

Once More to the Rostra (An Answer to John Morrill)

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Having learned that my essay on *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651) in the first number of *Connotations* was considered by John Morrill to have performed “a signal service” to scholars, I have been content to let his less positive observations be weighed by such readers as come upon them. Nevertheless, having been invited to do so, I now offer a response.

To begin at the beginning, I would say that it is indubitably correct to observe that the English theaters were ordered closed in 1642. It is likewise true that techniques deriving from drama crop up in many different sorts of seventeenth-century English writing (regarding this subject, one of the most striking examples, published well before the theatrical ban, would be Prynne’s *Histrio-mastix* [1633], a monumental, thousand-page, anti-theater diatribe that is structured in “acts” and “scenes”). It is incorrect, however, to deduce that after 1642 playable dramatic works ceased to be composed, printed, and performed. (The most famous example of pre-Restoration performance, I should think, would be Davenant’s *Siege of Rhodes, I*, presented before a paying audience at Rutland House in 1656.) Moreover, it strikes me as unwise to suppose that even unperformed works—provided we could identify them—would necessarily be unperformable. Why should a people accustomed to writing and reading plays be expected to abandon their long-held conventions relating to these activities? I think it more prudent to assume that they might or might not change. Though Morrill does not specify any grounds for thinking *Marcus Tullius Cicero* a playable and therefore earlier play, one might point out, for what it is worth, that stage directions are an interesting element in many dramatic writings of the 1642-1660 period. Burkhead’s *Female Rebellion* (ca. 1658), for instance, calls for a setting moon, and

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Willan's *Orgula* (1658) tells how a poniard is to be dropped. Whatever arguments Morrill may have in mind, however, it is apparent that closing the theaters did not ensure the unplayability of new dramatic works, and the fact that *Marcus Tullius Cicero* strikes one as playable is inadequate evidence on which to build a hypothesis for its time of composition.

Perhaps the most puzzling objection is that I do not delve more deeply into the suggestion made by Edward Phillips in 1675 that the play was created a half century earlier by Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (who died in 1628)—though Morrill then goes ahead to show how the play is, as I maintain, relevant to the 1650s. Since my major points have to do precisely with the play's relevance in 1651, naturally I expend my major efforts on them. One could, if time permitted, discourse at length upon the varied implications of "revivals," whether on the boards or in print. (An apposite example here would be Christopher Wase's provocative *Electra* of 1649.) My dismissal of Brooke as the writer of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, in any case, is scarcely "cavalier," based as it is on the writings of all the Brooke scholars I have consulted, and supported as it is by the no-less-than-nine published sources (spanning over a hundred years) that I cite on the subject—including the fallible but reasonably reliable *British Library General Catalogue* of 1980. Against all of these Morrill would champion a Wing entry in which I have already pointed out and documented two other errors.

Finally Morrill gets down to considering the contemporary context of this play that was—whoever wrote it—published in 1651. Strangely enough, he suggests that in discussing *Marcus Tullius Cicero* I do not "cite any of the works of recent years which examine the 'political' content of plays in the 1620s and 1630s." Obviously he has not had occasion to read my own publications on the subject—*Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked* (1975), in which I delineate in considerable detail the literary conjunction of Jonsonian and Jacobean politics, or *Theatres of Greatness* (1986), in which, on a complex set of politico-historical grounds, I explain how Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* is likely to have originated in the reign of James rather than that of Charles, to which it is generally assigned. Morrill did have the opportunity, however, to notice my citation in the *Cicero* essay of such authors as Barbara

De Luna (1967), John Wallace (1974), J. S. Lawry (1982), Annabel Patterson (1982 and 1984), Alan Roper (1989), and Lois Potter (1990). In closing, Morrill appends a list of "major studies" to which a person ill-informed about the relations between theater and politics might turn for help. At this point I feel obliged to murmur politely that I have read all the titles he cites—as well as a good many more. And what, pray, is gained by his citing of *Censorship and Interpretation* in a list of recommended titles when not only that work but also another by the same author has already appeared in my own bibliography?

Nevertheless, thanks to Morrill, I am pleased to have encountered Blair Worden. Moreover, like Morrill, I should be glad to see someone step forward with new facts that will allow us to identify "a specific English Cicero from 1650-1651" who may help to bring *Marcus Tullius Cicero* into focus more clearly than I have managed thus far. Then again, I would not be perceived as unduly over-anxious for such an identification, since I also believe *Marcus Tullius Cicero* to be most potent—then, now, and whenever—if read as a worldly wise comment upon (or admonition to) whatever incarnation of Ciceronianism may be strutting its brief hour on the stage that currently concerns one.

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