



Matthew Gwinne's *Nero tragaedia nova*: Custom and Innovation in Late Elizabethan England

A Nero tragaedia nova de Matthew Gwinne: costume e inovação na Inglaterra elizabetana tardia

Celia Goodburn

Leeds / England

c_goodb@aol.co.uk

Abstract: This paper considers Matthew Gwinne's *Nero tragaedia nova* (1603) and how the playwright treats the themes of custom and innovation to explore contemporary Elizabethan politics. The article reads Gwinne's work in the context of late Elizabethan interest in Neostoicism, and examines how Gwinne deploys the language of Neostoicism to comment on the Elizabethan succession crisis.

Keywords: Matthew Gwinne; Nero; Elizabethan England; Neostoicism; Montaigne; succession.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa *Nero tragaedia nova* (1603), de Matthew Gwinne, e considera como o dramaturgo trata os temas do costume e da inovação para explorar a política elizabetana da época. Este artigo lê o épico dramático de Gwinne no contexto do interesse elizabetano tardio pelo neoestoicismo e examina como Gwinne usa a linguagem do estoicismo para fornecer um comentário sobre a crise de sucessão elizabetana.

Palavras-chave: Matthew Gwinne; Nero; Inglaterra elizabetana; neoestoicismo; Montaigne; sucessão.

In 1603, the Oxford graduate and physician, Matthew Gwinne, published a tragedy in Latin depicting the reign of the emperor Nero. Gwinne's *Nero tragaedia nova* (*Nero*) exudes a sense of horror at the depths to which men can sink in the pursuit of power and wealth. The play's third act opens with the ghost of Britannicus urging Charron to let him pass into "the abodes of the Blessed" (III.i.1310).¹ Charron refuses, urging Britannicus to stay and watch, stating that the crimes Nero has committed against Britannicus are merely "trifles", for Britannicus's murder is merely "a step along the way of crime, not the end of the journey" (III.i.1322-1323).² "[T]he evil grows daily", Charron continues, and "the pious emperors of Rome who have lived, who will live, will never equal impious Nero's pious five-year span" (III.i.1325-1328).³ At the close of the act, the fury Megaera ascends from the fiery pits of hell to muse on the maladies of Nero's reign. Megaera highlights the cruelty which has just taken place, and underlines the strife caused by man's insatiable desire to devour his fellows. "Man is not a god, but a wolf to his fellow man", she argues, "[n]o beast treats a fellow animal as man treats man" (III.Chorus 3. 2203-2204).⁴ There is nothing "as ungrateful", "nothing as hateful" as man's treatment of his fellows (III.Chorus 3.2207-2209).⁵

This extract typifies Gwinne's attitude to this period of Rome's history. He relates the chaos and horror wreaked on a once glorious state

¹ GWINNE. *Nero 1603*. Quotations, act and scene divisions are based on Sutton's translation and line numbers refer to the Latin edition of the text from Sutton's site. Latin quotations in footnotes are taken from the 1603 version of Gwinne's play: GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*. STC 12551; GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. F3r: 'Vmb. Sedes beatas peto pius et insons puer.' An in-depth analysis of Gwinne's work in relation to late Elizabethan politics and new humanism is found in GOODBURN's *Constancy and Commonwealth: Nero and English Political Culture*, c.1580-1630.

² "Cha. Quid parua magnis aggrauas? sceleris gradus, / Non finis hic est: hactenus factum scelus" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. F3v).

³ "Votum est in istis: indies crescit nefas. / Quin qui fuerunt, quique erunt summe pij, / Romæque domini Cæsares, nunquam impij, / Quinquenniū Neronis exæquent pium" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. F3v).

⁴ "Homini lupus est homo, non Deus est. / Vt homo est homini, fera nulla ferae est" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. I3r).

⁵ "Nihil ingratum, nihil infidum, / Nihil infestum, nihil inuisum, / Vt homo est homini..." (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. I3r-v).

by an unsettled succession, by an ambitious ruler, and by glory-seeking rebels. Gwinne emphasises the need to maintain order and custom and presents Nero's reign as having caused an irreparable rupture in Roman history in its departure from norms and conventions. Gwinne's dramatic work is heavily influenced by his involvement in translating Montaigne's *Essais*, which display a similar weariness with perpetual political change. Gwinne appropriates much of Montaigne's scepticism about the wisdom of interfering in political affairs, and suggests that, where political activity is likely to have damaging repercussions, it is preferable to persevere with the existing situation without seeking amendment for political ills.⁶ Gwinne's text was published in 1603 and, as Dana Sutton has demonstrated, it is evident that Gwinne was finalising the text of his drama on the threshold between the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I.⁷ In many respects the play echoes much of the anticipation and anxiety of the later Elizabethan period, and Gwinne's focus on Rome in a period of transition establishes a parallel between the Neronian era and the concerns of the Elizabethans.

Gwinne, the *Essais* and Elizabethan politics

The emphasis on maintaining the political status quo undoubtedly stems from Gwinne's participation in translating Montaigne's philosophical work, the *Essais*, and his connection to John Florio.⁸ At some point in the

⁶ I am conscious of the incoherence in Montaigne's Stoicism as scholars have noted: MILES. *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, p. 85; VILLEY. *Les Sources et L'Evolution Des Essais de Montaigne: Les Sources et La Chronologie Des Essais*, p. 31, p. 214-217.

⁷ SUTTON. Introduction, section 56. Sutton notes that *Nero* was printed in 1603 and was dedicated to the Egertons and Francis Leigh. The epilogue in a first version praised Elizabeth, but when Elizabeth died two days before the beginning of the 1603 calendar year (Old Style), a few issues were reprinted with a new dedication to her successor. Printing was paused around the time of Elizabeth's death to allow this reconfiguration to take place.

⁸ WRIGHT. Gwinne, Matthew (1558-1627). *ODNB*; BINNS. *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age*, p. 122-136. For information on Florio's partnership with Gwinne see HAMLIN. *Montaigne's English Journey*, p. 6-8; YATES. *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*, p. 50, 93, 221-222.

1590s Florio had been asked to produce an English translation of the *Essais* for the Countess of Bedford.⁹ He was assisted in this endeavour by Gwinne and the Italian physician Theodore Diodati, and it seems that Montaigne's ideas influenced Gwinne's subsequent work.¹⁰ The time Gwinne spent working with Florio to bring the French philosopher's words to an English audience seems to have been formative: evidently, some of Montaigne's distaste for political change and his hostility towards innovation appear to have left their mark on Gwinne's *Nero*.

The play's dedicatory epistle firmly establishes Gwinne as part of the resurgence of interest in Tacitus and stoic philosophy. The epistle is provided by one of Gwinne's fellow scholars at St John's College, Oxford: John Sandsbury.¹¹ We should read Sandsbury's remarks not only as an indication that Gwinne's characterisation of Seneca is more realistic than that provided by other "new humanists", but also, as Emma Buckley has demonstrated, that Gwinne's drama itself is more faithful to the Senecan dramatic style than most Senecan-inspired pieces.¹² The choruses (and their references to misery and evil), the lyricism of the dialogue, and the bloodiness of the action are features Gwinne's drama borrows from Seneca.¹³

In using Tacitus and Seneca to articulate the need for obedience to a sovereign, and to stress the fundamental importance of unity within a polity, Gwinne is revealing something of his attitude towards contemporary political events. Gwinne's political interest in Tacitus and stoicism is at odds with the rhetoric of constitutionalism and non-domination which, it has been implied, typified the reception of Tacitus and Seneca in late Elizabethan England.¹⁴ More specifically, Gwinne is most certainly attuned to the discourse associated with the forward Protestants who were frustrated by Elizabeth's inaction over Europe's religious wars and angered by her alleged stifling of military virtue.

⁹ HAMLIN. *Montaigne's English Journey*, p. 7.

¹⁰ HAMLIN. *Montaigne's English Journey*, p. 7-8.

¹¹ MONEY. Sandsbury, John (1575/6–1610).

¹² BUCKLEY. Matthew Gwinne's *Nero* (1603): Seneca, Academic Drama, and the Politics of Polity, p. 16-33.

¹³ BUCKLEY. Matthew Gwinne's *Nero* (1603): Seneca, Academic Drama, and the Politics of Polity, p. 17-19.

¹⁴ GAJDA. Tacitus and Political Thought in Early Modern Europe, c.1530-c.1640, p. 266-267.

However, he uses Tacitus and Seneca to reach political conclusions fundamentally opposed to the politics of these men. Although Gwinne seems to have had little direct relationship with the court during Elizabeth's later years, it is possible to connect Gwinne to prominent members of the Essex circle. Given his association with Florio — who was himself tutor to the third Earl of Southampton, and whose fortunes “on the face of it” seemed tied to Essex and his associates — it is reasonable to assume that Gwinne shared some of his friend's interest in this group's affairs.¹⁵ Gwinne himself provided a poem addressed to the Earl of Southampton for inclusion in Florio's *Dictionary*.¹⁶ Furthermore, after the Essex rebellion, Gwinne corresponded with John Davies, who served with Essex in France and Ireland, and was only spared execution for his part in Essex's rebellion because he exposed his accomplices.¹⁷ In addition to these connections, Gwinne's part in the publication of the 1590 *Arcadia* perhaps indicates some ideological sympathy with the Tacitism and Neo-Stoicism of the Essex circle, since it seems this edition was designed to hitch Sidney's political and ethical outlook to the interests of the Essex-circle.¹⁸ These connections are, nevertheless, tenuous and the nature of Gwinne's relationship to this group of mavericks seems as ambiguous as Florio's.¹⁹ *Nero* was written in the aftermath of the Essex rebellion, and in his depiction of the rebellion against Nero Gwinne's criticism of Essex's actions is discernible.

¹⁵ YATES. *John Florio*, p. 76; for quotation see p. 93. See also the account of Florio in the Earl of Southampton's biography: HONAN. Wriothesley, Henry, third earl of Southampton (1573–1624). Yates also points to Florio's defence of Essex, presuming he is the “A. B.” whose dedication prefaces Savile's *End of Nero*; see YATES. *John Florio*, p. 198.

¹⁶ YATES. *John Florio*, p. 191.

¹⁷ FEINGOLD. *The Mathematician's Apprenticeship*, p. 111. See also MCGURK. Davies, Sir John (1560x63–1625).

¹⁸ DAVIS. Multiple *Arcadias* and the Literary Quarrel between Fulke Greville and the Countess of Pembroke, p. 401-430. Davis describes the conflict between Greville, Gwinne and Florio on the one hand and the Countess of Pembroke and Hugh Sanford on the other as a battle to determine the character of Sidney's Tacitean Neostoicism.

¹⁹ Yates makes the suggestion, based on Florio's correspondence with the Venetian diplomat Niccolò Molino (10 August 1600 *C.S.P. Domestic* 1598-1601, 459-60), that Florio may have been in the employment of the Cecil faction and tasked with spying on Essex and Southampton; see YATES *John Florio*, p. 216-218.

This second half of this article explores how Gwinne uses Nero's reign to depict the dangers of political innovation. As outlined, Gwinne was probably writing his drama in the final years of Elizabeth's reign when uncertainty about the succession was rife. His depiction of Nero is undoubtedly influenced by this uncertainty, as Gwinne chooses to narrate Nero's reign from the period of Nero's dubious accession through to the moment when it seems that the Julio-Claudian line would be extinguished by Nero's overthrow and death. Gwinne's play opens on the cusp of the succession: Claudius is engaged in protracted deliberations about his marriage, and then announces his adoption of Nero (I.ii and I.iii). Throughout this, Gwinne stresses the novelty of Nero's succession and the rupture this innovation causes within the state. In the process of narrating how Agrippina secured the succession for her son despite the desires of Rome, and in detailing the havoc the pair subsequently wreaked, Gwinne channels the anxieties of the late Elizabethans about their own succession crisis. What is more, he does so by evoking the disillusionment of Montaigne and his concern about political and religious strife.

Custom and tradition in imperial Rome

The play opens with Claudius celebrating the glories of the Roman Empire and complacently acknowledging the stability and prosperity his reign has brought to the Roman people (I.ii.112-151). In these opening scenes, Gwinne dwells on the source of Rome's instability: Claudius's marriage to Agrippina and the adoption of Nero as his heir. Claudius continues his opening speech by boasting about being "wooed by rival brides" and about his right as "a bachelor" to be "free to choose a wife", whether it be for reasons of "policy", "lust" or "ardent love" (I.ii.146-148).²⁰ His closest advisors, Narcissus, Calistus and Pallas, sing the praises of Claudius's prospective brides. When Claudius considers marriage to his niece, Agrippina, Gwinne illustrates how this decision goes against common practice and common sense. Claudius acknowledges the uproar betrothal to Agrippina would provoke:

²⁰ "Leuamen habeo mortuae vxoris, nouam / Eligere quód iam caelibí vxorem licet. / Sit causa, sit libido, sit feruens amor" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B2r).

CLAUD. The populace will reject this.

VIT(TELIUS). Should the populace reject Caesar? Is he thus ordered about? Does the populace govern Caesar?

CLAUD. The law forbids.

VIT. You are a law unto yourself.

CLAUD. This is without precedent.

VIT. Create a precedent. But it is not unprecedented. Consider barbarian kingdoms.

CLAUD. This reeks of barbarism.

VIT. But what is permissible anywhere is permissible everywhere.

CLAUD. Nature rebels.

VIT. The hardhearted law ordained marriage. Nature makes no distinctions, but rather invites kinsmen to love each other.

CLAUD. You urge a thing scarce sanctioned by custom. (I.ii.278-286)²¹

In this exchange Gwinne suggests that Claudius's decision to circumvent the wishes of the populace, by marrying Agrippina, represents an extension of royal prerogative. He does this by underscoring how Claudius is urged by Vitellius to consider himself *lex loquens*. However, the most significant aspect of the above exchange is the fact that Gwinne frames the whole discussion concerning the legitimacy of Agrippina and Claudius's marriage (and Nero's adoption) as a matter relating to the issue of custom and tradition. As the drama continues, Silanus, Claudius's son-in-law, is informed about his imminent removal from the Senate, and is told that Claudius has denied Silanus's claim to the throne. Again, Gwinne stresses the novelty of the situation:

VIT. I admit that marriage to a brother's daughter is a new thing at Rome. But elsewhere it is familiar, nor do the laws forbid it. Custom is unfair: marriage to a cousin was once unknown, but the passage of time removed this obstacle. Customs become accommodated to human needs, and things now once familiar

²¹ "*Clau.* Populus negabit. *Vitel.* Caesari populus neget?/Sic imperator? Caesarem populus reget? / *Clau.* Lex prohibet. *Vitel.* Es lex tu tibi. *Clau.* Exemplo caret. / *Vitel.* Exempla proebe: sed nec exemplo caret:/ Barbarica repete regna. *Clau.* Barbariem sapit. / *Vitel.* At vbique liceat, quod loco quouis licet. / *Clau.* Natura pugnat. *Vitel.* Dura lex statuit thoros, / Natura non distinguit, inuitat magis / Cognata amentur. *Clau.* More vix lictum doces" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B4r).

were once novelties – as will this innovation, thanks to their example (I.iii.377-382).²²

The opening scenes of Gwinne's drama, then, indicate that Rome's misfortunes have grown ultimately from the rejection of custom. In this focus, it is evident that Gwinne is reflecting something of the Neostoics' unease at the readiness to discard long-held beliefs and shake off tried and tested methods of governance.

In "Of Custome", an essay which appears in the first book of the *Essais*, Montaigne expresses his distaste for "noveltie, what countenance soever it shew", because he has "seene very hurtfull effects follow the same".²³ Employing the metaphor of the body in his discussion of the polity, Montaigne explains that there is little profit to be gained "in the change of a received lawe", since it is "impossible to stirre or displace one" without irreparably weakening and undermining the whole system itself.²⁴ In his *Nero*, Gwinne seems to adopt the stance Montaigne had adopted in his early essays when treating political change. Gwinne also shares the reverence the French philosopher Pierre Charron has for custom. Charron's work was translated into English in 1608 but, as Parmelee notes, the French work appeared in 1601 and would have been known to Elizabethan readers.²⁵ For Charron, upholding the "lawes & customes" of a country, "both in word and deed", is paramount.²⁶ He points to the detrimental effects of innovation and the suspension of customs: "All change and alteration of lawes, beleefes, customes and observances is very dangerous, and yeeldeth always more evill than good; it bringeth with it certaine and present evils for a good that is uncertaine to come."²⁷ Gwinne's attitude parallels Charron's and Montaigne's suspicion

²² "Coniugia Romae in filias fratrum noua. / Fateor: sed alibi nota: nec leges vetant; / Sed mos iniquus: pariter ignotus fuit / Thalamus sobrinae, tempore inualuit dato. / Accommodantur commodis mores: noua / Fuere quae nunc nota: hoc ex illis erit" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. C1v).

²³ MONTAIGNE. *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Militarie Discourses of Lo*, p. 53.

²⁴ MONTAIGNE. *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Militarie Discourses of Lo*, p. 52.

²⁵ PARMELEE. *Good Newes from Fraunce French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England*, p. 128.

²⁶ CHARRON. *Of Wisdome written in French by Peter Charro[n] Doctor of Lawe in Paris*, p. 312.

²⁷ CHARRON. *Of Wisdome written in French by Peter Charro[n] Doctor of Lawe in Paris*, p. 313. Also cited in PARMELEE, *Good Newes from Fraunce French Anti-*

of novelty. Early in the drama it is Claudius who acts as the innovator by showing no hesitation in preferring “love” over “custom” (I.ii.286-287), and in defying the wishes of the Senate, the people and the Praetorian Guard.²⁸ It is this act that propels Rome into misery under the misrule of Agrippina and, later, under Nero.

Gwinne and the Anjou match

While Gwinne is consistent in articulating this idea, it is less clear how his pessimistic view of political innovation should be interpreted in relation to Elizabethan politics. There are a number of possible analogies that can be extracted from the play’s opening scene, where Claudius’s and Agrippina’s nuptials confirm Rome’s fate. The debate over Claudius’s choice of brides, and the dramatisation of his power being eclipsed by the imperial consort, must surely represent Gwinne’s recollection of the debate about Elizabeth’s proposed marriage in the late 1570s and 1580s. Gwinne seems to echo the pessimism and anxiety individuals like Sir Philip Sidney expressed about the Anjou match in the later decades of Elizabeth’s reign. Claudius’s ghost’s exclamation in act two that “[a] false Nero invades a kingdom not his own and casts down the true Nero” (II.i. 660-661) reflects some of the anxieties expressed by those opposed to Elizabeth’s planned marriage to Anjou.²⁹ For instance, in his letter of 1579 to Elizabeth, Philip Sidney outlined his certainty that England would become prey to domination by the ambitious Anjou, who would not be content to submit to Elizabeth.³⁰ Furthermore, in Claudius’s opening speech in celebration of Rome’s prosperity and the settled peace of the empire, there are a number of thematic and linguistic echoes of Sidney’s depiction of Elizabethan England. In his famous “Letter” to Elizabeth, Sidney outlines that security and stability rests on the trust the people have for their monarch. Blair Worden points to Sidney’s assertion that Elizabeth’s government is based on the love and fear her subjects have

League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England, p. 129.

²⁸ “*Clau.* More vix licitum doces, / *Vitel.* Amore licitum fiat” (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B4r).

²⁹ “*Imperia falsus non sua inuadit Nero, / Verum Neronem deijcit: nec dum sat est*” (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. D1v).

³⁰ SIDNEY. Philip Sydney to Queen Elizabeth, An. 1580, perswading her not to marry with the Duke of Anjou, p. 287-292.

for her, and that the success in maintaining their loyalty during this time of tribulation over the Anjou match rests with her ability to demonstrate her virtue, justice, and resolution.³¹ To proceed with the marriage to Anjou would, Sidney contends, be to submit to the attraction of an outward sense of stability provided by alliance with Anjou, but this, he continues, is a far less settled strength than that Elizabeth possesses when she stands alone.³² Sidney fears that Elizabeth will suffer a loss of her “honourable constancy” if she commits to a marriage based not on a shared diplomatic fear or desire, but on “private affection”.³³ Claudius’s reign, like Elizabeth’s, is “enjoying a stable fortune” with a “foundation” greater than ever before (I.ii.115-120).³⁴ He possesses “Fortune’s support, and Virtue’s guidance”, like Elizabeth, but is willing to forfeit all these benefits in order “to indulge” his “need” and “nature”, and is keen “to wield the thyrsus of Bacchus and the distaff of Hercules” (I.ii.130-145).³⁵ Claudius’s reference to the Phoenix (I.ii.151) might further confirm that Gwinne gestures towards the question of Elizabeth’s marriage and the succession that had dominated discourse in the previous decades.³⁶

Gwinne, James I, and Mary Queen of Scots

If Gwinne looks forward to the prospect of James I’s accession, rather than backwards at Elizabeth’s failed marriage negotiations, it may also be the case that Gwinne picks up the message that James I stresses in his own political thought: that of pursuing a marriage in good

³¹ WORDEN. *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics*, p. 118-119.

³² WORDEN. *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics*, p. 120.

³³ SIDNEY. Philip Sydney to Queen Elizabeth, An. 1580, perswading her not to marry with the Duke of Anjou, p. 245-258.

³⁴ “Me cernat, et te Roma: vix aetas tulit / Exempla quaeuis paria, quàm stabili bono / Fruerentur αὐτοκράτορες terrae Ioues. / Augusta rerum Domina, et Europae caput / In astra surgit Romuli angustus labor; / Et talis annos bis quater centum stetit” (GWINNE, *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B1v).

³⁵ “Caesare fauente, comite fortunâ, duce / Virtute, vinci quod volo, victum dabo. ... Libet, orbe domito, genium et ingenium sequi, / Tractare thyrsus Bacchi, et Alcidae colum” (GWINNE, *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B2r).

³⁶ “Phaenix iugales sola non nouit faces” (GWINNE, *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. B2r).

conscience and based on sound counsel and custom. In the *Basilikon Doron*, first published in Edinburgh in 1599, James instructs his son to recognise marriage as one of the most important decisions a monarch can make. Due attention must be paid to “the weale of his people” when choosing a bride, and a monarch must not “for any accessory cause or worldly respects” choose a woman “unable, either through age, nature, or accident, for procreation of children”.³⁷ A ruler must be particularly concerned to avoid marrying one “of knowne euill conditions, or vicious education: for the woman is ordeined to be a helper, and not a hinderer to man”.³⁸ Gwinne seems to echo James’s general sentiment and, in portraying Claudius’s misfortune as the result of his defiance of shrewd advice like that offered by James, Gwinne perhaps attempts to endear himself to the future ruler.

Alternatively, it is possible to read Agrippina’s attempts to secure Nero’s succession and assassinate Claudius as a reflection on the threat posed by Mary Queen of Scots. Agrippina’s dialogue with Pallas in the first act, in which she plots to assassinate Claudius by having him ingest poison, is obviously topical as Gwinne seems to tap into contemporary fears about the ambitions of Elizabeth’s rival. In the *New Arcadia*, with which Gwinne was very familiar, the figure of Cecropia, as Worden illustrates, serves as an allegory for the threat posed by Mary Queen of Scots since her arrival in England in 1568.³⁹ The action of the *New Arcadia* centres in part on the machinations of Cecropia who, by the opening of the action, has already attempted to assassinate Basilius. The ambition and “devilish wickedness” of Cecropia, who would enact any “mischievous practice” if it meant her son could attain Basilius’s throne, is paralleled in Gwinne’s portrait of Agrippina, who works by any means to achieve power.⁴⁰ Moreover, Gwinne’s negative depiction of Agrippina, that “irate and powerful” woman (I.iv. 471) whose capacity for villainy seems boundless, reflects the outpouring of popular condemnation of Mary Queen of Scots following the discovery of the Babington Plot.⁴¹

³⁷ STUART. *The Political Works of James I*, p. 35.

³⁸ STUART. *The Political Works of James I*, p. 35.

³⁹ WORDEN. *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics*, p. 172-176.

⁴⁰ SIDNEY. *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, p. 117.

⁴¹ “*Agrip. Quid haeres? faemina irata, et potens*” (GWINNE, *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. C2v). For a discussion of representations of Mary Queen of Scots in the wake of the

Gwinne and the Elizabethan succession crisis

Additionally, it is possible to read Gwinne's discussion of Claudius's disregard for custom in the marriage to Agrippina as an echo of the constitutionalist arguments stressing that "great hazard and danger" is the likely result of any interference with, or royal encroachment on, legal custom.⁴² Claudius's disregard for the Senate in claiming that matters of his marriage and succession are his concern alone seems to evoke Elizabeth's attitude towards parliamentary involvement in the discussions of the succession, her marriage, and religious policies. Gwinne thus acknowledges the anxieties of that diverse "loose coalition" of men like Sidney or Burghley, who championed what Collinson has described as "aspects of the Protestant Ascendancy", whether this be advocacy of a more militant foreign policy towards Catholic nations, or discussion of, the succession.⁴³ Arguably, by presenting Claudius as a ruler who ignores and belittles the desires of his subjects and counsellors, Gwinne allies with those, like Sidney or later like Essex, who felt frustrated by Elizabeth's disregard for her subjects.

Conclusion

While showing an awareness of the political controversies in court circles in this period, Gwinne makes no clear statement about his stance. From this we may conclude that he shares the ambivalence of Montaigne who, as Parmelee acknowledges, seems "far less concerned with who is right and who is wrong than he is with the damaging effects of the upheaval itself".⁴⁴ Gwinne argues that those who seek innovation as a remedy for

Babington Plot; see EMERSON PHILLIPS. *The English Campaign for the Execution of Mary: 1586-1588*, chap. 5.

⁴² COKE. *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt. In Thirteen Parts*, preface. Glenn Burgess makes the important point that Coke does not necessarily consider the use of royal prerogative to be a threat to the immutability of common law because he establishes the idea that prerogative is part of, not antithetical to, legal custom: see "The Political Thought of Sir Edward Coke", chap. 6, in BURGESS. *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution*, p. 165-208.

⁴³ COLLINSON. *Puritans, Men of Business and Elizabethan Parliaments*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ PARMELEE. *Good News from Fraunce French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England*, p. 124.

ills are naïve, since an unnecessary change to public life causes irreparable harm. In the second act, Gwinne draws attention to the fickleness of the people who are easily convinced that Nero's accession is something to be celebrated, merely because Nero represents the new face of Rome. An equestrian enters, and is apparently confused about the sequence of events which has just unfolded. "Where's Britannicus? Where's Claudius' son? Where's Britannicus?", he asks, and resigns himself to "follow the crowd", and "follow that version of events which is offered" (II.ii.675-678).⁴⁵ Gwinne here seems to echo the sentiments found in Montaigne's *Essais* where, in the "Apologie for Raymond Sebond", the philosopher laments the ease with which men cast off the old in favour of the new. In the piece, which Miles has described as Montaigne's "most belligerently sceptical" essays, Montaigne intervenes in debates about the French religious conflict by suggesting that France's religious problems stem from the weakness of man's attachment to faith itself.⁴⁶

...had we hold-fast on God by himselfe, and not by vs; had wee a divine foundation, then should not humane and worldly occasions have the power so to shake and totter vs as they have ... The love of novelties, the constraint of Princes; the good successe of one parties, the rash and casuall changing of our opinions, should not then have the power to shake and alter our beliefe.⁴⁷

This resonates in Gwinne's work where he outlines how men are too quick to turn their back on custom. Like Montaigne, Gwinne suggests that this constant desire to seek out change and novelty stems from a defect in man's character — the inability to separate the external ephemera from internal constancy. The implications of Gwinne's belief in terms of a political outlook are evident, for Gwinne favours the maintenance of hierarchy and order, however bad, over action to remedy any perceived ill within the state. Rather than seek to change the external environment

⁴⁵ "*Eques. Britannicus vbi est? Claudij proles vbi est? / Britannicus vbi est? nemo respondet? Sequar / Vnus frequentes: numerus excusat malos. / Oblata, nullo qui renitatur, sequar*" (GWINNE. *Nero tragaedia nova*, sig. D1v-D2r).

⁴⁶ MILES. *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, p. 93. Miles notes that the "Apologie" was a piece commissioned from Montaigne by Montaigne's father to defend the theology of Sebond against Protestant attack; see MILES. *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ MONTAIGNE. *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Militarie Discourses of Lo*, p. 253.

through intervention in public life, Gwinne urges men to remain steadfast and uphold order and custom.

References

BINNS, J. W. *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age*. Leeds: Francis Cairns Publications, 1990.

BUCKLEY, Emma. Matthew Gwinne's *Nero* (1603): Seneca, Academic Drama, and the Politics of Polity. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, Alberta, v. 40, n. 1, p. 16-33. 2013.

BURGESS, Glenn. *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1996.

CHARRON, Pierre. *Of Wisdome Written in French by Peter Charro[n] Doctor of Lawe in Paris*. Translated by Samson Lennard. London: Eliot's Court Press for Edward Blount and Will Aspley, 1608. STC 5051.

COKE, Edward. *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt. In Thirteen Parts*. Edited by John Henry Thomas and John Farquhar Fraser. London: Joseph Butterworth and Son, 1826. v. 2, Parts 3-4.

COLLINSON, Patrick. Puritans, Men of Business and Elizabethan Parliaments. In: _____. *Elizabethan Essays*. London: Hambledon Press, 1994. p. 59-86.

DAVIS, Joel. Multiple *Arcadias* and the Literary Quarrel between Fulke Greville and the Countess of Pembroke. *Studies in Philology*, Chapel Hill, v. 101, n. 4, p. 401-430, 2004. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2004.0019>

MONTAIGNE, Michel. *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Militarie Discourses of Lo. Michaell de Montaigne, Knight of the Noble Order of St. Michaell, and one of the Gentlemen in Ordinary of the French King, Henry the Third His Chamber*. The first booke. First written by him in French, and now done into English by him that hath inviolably vowed his labors to the aeternitie of their honors, whose names he hath severally inscribed in these his consecrated altares... Iohn Florio. Translated by John Florio. London: Val. Sims, 1603. STC 18041.

EMERSON PHILIPS, James. The English Campaign for the Execution of Mary: 1586-1588. In: _____. *Images of a Queen: Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-century Literature*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1964. p. 117-142.

FEINGOLD, M. *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560-1640*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

GAJDA, Alexandra. Tacitus and Political Thought in Early Modern Europe, c.1530-c.1640. In: WOODMAN, A.J. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p. 253-268.

GOODBURN, Celia Elizabeth. *Constancy and Commonwealth: Nero and English Political Culture c.1580-1630*. 2015. 287 p. Thesis (PhD in History) – University of York, England, 2016.

GWINN, Matthew. *Nero 1603*. Edited by Dana. F. Sutton. A hypertext critical edition, Philological Museum, University of Birmingham, 27 Nov. 1997, revised 20 Nov. 2012. Available from: <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/Nero/intro.html>>. Access on: 18 June, 2013.

GWINNE, Matthew. *Nero tragaedia noua*. Mattaeo Gwinne Med. Doct. Collegij Diui Ioannis Praecursoris apud Oxonienses socio collecta è Tacito, Suetonio, Dione, Seneca. London: Blounte, 1603. STC 12551.

HAMLIN, William M. *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the Essays in Shakespeare's Day*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199684113.001.0001>

HONAN, Park. Wriothesley, Henry, third earl of Southampton (1573–1624). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. [S.l.]: Oxford University Press, 2004. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30073>

MCGURK, J. J. N. Davies, Sir John (1560x63–1625). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. [S.l.]: Oxford University Press, 2008. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7242>

MILES, Geoffrey. *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

MONEY, D. K. Sandsbury, John (1575/6–1610). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. [S.l.]: Oxford University Press, 2008. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24644>

PARMELEE, Lisa Ferraro. *Good Newes from Fraunce French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 1996.

SIDNEY, Philip, Sir. Philip Sydney to Queen Elizabeth, An. 1580, Perswading her not to Marry with the Duke of Anjou. In: COLLINS, Arthur (Ed.). *Letters and Memorials of State in the Reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, King James, King Charles the First, Part of the Reign of King Charles the Second, and Oliver's Usurpation*. London: Osborne, 1746. p. 287-292.

SIDNEY, Philip. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*. Edited by Victor Skretkowicz. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

STUART, James (King James I). *The Political Works of James I*: Reprinted from the Edition of 1616. Edited by Charles Howard McIlwain. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918.

VILLEY, Pierre. *Les Sources et l'évolution des essais de Montaigne*. Paris: Librairie Hachette & Co., 1908. v. 1.

WORDEN, Blair. *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1996.

WRIGHT, Ian. Gwinne, Matthew (1558–1627). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. [S.l.]: Oxford University Press, 2008. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11813>

YATES, Frances A. *John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

Recebido em: 31 de maio de 2018.

Aprovado em: 21 de setembro de 2018.