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### Chettle, Henry. Kind-Heart's Dream and Piers Plainness: Two Pamphlets from the Elizabethan Book Trade. Ed. Donald A. Beecher and Grant Williams

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**Chettle, Henry.**

***Kind-Heart's Dream and Piers Plainness: Two Pamphlets from the Elizabethan Book Trade.* Ed. Donald A. Beecher and Grant Williams.**

Tudor and Stuart Texts 7. Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022. Pp. 234. ISBN 978-0-7727-7350-0 (paperback) \$23.95.

This is a modern edition of two important pamphlets written by Henry Chettle, *Kind Heart's Dream* (1592) and *Piers Plainness* (1595). Henry Chettle is best known as a dramatist and pamphleteer, but in this expertly edited and annotated version of his two most popular works, the author's life is framed by the editors, Donald A. Beecher and Grant Williams, in their introduction as an insider to London's burgeoning print culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Chettle was apprenticed as a printer in 1577 and joined the Stationer's Company in 1584. He worked with John Danter in the trade but never advanced in his career to the level of householder or master. Scholars assume Chettle was in a great deal of debt since he is listed in the theatrical manager Philip Henslowe's diary for owing him money. For students and scholars in English Renaissance studies, Chettle's work is caught in the gravitational vortex of Shakespeare Studies in which his name appears in the supportive documents related to the playwright. Chettle is notoriously associated, for example, with Robert Greene's last publication, *Groatsworth of Wit* that attacked other poets; Chettle is often seen as the ghost writer of Greene's pamphlet (Beecher and Williams remind us that Chettle was an editor and proofreader for this pamphlet, and that its presence in the Stationer's Register declares it was submitted "uppon the perill of Henrye Chettle" [29]). Did Chettle write Greene's *Groatsworth* himself? If so, the infamous assessment of the young Will as an "upstart crow beautified with our feathers" has a different resonance when seen not coming from the resentful Greene.

Beecher and Williams complicate Chettle's life and works by asking us not to ignore these controversies but to develop and extend the complexities of Chettle's position in London's pamphlet world. He served as proofreader, corrector, compositor, stationer's agent, marketer, editor, and ghost writer. Philip Henslowe hired him to work on plays, and Chettle collaborated with many, including Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Ben Jonson, John Webster, and William Shakespeare. "Working alongside university wits such as Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe," Beecher and Williams explain, "Chettle cultivated

a lively idiomatic language exploited by the stage, pioneered a popular literature in the vernacular, and gained a foothold for the period's emerging professional writer; but he also distinguished himself from his peers by devising complex narrative frameworks that sympathetically relate the point of view of the vagrant laborer" (10). We are presented with a nuanced portrait of an inventive artist who used rhetorical conventions to negotiate the authoritative modes of address afforded his low status in order to accrue respect and authorial merit. The editors situate his work in the recent paradigms of scholarship that bring new light to the power relations that subtend his pamphlets. A poor, working tradesman, Chettle was shaped by the intricate textual politics of the piecemeal industry of pamphlet publishing. Typical college-trained humanist writers like Greene and Nashe strived to maintain an ironic distance from the denigrated pamphlet media while using it nonetheless to court patronage and make a living. We are invited to see Chettle, rather, as someone who creates a new strategy of obtaining authorial recognition in a world hostile to debtors and homeless itinerants by employing frame stories whose narrators symbolize the struggles of the dispossessed who faced the "ongoing invective of civic monopolies propped up by the law—a steady barrage of personal abuse, questioning, and shaming" (64). Readers are encouraged to read Chettle's subtle use of two popular literary forms (dream narrative and Grecian romance) as a sympathetic rendering of this vagrant world, whose narrators, Kind-Heart, the tooth drawer, and Piers, the simple shepherd, maintain a plain-styled ethos of moral integrity to affect the posture of the "honest broker," in "a fantasy of an unsettled subject overcoming his impossible position" (65). As narrators, Kind-Heart and Piers "manage to accomplish feats of mediation between potentially suspicious if not hostile interlocutors. Simply put, the thinly veiled interloper, constrained by adverse socio-economic conditions, transforms himself into a successful broker worthy of his employers' and the readers' trust" (65).

In sum, this book's introductory survey of scholarship is rendered with a careful eye to the details of the current debates in the History of the Book Studies and the political history of London's vagabond subculture and indentured servant class. The edited pamphlets are worth reading alone for the editors' annotations that offer lively backstories on the suggested innuendo of Chettle's phrasings and sometimes wry remarks. The book will be useful to scholars of English Renaissance literature and will teach well in undergraduate and graduate courses focusing on the politics of London's book trade as well as

the development of English prose. Libraries will want to purchase this edition to provide access for students and scholars alike to the turbulent world of early modern book making in which some of our language's best literature sees print—and lives on to this day—because of the Chettles of this world.

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