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«Youle zee zuch an altrication in him  
as never was zeen in a brother»:  
Somerset Dialect in Richard Brome's *The Sparagus Garden*

Abstract

The paper proposes to explore the use of south-western stage dialect in *The Sparagus Garden* (1635) by the Caroline playwright Richard Brome. This dialect has a long tradition on the early modern stage, from Shakespeare and Jonson to Brome. In *The Sparagus Garden* the dramatist had recourse to south-western stage dialect for multiple reasons: for comic purposes, to portray rustic characters and provide the play with a touch of local colour, but also to discuss social and political issues and to explore questions of identity. What will emerge is how Brome contributed to the development of this stage dialect providing it with a more profound artistic formulation.

1. *Introduction*

South-western dialect has a long tradition on the early modern stage. Renaissance dramatists made a complex and extensive use of it, mainly, but not exclusively, in the domain of comedy. Numerous are the plays featuring south-western dialect speakers: John Redford's *Wit and Science* (ca. 1550), Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605-06), in which dialect speech is part of Edgar's disguise, Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633), which presents «the greatest number of south-western features of all the plays of the period» (Görlach 1999: 510), but also Thomas Randolph's *The Muses' Looking Glass* (1634) and Richard Brome's *The Sparagus Garden* (1635).

This dialect was generally used to portray rusticity and idiocy, and was associated with peasant lower class rural language in Elizabethan drama: characters with this regional speech «were “othered” as rustic fools and

simpletons» (Delabastita and Hoenselaars 2013: 10), whose language was sometimes unintelligible and even perceived as foreign. In his *Logonomia Anglica* (1619), Alexander Gill actually argued that this dialect «has the most barbarous flavour, particularly if you listen from the rustic people from Somerset, for it is easily possible to doubt whether they are speaking English or some foreign language» (Gil 1972 (1619): 103). In this sense the place seems to be perceived as more remote than the North: actually «the borders delineating linguistic, cultural and social oppositions» (Ruano-García 2010: 47) mark the distance between the centre and the peripheral space of Somerset both in the North vs South and East vs West dimensions.

Somerset is the birthplace of some country characters in Brome's *The Sparagus Garden*, one of the most commercially successful comedies of the Caroline era. Despite Brome's mastery in the use of this device and its relevance in the dynamics of the play, this comedy has been investigated in terms of language only recently<sup>1</sup>: hitherto this specific feature of the play has been underestimated or passed over. In 1913 Andrews remarked that it «contains a little of the ordinary clown-dialect (Somersetshire?) so frequently used by the Elizabethan dramatists» (Andrews 1972 (1913): 66). This underscores Brome's supposed lack of originality and inaccuracy (Andrews is unsure about the geographical provenance of the characters in the play); Görlach, relying on Eckhardt's analysis<sup>2</sup>, maintained that the play has «plenty of (inconsistent) dialect» (1999: 536). On the other hand, Paula Blank<sup>3</sup>, whose seminal study is the starting point of any investigation

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<sup>1</sup> See Julie Sanders, *Introduction*, in *The Sparagus Garden. Richard Brome Online* at <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>; Cristina Paravano, *Refashioning language in Richard Brome's theatre: Comic multilingualism in action*, in Dirk Delabastita and Ton Hoenselaars (eds), "ETC", 6, 1, a special issue on *Multilingualism in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries*, 2013, pp. 161-178.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Eckhardt, *Die Dialekt- und Auslandertypen des Alteren Englischen Dramas*, Materialien zur Kunde des Alteren Englischen Dramas, vols. 27, 32, Louvain, 1910, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.

into dialects in Renaissance England, fails to mention this play as featuring an articulated and intriguing example of south-western/Somerset dialect. In Brome's comedy the presence of this dialect is strategic: the play would lose much of its appeal and would be deprived of part of its richness and fascination if it featured speakers of another dialect. The playwright had recourse to this stage dialect for multiple reasons, which range from comic purposes to the exploration of questions of identity, social dynamics and contemporary issues. Far from being a random choice, this is a specific device also used to carry «a kind of hidden agenda» (Wales 2006: 72). My paper purposes to investigate the composite function of south-western dialect and to discuss how Brome, by building on the example of other early modern dramatists, contributed to providing this dialect with a «more profound artistic formulation» (Bakhtin 1981: 82).

## *2. Somerset stage dialect*

In his works Richard Brome revealed a marked interest in the variety of ways English was spoken: he recreated jargons, foreign languages, cant, showed mastery of the vocabulary of specific fields and dialects, for which he had «a penchant and an ear» (Clark 1992: 155). Shaw argues that Brome's ability may derive from the fact that the author was of country origin: «the skill with which he handles country dialects might suggest that, although he certainly knew the city well, he was not originally a Londoner» (1980: 18). The playwright's origin is shrouded in mystery and we do not know for sure where he was born or what his background was. However, for early modern authors like Brome, dialects had «nothing to do with "home"» (Blank 1996: 3). More probably, we may presume that he might have had «emotional affinities with region rather than metropolis» (Alison Findlay, quoted in Wales 2006: 78). Nonetheless, he must have been very responsive to the linguistic stimuli around him, while taking a lead from contemporary dramatists whose plays featured a speaker of south-western dialect, like *A Tale of a Tub*, a comedy by his mentor Ben Jonson, and *The Muses' Looking Glass* by Thomas Randolph, a member, like Brome, of the

exclusive tribe of the "Sons of Ben", a restricted club of literary young men attracted by Jonson's charismatic personality.

Despite lacking his mentor's erudition, he displayed great accuracy in the depiction of both northern and southern dialects, namely Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cornish and Somerset. His representation of south-western dialect was limited to certain noticeable features regarding pronunciation and lexis, which was enough to make the characters immediately recognizable to the audience as people from Somersetshire.

In actual fact in *The Sparagus Garden* Brome's recourse to south-western dialect follows the usual early modern practice: it is used to create comedy and to portray rustic, ignorant characters, like Tom Hoyden and his servant Coulter, who speak dialect consistently throughout the play. They are reminiscent of a character like Agroicus in Randolph's play, «a rustique clownish fellow, whose discourse is all Country; An extreame of urbanity, whereby you may observe there is a vertue in jesting» (4.4). Moreover, Tom Hoyden was a well-known protagonist of a popular medieval ballad involving dialectal conversation:

Freeman: Prethe tell me thy name, and the lord mayor shall know't

Hoyden: My name it Tom. Hoyden, - what zayst thou to that?

On the one hand, there is Tim Hoyden, Tom's naive half-brother, who was encouraged by his dying mother, a gentlewoman, to go and look for his rich uncle in London, Sir William Striker. Taking advantage of the young man's ambition to be a gentleman, the sly, impoverished knight Hugh Moneylacks takes him to the Sparagus Garden, a popular pleasure garden, where he cheats him of his money, while pretending to be teaching him how to become a fashionable gentleman. Hence Tim refrains from speaking dialect and counterfeits his accent in a bid to hide his linguistic and cultural identity, even though it surfaces every now and then. The characters use dialect differently: while Tom and Coulter are made to exhibit rustic commonsense in their adventures in London, dialect as motherwit is here contrasted with Tim's claims to being a gentleman expressed

by fine language (Görlach, 1999: 536). The first dialect speaker introduced is the servant Coulter, who explains the meaning of his name:

Moneylacks: Is that your man? What, does he wear a coulter by his side?

Coulter: No sir, my name is Coulter; I myself am a coulter and this is but my hanger on, as I am my master's. (2.1 speeches 326-7)<sup>4</sup>

His name, referring to the iron blade in a plough (*OED* n.1), aims at reinforcing the rural connotation of the character. Comically, Coulter identifies himself with the object he bears the name, thus marking his social and cultural inferiority, while alluding with pride to his rustic origins. Coulter makes up a sort of comic duo with Tom Hoyden, one of his masters. It is to him that Coulter turns when he needs help to show Tim that he has been deceived by Sir Moneylacks. He takes his leave with a comically alliterative «a vart vor a varewell»: «But if I don't your errand to your brother and tellen how you do vlout'n behind's back, then say cut's a cur. And so a vart vor a varewell to the proudest o'ye; and if you be an angered, tak't in your angry teeth». (3.1 speech 605)

At the beginning of Act 4 Coulter comes across Tom, Tim's half brother, who has just arrived in London from Taunton Dean, in Somerset. This brief dialogue is entirely in south-western dialect, yet the audience can understand it without too much trouble:

Tom: Is it possible that half this can be true, that a half brother of mine can be made such an ass all over?

Coulter: 'Tis all true, as I am a cursen fellow, Master Thomas, every word on't: I scorn to lie in a syllabub, I. What luck had I to meet you! I never thought to zee you at London. Tom: S'daggers, death, it has as good as veezed me out o'my wits to think on't: was my vather's blood zo quaisome to him (with a mischief to't) that he must let it out to be a gentleman? Because his mother was one by her own report? For our own parts we nother know nor care where hence she coame, nor whither she's gone, but dead she is.[...]

Coulter: Youle zee zuch an altrication in him as never was zeen in a brother.

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<sup>4</sup>All quotations from the play are from Richard Brome, *The Sparagus Garden*, edited by Julie Sanders from *Richard Brome Online* (Modern Text) at <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>.

Tom: But I wo'not zee'n yet as vould a clown as I am and as vine a gentleman as he is. I have a trick i'my sponce to make a younger brother one. (4.1. speeches 680-82, 91-92)

The rendering of this dialect for the stage was not an accurate reproduction of the language actually spoken but words and pronunciations were «largely derived from the dialects of the southwestern shires, especially Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall» (Blank 1996: 81). The pronunciation of the lines is recorded phonetically and seems to be based mainly on the voicing of “f” and “s”, the substitution of “w” for “ch”. The dialogue also features typical dialect words such as “quaisome” for “quarrelsome” or “nother” for “neither”, which signals to the audience the provenance and lack of education of Tom and his servant Coulter. «Dialect speakers», Carlson reminds us, «have often suffered the additional stigma of being marked by their speech as coming from subordinate or inferior geographical area or social class» (Carlson 2006: 63).

In the early modern imagination Somerset was «widely regarded as harbouring the most uncouth SW speakers of all» (Wakelin 1986: 115), but also pictured as an Eden-like location. The antiquary John Norden (1607) defined the fertile Vale of Taunton Deane (northwest of the city of Taunton) as the «Paradise of England» and wondered in amazement: «where should I be born else than in Taunton Dean?» (Gibson 2007: 22). Thus the reference to this familiar location contributes to presenting the characters, though still rustic and boorish, in a more positive light, while attenuating the tension between city and countryside.

The play becomes even funnier when Tom and Coulter interact with characters belonging to a higher social class, like the justices of the peace Striker and Touchwood or any London character. When Tom and Coulter meet Friswood, Striker's housekeeper, they are quickly dismissed as people who sell cattle. Their appearance and speech are what give them away:

Friswood: Who would you speak with?

Tom: By your leave vorsooth, I would speak with the master o'the house; I understand his worship's name is Master Striker.

Friswood: He is so, sir, but he is not in case to buy any cattle at this time.

Tom: Nor do I come to zellen any; my coming is of a dead body's errand vorsooth.

Friswood: What strange fellow is this trow? (4.1 speeches 695-699)

Only later are the two countrymen admitted to Striker's presence, as he is talking to the curate and his old enemy Touchwood. Ironically, they come on stage after the curate's speech: quoting from Virgil's *Aeneid* (VII, 312), he evokes the underworld and its horrors, just before their entrance:

Curate: Help from above, within, or any whence, in the name of sanctity I conjure you!  
*Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.*

*Tom and Coulter enter.*

Tom: What's the matter? By your leave which is my zick uncle? Are you scuffling for's money before he be dead?

Coulter: We'll part you with a vengeance.

Touchwood: Ha you your tenants, your clowns, here brought in to butcher me?

Striker: Slave they are thine, brought in to spoil and rob me; I know'em not.

Curate: I fear I've conjured up fiends indeed; how infernally they look!

Tom: No sir, we come with no zick intendment on neither nother zide; [To Touchwood] but an you be Master Striker, we are o'your zide, an't be to cut all the rest into pot-herbs. [...]

Curate: They are a pair of the Sedan mules I take it? (4.1 speeches 803-09, 13)

As soon as the other characters on stage hear them speaking, they make a series of hypotheses about their identity, ranging from tenants, clowns and sedan mules (namely people who carry sedan chairs, a popular means of transport of the period) to fiends. Their language, often rich in imagery connected with country life like pot-herbs, marks their country origin. To Striker's bewilderment and horror, Tom claims to be his nephew but since he cannot produce a certificate to prove it, he takes his leaves with Coulter: «Agreed. [To Striker] Well, sir, vor this time I ha no more to zay t'ye, since you be so budge, but he that made you zave you». (4.1 speech 828)

### 3. *Tim Hoyden: what's in a name?*

The recourse to stage dialect for the purposes of characterization is likewise entertaining in the case of Tim Hoyden, the aspiring gentlemen. Moreover it contributes to exploring questions of identity. Tim openly re-

jects his country origin and his Somerset dialect, which in early modern England was perceived as the exact opposite, a linguistic periphery and «the "extreme" of courtly language» (Blank 1996: 80); nevertheless, his background haunts him. In the following extract Moneylacks flatters Tim pretending to notice "some breeding" in him, a sort of inclination towards a gentleman-like status (represented by his 400 pounds):

Hoyden: I have four hundred pounds, sir; and I brought it up to town on purpose to make myself a clear gentleman of it. [...]

Moneylacks: I protest I admire him: I never found like craft in a yeoman's son before.

Hoyden: No words on't I beseech you, sir; nor name that foolish word yeoman's son any more. I came to change my copy and write gentleman: and to go the nighest way to work, my small acquaintance here tells me, to go by the heralds is the farthest way about.

Moneylacks: Well, sir, we will take the speediest course for you that may be possible.

Brittleware: The season of the year serves most aptly too,

Both for purging and bleeding:

Give your name into this book, sir.

Hoyden: Timothy Hoyden, sir.

Brittleware: [Writes] Timothy Hoyden.

Hoyden: But must I bleed, sir?

Moneylacks: Yes, you must bleed; your father's blood must out. He was but a yeoman, was he?

Hoyden: As rank a clown, none dispraised as any in Somersetshire. (2.2 speeches 245-247; 278-286)

Tim expresses his desire to be able to write "gentleman" after his name and to secure a coat of arms. Ironically, the result of such an achievement would be oxymoronic, being hoyden synonymous with rude, ignorant and clown (*OED* n. 1). As in the case of Coulter's name, for Tim «the institution of an identity [...] is the imposition of a name, i.e. of a social essence» (Bourdieu 1991: 120). Nonetheless, despite the title, he will always be a "hoyden". In a play such as this, so strongly reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet* in the development of the first line of the plot (the long lasting feud between the two Justices of the Peace and neighbours, Striker and Touchwood, and the romance between Annabelle, Striker's granddaughter, and



Samuel, Touchwood's son), the insistence on names is fairly ironic since they perfectly match the essence of the characters who bear them (not only Coulter and Hoyden but also the poor knight Moneylacks). Even if they changed their own names, the characters would still be the same. Tim aims at acquiring the «outward signs expressing social position, like clothes but also bodily hexis and language» (Bourdieu 1991: 123). He boasts some knowledge of Latin, while claiming to be receptive to his mentor's precepts:

Moneylacks: Now, sir, have you your rules by heart?

Hoyden: Both rules and rudiments I have all *ad unguem*.

Moneylacks: Repeat your principles.

Hoyden: Principles to be imprinted in the heart of every new made gentleman: to commend none but himself: to like no man's wit but his own: to slight that which he understands not: to lend money and never look for't again: to take up upon obligation and lend out upon affection: to owe much but pay little: to sell land but buy none: to pawn but never to redeem again: to fight for a whore: to cherish a bawd and defy a tradesman. (4.2 speeches 893-6)

He also takes notes to master the vocabulary of his would be social class in a bid to acquire distinction through language. Given the lack of dialectal markers in his speeches, we may conclude that he counterfeited his accent to "sound" as a London citizen. Tim wants to be part of a social group and projects his «identity with this group in a number of ways, including "talking like" other members of the group» (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998: 33). He seems to be aware of the social differences singled out by pronunciation, like Gabriel Harvey, learned English writer with a humble origin (son of a rope maker) who «took speech lessons to acquire a more elegant pronunciation» (Holmberg 1964: 11).

Tim is also willing to visit the renowned Sparagus Garden, which was an existing pleasure garden on the south bank of the river Thames; an oasis far from city life, devoted to good health, providing entertainment and a rustic landscape, where people from the higher classes could promenade, have privacy, gossip and eat expensive delicacies, like asparagus. This was a luxury item used for its medicative and therapeutic properties and was

famous for its supposed erotic and aphrodisiac qualities. Proper nutrition turns out to be an effective means of climbing the social ladder so that Tim Hoyden is encouraged to change his rural diet made up of bacon and pudding for asparagus, and thereby complete his metamorphosis into a gentleman. For Tim, eating asparagus is a form of rite of passage with a series of tasks to be accomplished so that the garden may be conceived as a purgatory where Tim bleeds and purges in a bid to ascend to a higher social class. Nobility is hence reduced to a fluid balance which brings to mind Jonson's theory of humours «where one can siphon off base blood, and replace it with new aristocratic blood generated by asparagus» (Steggle 2004: 81).

Moneylacks: And how do you feel yourself, Master Hoyden, after your bleeding, purging, and bathing, the killing of your gross humours by your spare diet and your new infusion of pure blood by your quaint feeding on delicate meats and drinks? How do you feel yourself?

Hoyden: Marry, I feel that I am hungry and that my shrimp diet and sippings have almost famished me, and my purse too. 'Slid I dare be sworn, as I am almost a gentleman, that every bite and every spoonful that I have swallowed these ten days has cost me ten shillings at least.

Moneylacks: Well, sir, if you repine at your expenses now that you want nothing but your bellyful of 'sparagus to finish my work of a gentleman in you, I will, if you please, in lieu of that stuff up your paunch with bacon and bag-pudding and put you back again as absolute a clown as ever you came from plough. (3. 1 speeches 576-77, 586)

Quite amusingly, Tim mispronounces the name of the thing that will apparently turn him into a gentleman: he refers to asparagus as "sparrowbills", echoing its popular name "sparrowgrass" and suggesting all the dear bills he has paid in a bid to succeed in his objective.

Nay pray, sir, be not angry, though to the shame of a gentleman I say it, my teeth do even water at the name of the sweet country dish you spoke of (bacon and bag-pudding) yet I will forbear it: but you say I shall fill my belly with this new daintrel that you spake of – these sparrowbills, what do you call'em? (3.1 speech 589)

Paradoxically Tim's rural origin and background surface even when he goes to the fashionable Sparagus Garden, as if this environment, so distant from his everyday life, increased his status as "other", as "foreigner". They also emerge when he mentions his family and his life in Somerset. For instance, when Tim describes his father's status he claims: «As rank a clown, none dispraised as any in Somersetshire» (2.2 speech 286). His words feature an example of malapropism; as also Sanders (2010: n7188) has noted, he misuses the verb "dispraised", which is inappropriate for the context since it implies that his father was detested in Somerset. As a consequence Tim turns out to be very similar to the hateful western speakers who «are often ascribed a tendency towards malapropisms» (Blank 2006: 269).

Later on, when he is encouraged by his mentor to dismiss his servant Coulter, he experiences a sort of linguistic regression to his former country speech and a dialectal word order seems to take the upper hand over the ambitious Tim:

Moneylacks: Have you an elder brother?

Hoyden: You do not hear me say he is my brother. But the clown my father had a former son by a former wife that was no gentlewoman as my mother was and he is a clown all over, and incurable even get you to him. Like to like will agree well. [Hands Coulter some money.] Here's a crown for you; 'twill carry you afoot to Taunton. And so, get you gone, like a clown as you are. (3.1 speeches 600-1)

Even though the character struggles to master language, actually he seems to be losing control over it. Tim's fragile linguistic identity is put to the test on two occasions: a confrontation with a group of gallants (those who are part of the social group he would like to join) and then in a dialogue with Tom and Coulter, symbols and reminders of his humble and disgraceful former life:

Moneylacks: Master Hoyden, salute these gallants.

Hoyden: What without a hat or cloak?

Moneylacks: The better for a young beginner.

Hoyden: Sweet sir, I shall ever bless my auspicious stars that shined me into the fallacious acquaintance of so singular goodness.

Gilbert: Sir, you forget yourself.

Hoyden: Most singular sweet sir, most miserably impoverished in itself. [...]

Samuel: Can you say this gentleman was a clown within this fortnight? (4.2 speeches 963-967)

In this conversation, Tim repeats mnemonically a number of stock expressions from courtly language that he has heard previously in the scene. His supposedly superior education is turned against him by one of the gallants who kicks him. For them he is still a clown from the countryside like his half-brother. The word "clown" recurs 25 times throughout the whole play. Tim uses it for his father, Tom and Coulter in a derogatory sense («a man without refinement or culture; an ignorant, rude, uncouth, ill-bred man» *OED* 2); also the other characters address and refer to all of them, Tim included, as "clowns" to mark their country provenance, their ignorance and rude manners. On the other hand, in the case of Tom and Coulter, the term is also suggestive of their importance and role in the play, being a synonym for «fool or jester» (3a), a popular early modern stage character recurring in several Shakespearean plays. Only the arrival of the "clowns" on stage puts an end to the verbal and physical contrast between Tim and the gallants:

Walter: How now; what's he?

Spring: 'Slid, 'tis his clown brother he spake of.

Tom: Is't possible; icha made a sweet jaunt after you and have I vound a vine vool o'thee? Where's thy vour hundred pound? Is that made a voole on too tree: where's the zartificate my mother ga'thee to vind thine uncle? gi'me that, chill zee what I can do wi't.

Hoyden: Away, clown, I know thee not, canst thou compliment? (4.2 speeches 985-987)

Hoyden dismisses his half-brother with the same words used by Prince Hal to repudiate his friendship with Falstaff: «Old man, I know thee not» (*Henry IV, part 2, 5.5.45*), in a bid to distance himself from demeaning family ties. Later Tim also insists on not understanding what they are say-

ing and tries to laugh behind their back with his apparently new noble friends:

Tom: Cha mich ado to vorbear beating o'thee yet, my vingers doe zo itch at thee.

Hoyden: I understand thee not, as I am a gentleman.

Tom: But now I think on't, Coulter, we'll have all again and by a quieter way; and teach'em to lick honey, catch birds with chaff, or go to plough with dogs.

Spring, Gilbert, and Moneylacks [laughing] Ha, ha, ha.

Hoyden: Ha, ha, ha; who understands the barbarian trow?

Coulter: Uds vish, master: they do nothing but jeer to you all this while now. (4.2 speeches 997-1002)

It is the loyal and rustic Coulter who reveals that the gallants are actually laughing behind Tim's back. The servant, like Edgar disguised as a peasant in *King Lear*, is the emblem of «the traditional honest solidity of the land» (Montgomery 2012: 465) against the treacherous Sir Moneylacks and his confederates. The apotheosis of Tim's mockery is when he is brought on stage in women's clothes and addressed by the curate as a «monstrum horrendum», while his half-brother exclaims amusedly: «My brother Tim dressed like Master mayor's wife of Taunton Dean», thus relating Tim's situation to his beloved rural context. Only Striker's intervention lays the basis for a positive resolution by promising Tim a gentleman status at the end of the play: «This yonker I'll take care for, and make him a new gentleman by new breeding, without the diet, bathing, purge, or bleeding». (5.3.1297)

#### 4. *Dialect's contemporary resonances*

As I have already remarked, at the end of the play Tim is addressed as a “yonker”, a word of Dutch origin meaning a young nobleman or youth. This could mean that Striker, as representative of the London upper class, does not see Tim as a countryman but still conceives him as a foreigner who is not yet a London citizen through and through (Paravano 2013: 171). One of the main preoccupations of the period concerned the integration of foreigners, which caused an early modern obsession with «the

interaction between the native tongue and its dialectal variants, or with "foreign" languages and the associated phenomenon of translation» (Delabastita and Hoenselaars 2013: 1). The term "foreign" was actually applied to a wider part of the population than nowadays: hence a Londoner would perceive as a foreigner anyone not born in the capital or member of a guild, both coming from another county, like Tim, Tom and Coulter, and from another country.

While following the example of early modern dramatists prior to him who had experimented with south-western dialect, Brome, differently from them, draws on the presence of dialect speakers on stage to address burning political and social issues of the period. In the prologue to his play *A Tale of a Tub*, Jonson insisted that his comedy had no political contents:

No State-affaires, not any politique Club,  
Pretend wee in our Tale, here, of a Tub.  
But acts of Clownes and Constables, to day  
Stuffe out the scenes of our ridiculous play. (1-4)

Brome, instead, exploited this device to throw light on the articulated city-countryside dynamics. London stood as a pole of attraction: while Tim is willing to live there and sees the city as the possibility of clambering up the social ladder, Tom and Coulter are eager to come back home and inform their countrymen about their journey in the capital. For Sanders their dialectal linguistic exchanges provide the audience with «a model of flow that is instructive for understanding the operations of the city as a circulatory one, both within its own parameters and in its relationships with the regions of England and (through trade) with wider global geographies» (Sanders 2010, § 31).

Moreover, Somerset dialect speakers are not the only foreigners of the comedy but the polarity Englishness-otherness is discussed in a double form. The tenant of the Sparagus Garden is a smart woman from the Netherlands named Martha. The strategic presence of both these foreign languages carried a number of contemporary resonances for an early modern audience since it reflected a controversial issue on the political

agenda: the policy of drainage with the involvement of the Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden. He was involved in the project of draining marshland in the areas of East Anglia and Somerset. Their presence caused violent protests and sabotage: people «acting as forerunners of the Luddites, beat down the ditches and works which had been completed in the name of progress» (Sharpe 1996: 254). This also led to more general resentment towards the Dutch but also towards the monarch Charles I, a strong supporter of the plan. Brome thus addresses the issue from two different perspectives: of the Dutch who brought the fen drainage and of the inhabitants of Somerset where this technique was employed.

### 5. *Conclusions*

Despite his minor role, at the end of Brome's *The Court Beggar* (1640), there is an authentic appreciation for Tom Hoyden and his comic performance and, implicitly, for his dialect speech: «And let me tell you he has made pretty merry jigs that ha' pleased a many. As (le'me see) th' *Antipodes*, and – oh I shall never forget! *Tom Hoyden*'» (epilogue 1144). The audience's enthusiasm may signal the relevance of the dialect and its strong impact on the play. Moving beyond the mere stereotypical use, Brome exploits dialect as an «expressive tool» (Blunt 1967: 1) that may attract and instruct contemporaneously: both a form of entertainment and a vehicle to address engaging political and social issues. Only a part of the audience might have realized the political and social implications of dialect. Most of them may have appreciated Tom's comic character, his touch of local colour, being the character so deeply rooted in the English popular culture. Still today in England great importance is attached to accent linked to social class. This is one of the reasons that make a play like this still relevant for a contemporary audience as it was in the seventeenth century.

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