patron in the landscape, with the saints’ lost power transferred to “the land itself” (107), “emptying out the specifically Catholic content” (155) while retaining the power of the saint within the landscape.

Chapman’s subtlety of argument is matched by the care of her style: direct and understated, she writes with a skillful blend of primary and secondary references that creates the critical equivalent of the anthropologist’s thick description so that we are able to chart her carefully modulated argument within a rich context of observation and discovery. It is also a very honest argument: her initial premise of the transformation of patron saints into patrons clearly doesn’t fit some of her subjects as well as others, and she makes no pretence that it does.

Only three infelicities came to view: “Salkel, d”(142) and two typos in the notes (204). The only real reservation I have is the lack of a conclusion: we end abruptly with Milton, and this reader would have liked a summing up as persuasive as the introductory chapter; as well, perhaps, despite the author’s very explicit avoidance of the topic, some comment on the transformation of the Virgin Mary as patron saint. Otherwise, *Patrons and Patron Saints* is a fine study, a carefully modulated exploration of a topic that will lend itself to further investigation.

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