Glimpses of Rome in the Theatre of Richard Brome

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Abstract
The essay explores the uses of Rome in the theatre of Richard Brome. The myth of Rome is a cultural, moral and political paradigm in the Caroline age. Unexpectedly, the analysis of the corpus of Brome, one of the most significant playwrights of the period and "literary son" to Ben Jonson, reveals the absence of a celebration of the myth of Rome, its protagonists and its language, Latin. Unlike Jonson's works, none of his plays have a Roman theme; moreover, the occurrence of the terms "Roman" and "Rome" is very low and, in most cases, they refer to seventeenth century Catholic Rome rather than ancient Rome. Nevertheless the allusions to Roman culture, traditions and history, even though not celebratory and deferential, seem to be strategic and deliberate. They enhance a dark image of the Roman legacy and, consequently, of England during the period of the personal rule of Charles I.

Key-words: Caroline, Roman, Catholicism.

1. Charles I's imperial image

Among early modern sovereigns, Charles I was by far the most in control of his public image (Sharpe 2013: 155) and the iconographical representation of his court. In a bid to portray the monarch as an epitome of kingship, the Flemish artist Antony Van Dyke deliberately produced in his paintings an imperial image of Charles I and "mythologised the English Court of the 1630s, peopling it with a race of elegant heroes and their serene silken goddesses" (Parry 1981: 219). Associations of imperial Rome also recur in the court masques of the period, such as Aurelian Townshend and Inigo Jones's *Albion's Triumph* (1632); here Charles I enacts the role of the Romano-British emperor Albanactus, who is identified, in turn, with the Emperors Trajan, emblem of princely virtue, Constantine,

the restorer of true religion, and, to some extent, Alexander Severus, patron of arts (Peacock 2006: 59, 63).

References to an imperial image are not limited to arts and court masques. In early modern drama Rome and her cultural heritage still stood as an artistic, moral and political paradigm. A vast body of scholarly work has been devoted to William Shakespeare's representation and use of the myth of Rome, and to his contemporaries', with a focus on Ben Jonson's and Philip Massinger's plays (Miola 1983; Sanders 1999; Hopkins 2008; Chernaik 2011). Quite reasonably, in this respect, no interest has been shown regarding the Caroline playwright Richard Brome, whom critics never mention in relation to this issue, even in the most recent critical contributions. Indeed an analysis of his corpus reveals a lack of concern and reverence for the history of Rome and its cultural significance. Unlike his mentor Jonson, none of his plays have a Roman theme or source. Nonetheless, in his works we may detect several allusions to Roman culture, traditions, authors and history that, even though not celebratory and apparently purposeless, may be actually strategic and deliberate.

This essay explores how Brome's references to the Roman world tend to emphasise a dark image of the Roman legacy and, consequently, of England during the reign of Charles I. Brome's vision of Rome is not limited to her glorious and paradigmatic past but oscillates between two poles, portraying the city as both the ancient seat of emperors and the early modern "bastion of Catholicism" (Hopkins 2008: 3). Brome's exploitation of the myth of Rome is actually twofold: on the one hand, most of the Roman elements are found in a comic context and divested of their seriousness or degraded, as in the case of Latin. Brome actually deprives Latin and Roman rhetoric of their traditional prestigious roles. While the former loses most of its aura of authority and does not mark what Janette Dillon (1998: 104) calls "the iconic moment", the latter is turned into a highly calculated form of oppression. On the other hand, in plays such as *The Antipodes* (1638) and *The Court Beggar* (1640), cultural references to Rome strengthen the topical political dimension of the works, while reinforcing Brome's satire of the complex socio-political situation.

2. Ancient Rome on stage

Richard Brome presumably possessed even less than Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek". No records exist about his education, apart from his apprenticeship with Jonson, who was his master, and then became his mentor, when he started out as a playwright. His belonging to Jonson's circle, the so-called "Ben's sons", must have provided Brome with the basics of a classical education. In *Epigram 101* "Inviting a Friend to Supper", Jonson explains one of the main duties of his man (an epithet he often employed for Brome):

Howsoe'er, my man
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livy, or of some better books to us,
of which we'll speak our minds amidst our meat. (ll. 20-3)

Jonson seems to follow a classical approach for his pupils on the strength of the Horatian motto *docere et delectare*, thus nourishing them with culture and an edifying meal. At the end of Brome's apprenticeship, his master expresses appreciation for his personal recognition as a playwright, while marking the evolution of the relationship with his pupil, who started as a servant, then fellow and finally apprentice after learning the "comic laws" from his master "By observation".

At the same time, in "To my old faithful servant", a commendatory poem accompanying Brome's *The Northern Lass* (1632), Jonson praises himself as a master taking credit for the abilities acquired by Brome as a dramatist.

I had you for a servant once, Dick Brome,
And you performed a servant's faithful parts:
Now you are got into a nearer room
Of fellowship, professing my old arts.
And you do do them well, with good applause
Which you have justly gainèd from the stage,
By observation of those comic laws
Which I, your master, first did teach the age.
You learned it well; and for it served your time
A prenticeship, which few do nowadays. (ll. 1-10)

This commendatory poem, which represents Jonson's *imprimatur* to Brome's career, is significantly reminiscent of *Epistle 2.1* by Horace, one of his favourite poets. The classical association, which exalts Brome's merits, underscores his achievements and consecrates him as Jonson's heir.

Nevertheless, he still lacked his master's classical learning and Shakespeare's fascination with the myth of Rome. This may be one of the reasons why Brome never wrote a play based on a Roman historiographical source. Nevertheless, even without first-hand knowledge of the main characters and episodes of Roman history, he may have improved his restricted knowledge of the classical world and of Latin thanks to other playwrights' works, since references in Brome's oeuvre are limited to the most famous events, situations and protagonists. Unexpectedly for a dramatist like Brome, one of his plays is entirely set in ancient Greece. In *The Love-Sick Court* (1638) he discusses English politics using the court of Thessaly, where the tragicomedy is set, as a mirror for that of Caroline London, "which indulges in neo-Platonic games of love and self-love" (Shaw 1980: 119).

The plays that come closest to bringing the Eternal City on stage are *The Novella* (1632), set in Venice, and *The Queen and Concubine* (1635), whose action takes place in Sicily, on the periphery of the Roman Empire. In *The Novella* the city of Rome looms large. At the beginning of the play, we learn that a young Venetian called Fabritio is trying to avoid an arranged marriage with Flavia. While the girl is in love with Francisco, Fabritio is pledged to an impoverished young Roman lady, Victoria, whom he met during a trip to Rome. In this comedy the word "Rome" is repeated seven times out of the eight total occurrences of the term in Brome's entire corpus. The city, though, never evokes a glorious past, but only works as an irresistible pole of attraction for Fabritio since it is the place where his lover lives.

His friend Piso encourages him to defy his father's hope for the marriage he had himself arranged and flee to Rome to his "chaste Victoria":

Why fly we not to Rome then, where you left her,
And shun the danger of your father's plot,
Which would not only force you break your faith

With chaste Victoria, but to wed another,
Whose faith is given already to another?
Double damnation! 'Twere a way indeed
To make your children bastards o' both sides. (I.i.11)

None of the characters actually need to move to Rome because it is Victoria who comes to Venice disguised as "the novella", a courtesan who raffles off her virginity for two thousand ducats. Only at the end of the play, when a suitor called Swatzenburgh comes with the sum of money required to obtain Victoria's maidenhead, does she reveal her real identity and her noble Roman origin. Her family's surname, though, sounds clearly more Venetian than Roman (Brome 2010b, ed. Cave: n7910).

VICTORIA Gentle sir,
The law hath made me yours. And I have now
No court but conscience to relieve me in. *[VICTORIA] kneels*
SWATZENBURGH
What may this mean?
VICTORIA
If the strong passion of a virgin soul,
Expressed in bitter'st tears, move not your pity,
This shall prevent your cruelty. *[VICTORIA produces] a knife*
PISO
She'll prove honest, o' my life.
SWATZENBURGH What mean you, lady?
VICTORIA
Keep at that distance, sir, and you shall know.
Come nearer, and I will not live to tell you. […]
SWATZENBURGH
Why took you this deceiving habit then?
VICTORIA
I am about to tell you for your pity.
I am a Roman born, of good descent;
My father noble (of the Candiani)
Howe'er decayed in fortune ere he died;
Which drew on my misfortune: for, being betrothed
Unto a wealthy heir, here, of this city,
Who sojourned then in Rome, his covetous father
Ravished his faith from me, to give't another;
And called him hastily from Rome to Venice.
I followed him in hope to cross the match

And so regain him, towards which already
I have done something. (V.i.703-8, 714-5)

Victoria is terrified of the man's advance but tries to dissuade him. Like an early modern Lucrece, she is ready to defend her honour and threatens to kill herself with a dagger. In the sixth century BCE, during the period of the Roman monarchy, Lucrece killed herself to avoid dishonour after Tarquin raped her. Hence she has become the emblem of *pudicitia*, chastity and an archetypal virtuous rape victim for the succeeding generations of women and for the "chaste Victoria". Brome must also have been familiar with the story owing to the popular stage version made by Thomas Heywood (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 1608), with whom he co-wrote *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634).

Here Brome seems to draw a parallel between the two characters, by portraying his "virtuous heroine in her compromising position without her offending the most delicate sensibility" (Shaw 1980: 45) After Victoria's trip to Venice, a piece of Rome seems to be moved there. It is no coincidence that Flavia, obliged to marry Fabritio, finds models of conduct in Roman history. The young lady is determined to put an end to her life in a bid to avoid an arranged marriage. In this respect, she is ready to follow in the footsteps of those iconic women who had recourse to suicide for different reasons and in diverse ways: "Had she there Lucrece' knife or Portia's coals, or Cleopatra's asps, I could embrace 'em" (IV.i.423). Beside the already mentioned Lucrece, she refers to Portia, Brutus's wife, who killed herself by swallowing hot coals after Julius Caesar's murder and her husband's escape. Finally, she brings up the example of the Egyptian Cleopatra; in 30 BCE, after the defeat in the Battle of Actium and the death of her lover Mark Antony, she committed suicide supposedly by the bite of a poisonous snake. These are all episodes that Brome may have seen on stage and that were familiar to the early modern English audience. We may presume that they were selected as examples of women committing suicide, even though there is no connection between their situation and Flavia's. The allusion to these famous women, meant to reinforce her position and intent, instead seems to suggest that "she is a flighty teenager, the victim of her uncontrollable moods", as Richard Cave (2010: §17) puts it. Flavia cannot compete with these paradigmatic figures, who were so

popular in the early modern imagination, and is belittled and subtly ridiculed in her childish naivety.

Interestingly, Cleopatra and Lucrece are cited in tandem also in *The Antipodes* (1638), a play written almost at the end of Brome's career. In the following scene Diana, wife of the old country gentleman Joyless, has to deal with the sexual advances of Letoy, who is actually testing her virtue rather than trying to seduce her.

DIANA
My lord, your strength and violence prevail not.
There is a providence above my virtue
That guards me from the fury of your lust.
LETOY
Yet, yet, I prithee, yield. Is it my person
That thou despisest? See, here's wealthy treasure:
A table set forth, covered with treasure.
Jewels, that Cleopatra would have left
Her Marcus for.
DIANA My lord, 'tis possible
That she who leaves a husband may be bought
Out of a second friendship.
LETOY Had stout Tarquin
Made such an offer, he had done no rape,
For Lucrece had consented, saved her own,
And all those lives that followed in her cause.
DIANA
Yet then she had been a loser. (V.ii.982-6)

Letoy offers Diana some jewels in a bid to convince her to give in. The young woman, who bears the name of the Goddess of the Moon traditionally associated with chastity, resists, like Victoria with her suitor in the scene from *The Novella* analysed earlier. In this case, too, the association of Diana with Cleopatra and Lucrece seems to be poorly chosen. Brome is not actually interested in a mere comparison with them; his allusion is not part of an intertextual network of early modern references to the characters. His strategy is perhaps subtler. Cave (Brome 2010a: n9877) argues that in the case of *The Antipodes* "Brome appears at first quite deliberately to be inviting his audience to recall Volpone's seduction of Celia in Jonson's comedy". In my view, the three scenes analysed in *The Novella* and in *The Antipodes*

may be conceived as re-visions of the same episode from Jonson's *Volpone* (1606). It may not be a twist of fate that in Act III a Lucrece-like Celia threatens to "take down poison, / Eat burning coals" (*Volpone*, III.vii.93-4) as Portia did and Volpone offers her "a rope of pearl, and each more orient / Than that the brave Egyptian queen caroused" (III.vii.190-1). Brome's interpretation of Roman history seems to be mediated by his mentor's view so that what the audience sees on stage is an image of Rome refashioned through the filter of Jonson's work.

2.1. Latin and Roman cultural heritage

Latin and rhetoric are an undeniable part of Roman cultural heritage. Despite Brome's background, Latin epigraphs stand on the title pages of many of his plays, and numerous are the characters in his plays who have recourse to Latin, mostly pretentiously or irrelevantly. The London citizen Saleware in *A Mad Couple Well Matched* (1639) repeats as a *Leitmotiv* a Horatian motto, "Sapientia mea mihi, stultitia tua tibi". Characters like him have recourse to Latin so repeatedly and indiscriminately that the language is emptied of its canonical status. They choose to employ Latin to assert their authority in specific fields, as this language was in early modern England "the very ticket to the cultural hegemonic" (Correll 2011: 25). Their random use of Latin underscores that the language has lost most of its aura of authority and authenticity associated with the myth of ancient Rome and does not mark "the iconic moment" (Dillon 1998: 104) any longer. Brome's corpus offers examples of pedants in the comic domain who all openly flaunt their knowledge of the language. The pedant Sarpego in *The City Wit*, for instance, seems to re-create verbally a sort of enclave of Republican Rome in early modern London. He displays his allegedly deep erudition by spouting Latin words and phrases, as in this dialogue with his pupil Toby:

SARPEGO
Egregious and most great of expectation, my right dignified and truly *Ciceronian pupil*, now that I have brought you into the *amoene* fields with my ready thankfulness for the loan of this ten pound, I commit you to the grace of court.

TOBY
I shall expect that money shortly. Care to send it, for I purchased my place at a racked recompence.
SARPEGO
Your Sarpego is no slippery companion. You know I am to marry, and this money shall provide me complements. *Sis bonus o felixque tuis. I pede fausto*. (II.i.137-89, emphasis mine)

Sarpego's knowledge seems to take in a wide range of classical authors, mainly from the first century BCE. From his quotations, we may conjecture that he had a typical grammar school education. Elsewhere he cites the opening lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* ("In nova fert animus", Prologue), Cicero's *Ad Familiares*, VII.24 ("non omnibus dormio", II.i.153), and in this extract he stuffs his speech with quotations from Horace's *Epistles* ("I pede fausto") and Virgil's *Eclogue 5* ("Sis bonus o felixque tuis"), authors that were taught in the upper grammar school, when students focused on rhetoric (Cicero and Quintilian, the supreme *auctoritates* in the field) and versification after the example of Ovid, Virgil and Horace.

Sarpego's knowledge of Latin enables him to assert his authority, to confuse his interlocutors who do not understand him and to curse his enemies. Words are turned into weapons, like the fearsome "curse of Priscian", a Latin grammarian of the sixth century CE, a medieval authority in the field of rhetoric.

Now barbarism, incongruity, and false orthography shame thee. The curse of Priscian take thee. All the parts of speech defy thee. All the interjections of sorrow, as heu hei; of shunning, as apage; of disdaining, as hem vah; of scorning, as hui; of exclaiming, as proh deum atque hominum fidem take thee. (II.i.163)

Sarpego hurls abuse at his antagonist, evoking several parts of the speech as if they were his army ready to support him in what is virtually a verbal skirmish. Later on, he needs the assistance of another illustrious grammarian and rhetorician, Cicero, to offend an opponent who took some money from him: his quotation is very close to the original passage, "abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit" from *In Catilinam II*:

Now could I accost that Catilinarian traitor that defeated me of my ten pound, I have a precogitated oration should make him suspend himself. But abiit, evasit, erupit. (III.i.402)

The comparison with Catiline immediately characterises Sarpego's opponent as a treacherous conspirator (even though it is later revealed that he has only taken back some money he had previously lent to Sarpego).

Catiline as synonymous with perfidious and disloyal is used elsewhere in Brome's corpus. In *The Queen and Concubine* the Sicilian country curate uses the expression to define the men that were trying to kill Eulalia, the queen in the title.

Upon my facundity, an elegant construction by the fool. So I am: cedunt arma togæ. [...]
O homines insani! Quomodo erravistis?
The woman must be saved a manubus istis.
They are Catilinarian traitors. (III.i.574, 588)

He also quotes from Cicero's *De Consolatu meo* (now lost)[1] the famous "cedant arma togae", which was meant to celebrate Cicero's successful experience as consul in 63 BCE, when he contributed to the overthrow of Catiline.

Sarpego, like the country curate, seems to see himself as an early modern Cicero, with whom he may perceive some similarities. In the passage cited previously, he defines his pupil Toby as "truly Ciceronian". Like the Roman rhetorician he considers himself as a model of eloquence and formal correctness in the field of rhetoric; moreover in his aspirations to become tutor of his Grace at Court, he may feel like the *homo novus* Cicero, a "new man", the first in his family to be raised to the consulship. The character's view on Cicero clearly recalls Jonson's interpretation of Roman history in which Cicero played a crucial role as in his *Catiline*. Also in this case, Brome does not show a direct knowledge or a personal interpretation of Roman history but relies on previous readings.

[1] The expression, which also recurs in *De Officis* and in the *Second Philippic*, is actually "cedant arma togae". The character is imprecise since he replaces the exhortative subjunctive "cedant" with the simple tense in the indicative mood "cedunt". While this is possibly a misprint, we should not exclude that this may be a conscious mistake on the author's part to make fun of his own character.

3. The early modern face of Rome

In *The Queen and Concubine*, set in Sicily, the curate's recourse to Latin is also "increasingly identified with Catholics" (Dillon 1998: 192). The play, with an "obviously Catholic frame of reference" (Steggle 2006: 89) is one of Brome's works that more explicitly evokes the early modern Roman world. A Roman cultural tradition concerning marriages is mentioned in *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), a comedy Brome co-authored with Heywood. In the play, the usual social order has been inverted due to witchcraft. In Seely's family, an affluent landowner, children rule over their parents and the servants over their own masters. In Act III we attend the marriage of Parnell and Lawrence, both servants at Seely's house. The host and his wife Joan are preparing to perform their part in the ceremony:

SEELY
Come away, wife, come away, and let us be ready to break the cake over the bride's head at her entrance. We will have the honour of it, we that have played the steward and cook at home, though we lost church by't, and saw not Parson Knitknot do his office, but we shall see all the house rites performed; and — — oh, what a day of jollity and tranquility is here towards! (III.i.362)

Roman wedding ceremonies, as the Latin poet and philosopher Lucretius explained in *De Rerum Natura*, were concluded by the breaking of a cake over the bride's head as a symbol of good luck and fertility. This traditional auspicious ritual, taking us back to Roman times, is interrupted by the unexpected intervention of the witches who thwart the host and his wife's efforts. In front of the guests the wedding-cake is turned into bran:

SEELY Bridegroom Lawrence eke,
In you before, for we this cake must break
LAWRENCE exits.
Over the bride — —
As they lift up the cake, the spirit snatches it and pours down bran.
Forgi' me—!What's become
O'th' cake, wife!
JOAN
[*Amazed and apologetic*] It slipped out of my hand, and is fallen into crumbs, I think.

DOUGHTY
Crumbs? The devil of crumb is here but bran, nothing but bran! What prodigy is this?
PARNELL
Is my best bride's cake come to this? O wea warth it!
PARNELL exits [with] Seely, Joan, and maids.
WHETSTONE
[*Amused*] How daintily the bride's hair is powdered with it.
ARTHUR
[*Terrified*] My hair stands on end to see it.
BANTAM
And mine.
SHAKESTONE
I was never so amazed!
DOUGHTY
What can it mean?
GREGORY
Pax, I think not on't. 'Tis but some of my father and mother's roguery; this is a law-day with 'em, to do what they list. (III.i.381-90)

In a bid to restore order, Gregory, Seely's son, has recourse to the Latin word "pax"[2]. Far from evoking the idea of *Pax Romana* or *Augustea*, the term plunges the audience in the early modern English situation by reminding them that at that time Lancashire was a well-known breeding ground of Catholicism. Furthermore, "Robin, the lover of one of the witches, is asked to get some wine at the Mitre, a very popular tavern in London's Fleet Street frequented by Jonson, but also the Latin-derived name of a type of headgear for bishops and Roman abbots" (Paravano 2013: 172). Gregory's family, repository of this Roman ritual, may embody the Catholic face of Rome.

Finally, Renaissance Rome is mentioned in *The Court Beggar* (1640), when Lady Strangelove complains about not being able to marry the man she loves:

I had no other way to shift him. Would he would make
An errand now to Rome to quit my scruple

[2] The word has history in signifying fractures within English culture. It also recurs in *Henry V*, where Bardolph is executed for stealing a pax (a small metal plate with a representation of the Crucifixion) from a church. The term thus has a strong religious import on the early modern stage.

And rid the court of an officious fool.
Women sometimes have sent wise men to school. (II.i.300)

As Marion O'Connor (Brome 2010c: n7052) puts it, "the joke may be informed by memories of delays in papal dispensations and permissions around international negotiations for Catholic princesses to marry Charles I – the aborted match with the Spanish Infanta in 1623, the achieved one with Henrietta Maria in 1625". As a consequence, Rome, and the territories that were part of the empire, like Sicily, were more often associated with religion than the ancient splendour of the Roman civilization, thus showing the "underlying continuity between Romanness and Roman Catholicism" (Hopkins 2008: 4).

4. A Roman resolution

The examination of the corpus of Brome's plays shows that the rate of occurrence of the adjective "Roman" is extremely low. If we consider that only in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* the term is repeated over 25 times, the four occurrences in Brome's works seem a drop in the ocean. Moreover, their impact is disputable. In *The Northern Lass* (1629), for instance, "Roman" refers to a form of handwriting – "What hand is it? Secretary, roman, court, or text?" (III.ii.555) – and in *The Novella* it is merely used to mark the geographical provenance of Victoria, who was born in Rome. Far more intriguing are the uses in other plays; in the morally controversial *A Mad Couple Well Matched*, the term is apparently used only to depict a physical trait. The womaniser Lovely employs the adjective to describe the long nose of a young man called Bellamy: "And look, look here, what a long middle finger he has, / Which with thin jaws and Roman nose / Are never-failing signs of widows' joys" (IV.i.672). As Eleanor Lowe has noted, these physical features "are suggested as indicators of non-coital sexual pleasure. The dimensions of the nose were also thought to indicate penis size" (Brome 2010e, n2095). Far from evoking the heroic past of Rome or moral virtues, the adjective here hides sexual innuendos that degrade rather than exalt the Roman heritage. In addition, the pun on Bellamy's nose accentuates the degradation of the Roman myth since the character is in actual fact a woman in disguise who cannot represent an icon of sexual virility.

Finally, the most interesting illustration is in *The Weeding of Covent Garden* (1632). In the following scene we are shown the disguise of the Justice of the Peace Cockbrain. He takes his civic responsibility very seriously. In a bid to cleanse the fashionable Covent Garden, he takes on the persona of a tavern singer and goes to the Goat Tavern. Cockbrain tends to see Covent Garden from a moral and class-conscious perspective. It is a place that needs weeding of unwelcome characters such as prostitutes and a roaring gang known as the Brotherhood of the Blade and the Baton, "a parcel of those venomous weeds, that rankly pester this fair Garden-Plot" (III.i.495).

> Do we not soil or dung our lands, before we sow or plant anything that's good in 'em? And do not weeds creep up first in all gardens? And why not then in this? Which never was a garden until now; and which will be the garden of gardens, I foresee 't. And for the weeds in it, let me alone for the weeding of them out. And so as my reverend ancestor Justice Adam Overdo was wont to say, "In Heaven's name and the King's", and for the good of the commonwealth, I will go about it. (I.i.10)

The passage is resonant with literary associations. On the one hand, it recalls the Shakespearean imagery of the "unweeded garden / that grows to seed" (*Hamlet*, I.ii.135-6) in Hamlet's soliloquy, which draws a comparison between the violation of order within the kingdom with the dissolution of the order in nature. The metaphor of Cockbrain as gardener is also reminiscent of the garden scene (III. iv) in *Richard II*, in which the enemies of the monarch are compared to the dangerous seeds uprooted by Bolingbroke that threaten the king and need weeding. On the other hand, Brome acknowledges his debt towards his mentor Jonson when Cockbrain compares himself to Adam Overdo of *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). The ethical and political dimension of the scene is enhanced by the reference to a passage of Jonson's *Catiline*, which is adapted from Cicero's *In Catilinam I*. The consul affirms that

> Not only the grown evil that now is sprung
> And sprouted forth would be plucked up and weeded,
> But the stock, root, and seed of all the mischiefs
> Choking the commonwealth. (IV.ii.355-8)

As a magistrate Cockbrain is determined to fulfil his duty, even though he is abused, duped, outraged and beaten up by the members of the Brotherhood, amongst whom is his own son, a habitual tavern goer. "I will not yet desist, but suffer private affliction with a Roman resolution for the public welfare, with full assurance that my fortitude shall at last get within 'em" (III.i.512). Cockbrain's adoption of "a Roman resolution" seems to imply that his actions are guided by a concern for public welfare. Actually he is "the character who most obviously attempts to impose authority" in Covent Garden as an urban magistrate and who "strives energetically to impose mores" (Leslie 2010: §13), expressing a profound concern for morality. In this context, "Roman" is used to evoke a set of moral and ethical values that the character fails to embody, though. Far from being heroic or stoic, Cockbrain is an aspiring social climber who "regards the law almost as personal property and is motivated as much by pride as by genuine care for the public good" (Butler 1984: 153).

When the Brotherhood discovers Cockbrain's disguise, one of them argues: "I vow, some disguised villain, and but for doing the state so good service, we would hang him presently without examination" (IV.i.774). In the light of the characters' reaction, Cockbrain's "Roman resolution" has further implications. The same expression recurs in James I's definition of the Catholic conspirator Guy Fawkes who was "seeming to put on 'a Roman resolution'" (Fraser 1999: 174). The Gunpowder Plot and the people involved were familiar to the early modern audience. It is no coincidence that the plot is "the forbidden topic to which Jonson alluded most persistently, presumably because of his first-hand involvement in it" (Dutton 1983: 143). The expression thus is further deprived of any moral or epic association to take on a more oppositional connotation. This sheds a negative light on the disguised Cockbrain who hides his identity behind the honourable façade of an ancient Roman but turns out to be wearing the disturbing mask of Guy Fawkes.

5. "The emperor hears no such music" (*A Jovial Crew*, I.i.79)

In the plays of the Caroline period, politics is "the basic, fundamental concern and the principal determinant of dramatic form" (Butler 1984: 281). Yet, as Warren Chernaik (2011: 248) has remarked,

dramatists were well aware that political satire had to be approached with great caution, especially if directed at the monarch, since he was their "prince, however wicked" (Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, V.ii.77-8). Brome seems decidedly cautious but shrewd in this sense. He did not run into trouble with the censors like Massinger and Jonson but, at the same time, the fear of censorship did not prevent him from expressing his view on controversial and burning political issues during the period of the king's personal rule.

Despite Charles I's desire "to create a fantasy of an ideal imperial culture" (Peacock 2006: 64), not many were the emperors or Roman leaders to whom the king could be associated. A key figure such as Julius Caesar is not even mentioned apart from his famous "veni, vidi, vici", which Brome may have heard in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (II.iv.13-4). On the other hand, the tag was popular in early modern drama also owing to Shakespeare's frequent recourse to it. At that time the phrase was "a completely commonplace piece of knowledge" (Burrow 2013: 46), fully devoid of any heroism and paradigmatic value. In this case, it is used comically to describe Careless's attempt to propose to a rich widow. The seduction of the lady here corresponds to the conquest of a territory:

> *[CARELESS gives SAVEALL a letter.]*
>
> SAVEALL
>
> [*He reads*] "To the fair hands of the most accomplished in virtue, Mistress Anne Crostill, present, I pray, with my service". The outside hath no rudeness on it, and (I doubt it not) she shall find within all sweetness and urbanity.
>
> CARELESS
>
> As you may interpret it to her, sir.
>
> SAVEALL
>
> Sir, what I have already said, and do intend to say unto her from your uncle and myself on your behalf, together with what you have here written, shall (I doubt it not) prepare so fair a way of proceeding for you that at your visit of her you may say, veni, vidi, vici, she is your own. (II.ii.370-2)

The absence of Caesar may be due to Jonson's negative portrayal of the Roman conqueror in his *Catiline*, in which Caesar stands as an equivocal figure, "the bold and turbulent man who destroyed Roman liberty, plunging the Roman world into the darkness of tyranny" (Chernaik 2011: 134).

Apart from the celebrated Caesar, only one famous Roman emperor is evoked, albeit indirectly. In *The Queen's Exchange* the Constable interrupts the preparations of the fool Jeffrey who plans to make a bonfire as part of the celebration for the marriage between the King of Nurthumbria Osric and the Queen of the West Saxons Bertha.

CONSTABLE
Whither away, my friends?
JEFFREY
To make the bravest bonfire that ever blazed since Troy, or that which the tyrant emperor warmed his hands at. (II.i.232-3)

Inauspiciously or prophetically, since the marriage will never take place, the fool compares the bonfire for the festivities with two well-known fires: the one that burned Troy to ashes in Greek mythology; the other that destroyed Rome before the eyes of the Emperor Nero. Evoked twice, but always with a periphrasis, Nero is also cited in *The Antipodes*. In the following scene the painter Blaze is in deep conversation with Letoy, an aristocratic playwright and patron of his own company of players:

LETOY
And now I am here i'th' city, sir, I hope
I please myself with more choice home delights,
Than most men of my rank.
BLAZE I know, my lord,
Your house in substance is an amphitheatre
Of exercise and pleasure.
LETOY Sir, I have
For exercises, fencing, dancing, vaulting,
And for delight, music of all best kinds;
Stage plays and masques are nightly my pastimes.
And all within myself: my own men are
My music, and my actors; I keep not
A man or boy but is of quality;
The worst can sing or play his part o'th' viols,
And act his part too in a comedy,
For which I lay my bravery on their backs;
And where another lord undoes his followers,
I maintain mine like lords. And there's my bravery.

Hautboys. A service, as for dinner, passes over the stage, borne by many servitors, richly apparelled, doing honour to LETOY *as they pass. [All exit]*

BLAZE
Rather an emperor's, my lord.
LETOY I tell thee,
These lads can act the emperors' lives all over,
And Shakespeare's chronicled histories to boot,
And were that Caesar, or that English Earl
That loved a Play and Player so well, now living,
I would not be outvied in my delights. (I.ii.114-8)

The emperor is here evoked because of his passion for the theatre and acting, and the comparison between Letoy's house and an amphitheatre strengthens the connection between the English monarch and the pitiless Roman emperor. While the king's "patronage of art and architecture", argues John Peacock (2006: 63), "was the first of several respects in which Charles could be likened to Alexander Severus", his passion for the theatre associates him with Nero. Moreover, the reference to court masques is particularly resonant for the audience since it is reminiscent of the enormous amount of money that the king spent on this "pastime". If Brome merely suggests the comparison, John Milton in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Prima* (1651) will go further by defining Charles I as "ipso Nero Neronior", employing the same definition coined by Walter of Chatillon for Henry II. Charles I had always wanted to be associated with the "image of a British *imperator*, an image of triumph" (Sharpe 2013: 145) but he did not intend to be seen by his subjects as a new Nero.

6. An "alternative" mythology of Rome

Kings and emperors are cited in *A Jovial Crew* (1642), probably Brome's last play to be performed before the outbreak of the civil war and the closing of the theatres. The final act of the comedy culminates in a play-within-the-play with a crew of beggars (among whom there are some aristocrats in disguise) as players. Master Clack, Justice of the Peace, is concerned "about how justice will be performed and represented" (Sanders 1999: 68) but his friend Sentwell reassures him:

CLACK
They can act justices, can they? I'll act a justice among 'em; that is to say, I will do justice upon them; that is to say — —
SENTWELL
Pray, sir, be not severe. They act kings and emperors, as well as justices. And justice is blind, they say. You may therefore be pleased to wink a little. (V.i.891-2)

Besides the political reading, the scene may also suggest that emperors are no longer seen as models of kingship but are turned into roles that even a beggar can play.

The myth of Rome and its paradigmatic function seem to be approached with a certain degree of scepticism. The adjective "Roman" never carries any moral, ethical or heroic dimension. Brome actually conveys a hostile view of the empire and of its degeneration into tyranny by marking the distance between Renaissance England and its ancient Roman ancestors. The infrequent presence of references to Roman characters or the lack of Roman settings is not merely due to the playwright's scant classical education but to his will to show the abyss between the paradigmatic ancient Roman empire and early modern England under the personal rule of Charles I. This is why the "association between Romans and Roman Catholics gained added force in the reign of Charles I, whose wife Henrietta Maria was a Catholic" (Hopkins 2008: 5), and any time Rome is mentioned Brome always refers to early modern Rome. Ancient Rome and her set of values are worlds apart from Caroline London.

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