

The Head and the Hands on the Rostra: *Marcus Tullius Cicero* as a Sign of Its Time

DALE B. J. RANDALL

*The Common-wealth is ful of tumors,
And each day repugnant humors
Threaten the downfall of this frame. . . .
(Marcus Tullius Cicero, B2*)*

Harking back to Jonson's *Catiline* (1611) and reminding us that that work was the most frequently cited earlier play in mid-seventeenth-century England, *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651) is a carefully crafted, Senecan-flavored, politically oriented work that emphatically fulfills Jonson's call for "truth of argument" in a tragedy.¹ In *Catiline* Jonson had praised Cicero as

. . . the *Consul*,
Whose vertue, counsell, watchfulnesse, and wisdom,
Hath free'd the common-wealth, and without tumult,
Slaughter, or bloud, or scarce raising a force,
Rescu'd vs all. . . .

(5.304-8)

Forty years later, *Marcus Tullius Cicero* provided a similarly laudatory view of a post-consular Cicero. The play opens with Julius Caesar's ghost (as *Catiline* opens with Sylla's²) and thence proceeds to depict with reasonable historical fidelity the course of Cicero's final months. Though it has long been submerged in the flood of publications that poured forth from the mid-century presses and probably has been lost the more readily because its author chose to remain anonymous, *Marcus Tullius Cicero* is a good play to read and know about.³ As one comes to see that it tells Cicero's story with gravity, dignity, and skill, one senses that it also may be read as an expression of the anti-monarchic feeling of a much later time.

After the assassination of Caesar on 15 March 44, the Cicero of history became head of the republican party that decried the rapid rise to power of Marcus Antonius. During the following fall, winter, and spring (between 2 September 44 and 21 April 43), he wrote a series of orations attacking Antonius, somewhat facetiously calling them his *Philippics* because of their similarity to Demosthenes's speeches against Philip of Macedonia. The *Philippics*, which are specifically named three times in *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, were a major means of warning Rome about the dangers of Antonine ambition. Regarding the killing of Caesar, in which he himself had played no part, Cicero acknowledged that "everybody who did not want to be a slave gained thereby, but"—and here was the rub—"particularly you [i.e., Antonius]; for not only are you no slave, you are a monarch" (*Philippics* 2.35). Cicero claimed that "Your abominable crimes make Catiline look tolerable in retrospect" (13.21). "What is there in Antonius," he asked, "save lust, cruelty, insolence, audacity? He is wholly compact of these vices" (3.28). Understandably, Antonius and his newly confederate triumvirs, Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, called for the proscription of Cicero. He was assassinated on 7 December 43, and by order of Antonius his head and hands were displayed in the Forum. Not far from the senate house and the Temple of Concord, they were nailed to the rostra, the platform from which orators addressed the people.

The seventeenth-century English play that dramatizes this story is highly literate in every sense. It devotes some of its lightest as well as its most serious moments to remarks on the character of Stoics, Epicureans, Pythagoreans, and Academics (that is, followers of the New Academy, such as Cicero himself). It brings in references to Herodotus and Sallust, to Homer, Pindar, and Ennius, and to "Anser, . . . who sings the praise / Of Antony in verse" (C1'). Most important, the central character himself is both a statesman and a man of letters; the full title of the play is *The Tragedy of That Famous Roman Oratour Marcus Tullius Cicero*. Almost of necessity, then, the words and thoughts of this "great *Patritian* of the speaking Art" (B1') are not merely presented but also discussed in the play. One minor character asks another, for example, "How does my fellow *Academick*? canst / Digest my Lords discourse of *Summum bonum*?" (B1'v)—apparently

a reference to Cicero's *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*. Moreover, the play offers a complementary spectrum of figures that includes an "Academick" named Philologus who has been trained by Cicero (E4'), a vinously inclined poet and former pupil named Laureas, and a would-be historian named Tyro (historically, Tiro was the name of Cicero's secretary), as well as Cicero's "studious" nephew, Quintus Junior (D1'). Eventually we come also to a group of vatic soothsayers ("Hetruscian Vates" [D3']). Altogether these varied kinds of word-men strut their brief hour in the text in such a way as to draw the mind repeatedly to the capabilities and disabilities of each. (Perhaps it is helpful here to recall Shakespeare's use in *Julius Caesar* of a soothsayer and two poets.) Philologus sceptically and tellingly holds that "scribbling Fblers are sly creatures" (C1'), Laureas seems to see "the Soul / Of History" in a glass of wine (C1'), and Tyro calls up parallel stories that juxtapose past events with present ones. Naturally it is Cicero himself who best understands the reaches of which poetry is capable:

O 'tis the language of the Gods when Virtue
Is made her theam; they prostitute the Muses,
And turn *Parnassus* to a stews, that cloath
Their unwasht fancies in these sacred weeds.
(B2')

All the greater the irony, then, when Cicero is finally betrayed by his brother's manumitted man, a student of words, Philologus.

The sophisticated literateness of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* might be said to extend to the fact that it is the sort of tragedy that both reflects and distances itself from examples of the revenge tragedy. The opening speech by Julius Caesar's ghost informs us unequivocally that "*Caesar* must be reveng'd" (B1'), enabling us to say that the spirit of Caesar, like personified Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, hovers over the entire play. The central character, however, instead of being a revenger such as one finds in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, or even *The Bastard*, is a victim somewhat akin to the sympathetic central characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The Queen of Corsica*, who are shown to endure a sort of martyrdom. Beyond this, it is reasonably clear in *Marcus Tullius Cicero* that the victim is presented not merely

as a particular, idealized individual (his historical flaws are largely air-brushed away) but also as an emblem. Caesar's foreboding opening soliloquy makes the point with a curse:

. . . *Rome*, [thou] shalt . . . be plagued, and among
 Thy other evils lose thy sacred Tongue,
 The great *Patritian* of the speaking Art,
 Then shal thy griefs lie fettered in thy heart,
 And speak no other language but of tears;
 Words shall be strangled by thy stupid fears.
 (B1')

In losing Cicero, Rome will lose her freedom to speak. At the end, in keeping with the tendency of revenge tragedy to display body parts for horrific dramatic effect—head, hand, heart, finger, and leg—we have, besides Cicero's own head and hands, the heads of some of his supporters. Furthermore, veering away from Plutarch, the playwright has found a way both to reify the metaphor of Caesar's curse and to make explicit the symbolism of the action that follows it: Cicero's tongue is cut out of his head—cut, according to this version, by the turncoat scholar Philologus, who has switched his allegiance to Antonius. Antonius's wife, Fulvia, who has earlier called Cicero "Tongue-valiant" (B3'), makes her triumphant final exit bearing his tongue on her silver bodkin. There follows a fleeting moment which hints of counter-revenge (Philologus is turned over to Cicero's enraged sister-in-law), but there is no slightest sign of hope-bearing light on the horizon, no virtuous young heir or wise leader such as comes forward at the close of many English tragedies. Instead, Antonius speaks the final lines, and the bleak, rather Senecan irony of the whole is darkened for the last time when we hear his confirmation that Caesar's initial, ghostly desire for revenge has long been paralleled among living men by that of his erstwhile friend and supporter. Victorious amidst the gore, Antonius says, "*my long wisht for aim is wonne*" (E4').

If we should wonder why *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was published in 1651, several kinds of suggestive evidence are available. Among these are the auspices under which the work was printed, the turbulent current of discourse into which it was introduced, its Jonsonian connections, and the nature of the exempling to be found within the

play itself. The last of these will occupy most of our attention here and may prove useful in reading other plays of the period, but our most immediate reward for synthesizing the evidence in the case is learning about a play worth knowing.

To begin, if we bear in mind how readers of many periods have acknowledged that meanings lie partly in the eyes of the beholder, we may work the more readily with the fact that whenever *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was written (we do not know), the date printed on its title page is 1651.⁴ The title page informs us also that the bookseller was John Sweeting, who sold his wares at the sign of the Angel in Popes-head Alley. Sweeting was a bookman who sold such items as Donne's poems, Brome's plays (*The Novella*, *The Court Beggar*, *The City Wit*), and Quarles's *Shepherds Oracles*—which used pastoral conventions to convey observations on the times. Perhaps more tellingly, the printer of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was Richard Cotes, who operated at the Barbican in Aldersgate Street. A major printer of the day, Cotes was appointed official printer to the City of London in 1642 (Plomer 53). Thus we find him producing *Joabs Counsell and King Davids Seasonable Hearing It. Delivered in a Sermon before the Honourable House of Commons, at Their Late Solemne Fast, . . . by W. Bridges* (1643)—in which sermon Bridges held "That the King must command not onely according to Gods, but Mans Law also" (A4'). And we have another example of Cotes's craft in Thomas Carter's *Prayers Prevalencie for Israels Safety. Declared in a Sermon Preached in Saint Margarets Westminster, before the Honourable House of Commons, at the Late Solemne Feast* (1643); herein Carter asks, "hath not the Lord raised you up (most Noble Senators) as he once did that Pillar to the Israelites . . . ?" (A2'). Moreover, in 1643 Parliament chose Cotes to serve as one of several searchers, which means that he was supposed to help silence subversive—that is, anti-Parliamentary—publication (Plomer xvii, xiii). Though the Parliamentary plan for searching proved ineffectual, we may ponder the fact that Cotes was viewed by his contemporaries as a man suitable for discovering anti-Parliament presses, and presumably for disabling them and bringing the guilty printers or workmen to justice.

Why such a play at such a time? The evidence that lies scattered about in other publications of the years 1650 and 1651 is almost

dazzlingly rich and complex. During this period of political incertitude following the execution of King Charles, many disparate voices strained to be heard. In 1650 we find G. W.'s (George Wither's?) *Respublica Anglicana* ("wherein the Parliament and Army are Vindicated" by the necessity of "secluding the Members, laying aside the King, and House of Lords"). Thomas Hobbes argued in *De Corpore Politico* that "Decision in all Debates . . . [is] annexed to the Sword" (2.9). Thomas May, the poet, playwright, and former royalist, was now sufficiently converted to write an ostensibly objective but actually justificatory *History of the Parliament of England*. But *An Exercitation Concerning Usurped Powers*, apparently by Edward Gee the elder and in any case by one said to be noted for "His eminent fidelity to the Parliament" (A2'), held that the obedience due to lawful magistrates was not owed to usurping powers. Also chewing on the gritty pill of what was best or right to do was the author of *A Briefe Resolution, of That Grand Case of Conscience (Necessary for These Times) Concerning the Allegiance Due to a Prince Ejected by Force out of His Kingdome, and How Farre the Subjects May Comply with a Present Usurped Power*. Meanwhile Milton, bringing out a revised second edition of *Eikonoklastes* in 1650, found it useful to compare Charles I with Julius Caesar. More specifically, he compared Charles's *Eikon Basilike* with Caesar's will:

that some men (whether this were by him intended, or by his Friends) have by policy accomplish'd after death that revenge upon thir Enemies, which in life they were not able, hath been oft related.

(A4')

Thus one might say that Milton paralleled the ghosts of Caesar and Charles.

The following year, 1651, brought Hobbes's *Leviathan* (with its monarchic leanings) and Robert Douglas's *Forme . . . of the Coronation of Charles the Second . . . at Scoone, the First Day of January, 1651*. Works of this sort were countered by *An Act Prohibiting Correspondence with Charles Stuart or His Party* and by David Brown's *To the Supream Authority of England, the Parliament*. Yet another voice against the threat of Prince Charles was raised in *Anglia Liberata, or, The Rights of the People of England, Maintained Against the Pretences of the Scottish King*; and one that attempted to rationalize the past so that readers might

be induced to reason in the present was heard in *Englands Apology, for Its Late Change: or, A Sober Perswasive, of All Dis-affected or Dissembling Persons, to a Seasonable Engagement, for the Settlement of This Common-wealth*. One may therefore say that a whole complex of inter-related problems is inherent in the title of William Lilly's *Monarchy or No Monarchy in England*, which was registered with the Stationers on 6 August 1651.

But why does *Marcus Tullius Cicero* in 1651 hark back to Ben Jonson's *Catiline* of 1611? Though there is never a single or simple answer to a question of this sort, we should take into account such things as the strong classical bent of Renaissance English education, the continuing high repute of Jonson (an English classicist), the emphasis on idea that results from Jonson's rather a-theatrical handling of his Roman tragedies, the particular attention that *Catiline* appears to have attracted at mid-century, and Jonson's treatment in *Catiline* of a major episode in Cicero's earlier life that provided a natural lead-in to a play about that great orator's later life. To these interlocking kinds of evidence we should add the related and deeply ingrained seventeenth-century habit of associating England with Rome. As Hobbes observes in *Leviathan*, men

have undertaken to kill their Kings, because the Greek and Latine writers, in their books, and discourses of Policy, make it lawfull, and laudable, for any man so to do; provided before he do it, he call him Tyrant. For they say not *Regicide*, that is, killing of a King, but *Tyrannicide*, that is, killing of a Tyrant is lawfull.

(2.29, pp. 170-71)

As a case in point we have Milton, who, thinking of Charles I, turns specifically to the second *Philippic* of Cicero, saying, "I will repeat some of his words: 'All good men killed Caesar as far as in them lay'" (*Defence* 326-7). Moreover, to press the Catilinian connection just a bit further, it is clear that a half century earlier, while illustrating his belief in tragedy's need for "truth of argument," Jonson had simultaneously engaged in the ancient Roman strategy of incorporating oblique commentary on one's own time (DeLuna, Patterson 1982, and Lawry). Eight years before *Catiline*, in fact, his *Sejanus* had caused him to be called before the Privy Council and charged with treason.

Nevertheless, the best evidence on the question of why *Marcus Tullius Cicero* appeared when it did is provided by the play itself. Some readers may choose to concentrate on other aspects of the work or merely say with Cicero's sister-in-law, Pompiona, that "I feel a kind of pleasure in the story / Of woes compleat and perfect" (E3'), but it is in keeping with the play as a whole to pay particular attention to the view of her son, young Quintus, of whom she asks, after he calls to mind the story of Croesus's mute son (and one should note the play's continuing concern for delimited communication), "What Genius has inform'd my *Quintus* fancy, / That he still meditates on such examples?" (D2'). The dramatist, of course, is not being anachronistic here. In *De Officiis* we find Cicero himself remarking to his son Marcus—who is off studying at Athens—"I much prefer to illustrate my point with foreign examples than with those of our own state" (1967: 2.8). Quintilian defines an "example" as "the adducing of some past action real or assumed which may serve to persuade the audience of the truth of the point which we are trying to make" (5.11.6), and observes that "reference to historical parallels is the quickest method of securing assent" (3.8.36). Practically all authorities, he says, regard examples from history as providing especially valuable bases for reasoning because "as a rule history seems to repeat itself" (3.8.66). By having Pompiona wonder what brings particular "examples" to her son Quintus's mind, therefore, the writer of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* almost inevitably induces us to "meditate" on his own present "example."

It is inherent in the nature of Renaissance literary exemplum—and also constitutes one of its pleasures, then and now—that readers are expected to participate by calling to mind apposite elements.⁵ Of course our success is likely to be the greater insofar as we have grasped the general purport of the work. In the present case, no one will ever be able to say for sure what the writer of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* had in mind, and yet if we go directly to the anti-monarchic message that he assigned to the eldest soothsayer, we will have a key that is consonant with the admonition that he has Cicero give the old man: "be not Aenigmatically, nor shroud / Your Speeches in a dark mysterious cloud" (D3'). The only words that the seer speaks are these:

Then fathers, hear your dismal fate,
 Your freedom shall be lost, your state
 Converted to a Monarchy,
 And all be slaves but only I.]
 (D3')

Plain as they are, such words call for no gloss, unless it be to note that according to the Ciceros of both history and the play, monarchic power was to be vested in Rome's consuls, for, once fallen into the hands of any individual, whatever he be called, it spelled disaster. Hence we may say that the soothsayer, who falls dead immediately after speaking, escapes.

The provocatively interesting truth is, however, that while this play is rich with intelligently wrought evidence, and that while apposite monarchic and anti-monarchic publications from the period abound, we are likely to draw a blank in trying to identify a specific English Cicero from 1650-1651. Furthermore, despite the playwright's interest in exemplifying, the action of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* in many ways jars with rather than parallels what we know of the major historical action in England at the time. On the other hand, we are warned to be on particular guard in the matter when, within the play itself, Pompiona protests to her son that the narrative "President" (precedent) he cites in his commentary on current events "coheres not" (D2').⁶ It is partly thus that we are brought to realize that for this intelligent Roman youth, while relevance does indeed inhere in coherence, coherence does not depend on congruence. In fact, while the well-known action of the play is in many ways at variance with what we know of the basic history of England in 1650-1651, we could scarcely expect to find a drama that works more directly and strongly with some of the ideas and passions, perhaps especially the fears, that then filled the air. In other words, we could hardly expect to find a better example of a play whose narrative incongruencies with its time are so complexly and interestingly counterbalanced by its contemporary ideological and emotional relevance.⁷

The underlying source of "coherence" suggested most strongly by the play may be approached by various means, including the dramatist's presentation of the figures of Julius Caesar, Caesar's "son" and heir Octavius Caesar, and the ruthlessly ambitious soldier, Marcus

Antonius. Despite some inevitable incongruencies, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that these three may be seen in part as historical vehicles marshaled to convey and arouse ideas and feelings about, respectively, Charles I, Prince Charles, and Cromwell.

However self-sufficient the play may be as the dramatization of a turning point in Roman history, the theme-setting opening speech by the ghost of "butcher'd *Julius*" (B1') is likely to call to mind that more recently "butcher'd" monarch, Charles I. In fact, if we recall either Milton's parallel of Caesar with Charles or the historical Cicero's observation that Caesar "now continues his domination more than ever after his death" (*De Officiis* 1967: 2.7) or the broadly suggestive observation of Willson that "Charles haunted the Independents from his grave" (390), we may better hear the contemporary resonance of the ghost's prediction that "a heavier hand / Shall make thee stoop to Sovereign command" (B1'). And we may catch more overtones in his exculpatory words:

My glory was, that Fortune did afford
That royall power to doe thee good I would,
And Nature heart to will the good I could.
But I was too too mild. . . .

(B1')

The play is by no means blind to the dangers that Caesar posed (and Charles, after all, was executed as a tyrant, traitor, and murderer), yet it also has a touch of sympathy for him. As the first chorus sings, "*A King is but a Royall slave*" (calling to mind the title of William Cartwright's play of 1636) and "*A Scepter's but a glorious name*" (B4').

Caesar's adopted son and successor, Octavius, is at first viewed by Cicero, despite his own republican commitment, as "A youth / Ordain'd by Heaven to doe his Countrey good" (B4'). The tribune Salvius, however, is dubious about Octavius's intentions:

Was't ever known a youth
Of his hot spirit, was so much devoted
Unto his Countrey cause without some plot
To strengthen his ambitious aims?

(B3')

Cicero is willing to gamble on the hope that by aiding Octavius he will be keeping Antonius in check. It turns out, however, that Octavius (who is twenty years old, the age of Prince Charles in 1650), does indeed have his own agenda. We hear him musing that "The Senators, those Nestors of the State, / Disturb the fair *praeludium* of my Glories" (C3"). Despite Cicero's hope that the youth may be won "To have some pity on the State" (C4'), the Chorus knows that "*now an upstart scarce unboyd, / Unto an age of iron gives new date*" (D2'). Soon we hear Octavius conclude that

We must complot a Tragedy; the *Postscripts*
Must be culled out; shall *Cicero* then dy?
Alas, how piety struggles in my brest.
This mouth, this tongue which now must speak his death,
Was wont to call him Father; shall I then
Become a Paricide?

(D3')

The answer is "It must be so." Octavius says, "*Ambition thus must thought of pity smother*" (D3').

As the historical story requires, Octavius has by this time joined forces with Antonius and Lepidus. Cicero knows that all "*State-usurpers think of nought but blood,*" and inevitably "*when they consult tis to devour the good*" (D2'). Of the foes he must deal with, however, Antonius is the most dangerous. It is chiefly at Antonius's behest that the triumvirs include Cicero among those doomed to death. At this point, veering from history into tradition, the playwright has Antonius offer Cicero a deadly choice:

... if you will but burn your *Orations* which you call your *Philippicks* compiled
only out of malice and rancour against me, you shall liue; otherwise—
(D4')⁸

This Antonius would try to induce Cicero to proscribe his own works. Thus the dramatist contrives to emphasize the subject of silencing. In effect, of course, Antonius offers a choice and no choice, and in sorrow and pride Cicero's brother, Quintus Senior, asks,

... what sepulcher
Can be more fit, more glorious then the same

Wherein his countreys freedome lies enclosed?

(D4^v)

Having meditated both on taking his own life and outfacing death as Socrates did, Cicero decides to flee ("To be, is better . . . / Then not to be at all" [D3^v]). Nonetheless, he sees the handwriting on the wall, and his nobler self realizes that it is good "Not to survive ones countreys liberty" (D3^v). Instead of developing the idea that Cicero in a sense will never die so long as his writings survive, the playwright elects to show how the deaths of Cicero and liberty converge.

With the lively realization that these ancient Roman events conflict in multiple ways with seventeenth-century English ones, it remains noteworthy that Prince Charles, who shortly after his father's death was deprived of the succession by order of Parliament (the monarchy was abolished on 17 March 1649), was nevertheless considered by many to have succeeded automatically as Charles II when his father died. On 1 January 1651 he did, in fact, accept a crown at Scone. For some while prior to this he had striven to make his military prowess felt, and hence made himself a source of concern to many. In May, 1650, the reversible Marchamont Nedham, sometime apologist for the royalists but now a paid spokesman for Parliament, argued pointedly in *The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated* that it was better to support the existing government than to gamble on the unknown dangers that could result from unsettling it. All of Charles's efforts, in any case, eventually came to ruin with the death of Montrose and then his own defeat at Worcester. James Graham, Earl of Montrose, who was probably Charles's best and noblest supporter, was hanged, beheaded, and dismembered on 21 May 1650. A month later, on 27 June, Charles came upon an arm of his friend that the Scots had hung over the gate of Aberdeen. Not until September 1651, when over a year more had passed, did Charles himself come to that major turning point of the period, his own defeat at Worcester by Cromwell.

A more commanding figure than Prince Charles, Oliver Cromwell became first president of the Council of State soon after the execution of Charles I, and in March Parliament created him Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He arrived in Dublin that August and thereafter proceeded

to put down the rebels with implacable severity, especially at the siege of Drogheda. A great many people were massacred by his troops, and, fairly or not, he was widely anathematized as a ruthless man of blood. Following these achievements, he returned to London (31 May 1650) and a short while later (26 June) was appointed commander-in-chief of all military forces in the Commonwealth. In July he left to take up his command in the North, and in September, at Dunbar, he won one of the most decisive battles of his entire career. Then he marched on to Edinburgh and Leith, and eventually, in September of 1651, came southward to triumph over Charles at Worcester.

However one interprets Cromwell's complex character and motives, he was an imposing military figure who was often accused of monarchic ambitions. In a pamphlet bluntly titled *A Coffin for King Charles: A Crowne for Cromwell: A Pit for the People* (1649), Cromwell says to the people, "You must be props unto our pride, / and slaves to our command" (Wright 120). If we recall Antonius's "*my long wisht for aim, is wonne*" from *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, we may be the more struck when Cromwell in this pamphlet admits,

So, so, the deed is done,
 the royall head is severed
 As I meant, when I first begunne,
 and strongly have indeavord.

(Wright 117)

Even before Charles's death, *Passes Granted, by the Free-born People of England, to Severall of the Most Perjur'd Rebels* (1648) designated the "Copper-nose cut-throat" Cromwell as "*The High and Mighty, King Oliver*" (A4^v); and *The Second Part of Craftie Crumwell* (1648) carried the satiric sub-title *Oliver in His Glory as King*. In the summer following Charles's death, Cromwell was bitterly hailed as "mighty King Nol" (Frank 243), and still later and closer to the time when *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was published we find him mocked coarsely in *The Right Picture of King Olivre from Top to Toe* (1650).

It is not for nothing that "ambition" is a key word in the play. "Ambition is a precipice," says Cicero, thinking of Antonius, "and the sky / At which he aimes his shafts . . . too high" (B4^v). Later he

exclaims, "How feeble, how ridiculous a madness / Is fond Ambition" (D1^v). To safeguard ourselves against sentimentalizing the historical figure of Cicero, however, and at the same time to place in perspective the play's scornful handling of ambition as well as the severing of Cicero's head, hands, and tongue, we may recall his observation regarding Caesar as "the supreme example of a man whose ambition was to be . . . master of the world." "Anyone who says that this is an honourable goal," writes Cicero, "is mad" (*De Officiis* 1967: 3.21). He has earlier said of tyrants,

They are a poisonous and wicked breed who need to be banished from human society. For just as limbs which have become shrivelled and lifeless . . . are amputated, so these monsters, who are really wild animals in human disguise, need to be cut off from the body, as it were, of human society.

(3.6)

Providing an effective foil to ambition as well as an important "example" that has been missing from our consideration thus far, the playwright also gives us Cicero's friend Brutus. Cicero holds that Brutus's

. . . very name, and blood
Fatale to State-usurpers were sufficient
To fortifie our drooping souls, and raise them
From thought of servitude.

(B4^v)

He is "my beloved *Brutus*" (C4^v) and "my dearest *Brutus*" (E1^v). The striking fact is, however, that the noble tyrannicide appears in not a single scene, and Cicero reflects that

. . . this afflicts me most, that these calamities
Should happen at a season so unfortunate,
When *Brute* and *Cassius* are so far remote. . . .

(D1)

Cassius is remembered, but Brutus is most missed. An honorable man, eminently capable of performing high service to the State and still very much alive in the mind of Cicero, Brutus is now far away. Literally he is supposed to be in Macedonia, but the more important facts are that he is inaccessible and he is silent. Cicero exclaims, "That

Brutus were at home now! we would loose / Our dearest bloud, before our liberty" (D1'). We may conclude that the playwright's scattered allusions to Brutus serve to introduce a strain of ironic pathos that is nicely suited to tragedy, especially since everyone likely to lay eyes upon the play knows that on one bad day at Philippi Brutus eventually will fall upon his sword, sadly aware, as we are seeing and reading here, that the struggle for patriotic republicanism has been for nought. The conclusion of Brutus's story, as well as his continuing absence here except as a memory in other men's minds, might well be expected to trigger some readers' thoughts.

From our own varied perspectives three or so centuries after the play was printed, when the world has seen a good many more tyrants and dictators, there are assuredly multiple ways to read the play. The cutting off of Cicero's head and hands and even his very tongue may be seen to result in a silence more eloquent and universal than any words.⁹ If we attempt to view the play in a specifically seventeenth-century framework, however, perhaps it is a different irony that stands out above all the rest. Although the tragedy of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* ends with a vindictive Antonius gloating triumphantly over Cicero, every reader knows that that colossal soldier himself was fated to be defeated by Octavius at Actium in 30 B.C. Not too much later (27 B.C.), Octavius would be given the title "Augustus" because it granted distinction without monarchic connotations, but eventually, of course, it was as Caesar Augustus that he would go down in history. Though the Chorus laments that "*Julius is turn'd his Genius, we fear*" (D2')—that is, his tutelary spirit—neither the playwright nor his bookseller could have known in 1651 that about nine years later Charles would return to England in triumph as king. The "coherence" of the exemplum continued to hold.

In trying to reconstruct the seventeenth-century frame of this anti-monarchic play as best we can, it is probably advisable to factor in also the observation that monarchy's opponents in Parliament and the Army were themselves sometimes at odds. As far back as the winter of 1648, it was Cromwell and Ireton who gave orders for soldiers to seize and excise certain members from Parliament. It was thus that the Rump came into being. Though presumably purged of undesirable voices, Parliament continued to be a chorus that did

not always sing in unison. On the other hand, however varied the views of the Rumpers themselves, large parts of the nation had no voice at all in the Commons. Then, too, however one is to interpret Cromwell's motives in the years 1649 to 1653 (from the time of the King's execution until his own acceptance of the Protectorship), Cromwell was a powerful figure, and the breach, sometimes papered over, that subsequently widened between the Army and Parliament (the Army wanted an election, but none was held) would finally result in 1653 in his total silencing of England's "senate." "I say you are no Parliament!" he would shout. Then his troopers would enter and empty the house. This was a grand climax, of course, a turning point that would occur about two years after the publication of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, but throughout the period there had been silencings and reprisals of various sorts. Many men's hands and tongues were tied if not cut off. Perhaps most notably, on 19 March 1649 the Commons abolished the House of Lords.¹⁰ On 17 July that year came an *Act Declaring What Offenses Shall Be Adjudged Treason*, which proclaimed anyone guilty who wrote or printed that the government was tyrannical, and on 20 September came the most severe Act against publishing since the 1637 Star Chamber decree. As Potter summarizes, "Imprisonment and fines silenced or converted many writers" (19). In 1651, at about the time *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was published, Milton himself, author of the *Areopagitica* (1644), was serving as a licenser.

In 1651, the choice of Cicero as an image to explore such matters could hardly have been bettered. Besides being well calculated to express republican fidelity and dismay, it would have gained considerable strength from the fact that the study of Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Officiis* had long played an important role in the education of youths slated to provide political and administrative service to the State. Cicero had in some sense been a major advisor and teacher to this generation. As Roger L'Estrange wrote in his translation of *De Officiis*, "*This Treatise of Offices, I find to be one of the Commonest School-Books that we have*" (A5). The playwright could safely assume that many of his readers would be familiar with Cicero's values and views. They would know that Cicero believed the best government to be that which was a mix of monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic principles—provided that consuls

represented the first and the Senate the second, and that the people, while free, were charged with few specifically political acts. Above all, as the English reader would likely know, Cicero believed in the pre-eminence of the Senate. The playwright's chief task, then, was to shape his representation of Cicero's death as a grim and pertinent "example," a sort of last-minute, warning philippic before "the downfall of our liberty, / (And heaven knows what calamities. . .)" (D4^v).

Though we do not know who he was and though reasonable discretion cautions against rushing in to deduce the nature of a writer from the nature of his work, especially from a drama, we may hazard the hypothesis that the creator of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* was a politically committed, well-read, and highly literate sort of English Ciceronian, apparently supportive of a mixed government in which the Parliament had a major voice. Above all, he seems to have felt antagonistic to any sort of single-person magistracy, whether by inheritance or conquest, and to have concluded, like his idealized protagonist, that he was witnessing the dreadful signs of a return to monarchy. In short, the temptation to perceive Cicero as his mouthpiece is great.

Whatever specific elements we choose to call forth as illuminants from the English world of 1650-1651, the play's insistence on the idea of parallels makes it reasonably clear that some amalgam of contemporary facts and fears must be seething in the workings of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*. Furthermore, although this play about the tragic fall of a commonwealth whose "sacred Tongue" is silenced is in some ways off-target (there is no obvious English Cicero at the time), we may reasonably suppose that, in the playwright's words, the "shroud" or "dark mysterious cloud" of his play has been created in the hope that it will not remain totally impenetrable. There is something self-denying in the fact that the poet in the play is so stricken by events—his own voice "strangled by a throng of struggling sighs" (E3^v)—that he feels he must desist and leave it to the historian to "Tell . . . the Tragick story" (E3^v). Then again, the poet-dramatist of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, himself a dealer in history if ever there were one, surely would have us reflect on Cicero's claim that Poetry is "the language of the Gods when Virtue / Is made her theam" (B2^v). He has produced here an anguished paean to doomed virtue in the

form of a tragedy in verse. Having succeeded during its course in piquing our interest and complicating our thoughts by inducing us to ponder dimension-adding parallels to his story, at its close he probably would have us reflect on the fact that Caesar's revenge is to see Caesarism restored. It should be said that we will remain completely faithful to the dynamics of the play if we find cause in it to consider that the brutal silencing of virtuous men in any time and place—Rome, England, or elsewhere—is a tragedy sufficient to inspire real pity and terror in those who are left to watch. Still, the parallels that link *Marcus Tullius Cicero* with its own troubled time of publication are likely to illumine it best. Whenever it was written, there is a special, mid-seventeenth-century English urgency in the soothsayer's warning to Cicero that "Your freedom shall be lost, your state / Converted to a Monarchy." In 1651 the prospect of a return to monarchy in the larger-than-life person of Oliver Cromwell—who eventually would be offered the crown three times—was apparently enough to plunge at least one freedom-loving Englishman into creative despair.

Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

NOTES

¹Jonson's well-known criteria appear in his remarks "To the Readers" preceding *Sejanus* (H&S 4.350, ll. 18-20). For the present study of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (Wing B4902) I rely on my notes from a British Library copy (643.d.11) and a microfilm of the Huntington Library copy. The 1650 edition designated by Wing as B4901 appears to be a ghost. Ignored or discounted in the bibliographies of Greg (2.xii and 818), Bentley (1370-71), and Harbage-Schoenbaum-Wagonheim (150-51), it may have been conjured from the notation "feb 1650" written in the Thomason copy (E. 784. [2]) at the British Library (*Catalogue of Pamphlets*, 829). Wing notwithstanding, I find no record of a BL copy of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* from 1650 (*British Library General Catalogue*, 62.435; and personal letter from Thomas L. Berger, 28 October 1990). Also contrary to Wing, there is no 1650 copy at the Bodleian (cf. *Catalogus Librorum Impressorum Bibliothecae Bodlianae*, 3.135; instead, Bodleian Malone 57 (2) corresponds to Wing B4902; personal letter from Matthew Sheldon, 2 November 1990).

²In the first two pages of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* there are references to both Sylla and Catiline.

³Wing conjectures the work to be by Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628), apparently because of an attribution made by Edward Phillips in 1675 (ii.47). The ascription has been discredited or ignored by students of Brooke, however, from the time of Grosart ("necessarily excluded" [1.xiv]), Croll (35), and Lee ("Brooke has been wrongly credited" [8.602-06]) to that of Bullough (2.5), Rebholz (328-31, 340), Rees (138), and Larson (43). In both Bentley (1370-71) and *The British Library General Catalogue of Printed Books* (62.435), the work is considered anonymous.

The sole critical discussion I have found of *Marcus Tullius Cicero* is by Aggeler. It devotes a few pages (68-70) to the play and is helpful for placing it in an inter-regnum context.

⁴The previously mentioned notation in the Thomason copy, which changes the printed "1651" to "feb 1650," suggests that the book may have appeared very early in what we nowadays reckon to be 1651.

⁵The most helpful discussion of this matter may be found in Wallace.

⁶According to Alan Roper, "The most common Restoration synonym for *parallel* was . . . *precedent*, and pamphleteers and versifiers argued their cases by showing the aptness of past precedents to present examples" (41). The Bridges sermon noted previously on Joab's "counsel" to King David begins with the idea that "Coherence . . . will be easily gathered by the reading of the History" (B1'), that is, the history in 2 Samuel 19.5-8. The use of analogues in sermons is, of course, ubiquitous.

⁷The view expressed here is comparable to that of Aggeler. For an overall exploration of topicality and indirection in mid-seventeenth-century English writings see Patterson 1984 and Potter.

⁸In his *Suasoriae* Seneca the Elder included sections entitled "Cicero Deliberates Whether to Beg Antony's Pardon" (6) and "Antony Promises to Spare Cicero's Life if He Burns His Writings: Cicero Deliberates Whether to Do So" (7).

⁹The irony is the greater if one recalls the historical Cicero's famous claim in his "De Consulatu": "that arms must give place to the toga and the laurel of triumph to the tongue" (*Poems* 13, 77).

¹⁰One of the senators in the play exclaims,

What have we done my Lords? given up our liberty,
Without the shedding of one drop of blood?
Twill grow a custome for Ambitious men
T' usurp the offices of State. . . .

(D1')

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