

## **Reading Cicero's Final Years**

# **CICERO**

## Studies on Roman Thought and Its Reception

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Edited by  
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## **Volume 3**

# **Reading Cicero's Final Years**

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Receptions of the Post-Caesarian Works  
up to the Sixteenth Century

With two Epilogues

Edited by  
Christoph Pieper and Bram van der Velden

**DE GRUYTER**

Gesine Manuwald

# First Epilogue

## Dramatic Representations of the Final Years of Cicero's Life

### Introduction

The writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero are well known to have had a significant influence on intellectual history, on the development of European political thought as well as on oratorical practices in politics and education, even though not all details of this rich reception have been studied in detail yet. What is less well recognized is that, in contrast to other writers from the ancient world, Cicero's personality, covering his political activities and also his literary and philosophical production, has inspired a flourishing reception in a variety of artistic media. This 'afterlife' is probably due to the fact that Cicero was active in politics and is therefore mentioned in historical works on the late Republican period and to the large amount of writings by him that have been preserved, including a number of personal letters, so that there is a considerable amount of information about 'Cicero the man'.

An art form well suited to giving a direct impression of the character Cicero and therein to build on his works, most of which have a dialogic character, is stage drama. This type of reception has gone largely unnoticed by Classicists until recently, although there are more than 60 plays (dating to the period from 1574 to 2017) in which Cicero appears as one of the dramatic characters.<sup>1</sup> By far the most popular incident in Cicero's life to be dramatized is his opposition to the Catilinarian Conspiracy in his consular year of 63 BCE, followed at a considerable distance by Cicero's exile in 58–57 BCE and the presentation of longer stretches of his life. Cicero's confrontation with Mark Antony and his support

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<sup>1</sup> All these dramas have been explored in a larger study (Manuwald 2018), where further details can be found and which has inspired the presentation of the individual plays here. In the context of that study, however, it was not possible to focus specifically on plays dramatizing a particular period of Cicero's life: hence a discussion concentrating on dramas relating to 44–43 BCE is offered here; thus it can be explored whether any specific features of this group of plays can be determined.—There is hardly any secondary literature on the individual plays. Also, there is hardly any evidence on the production and reception history of these plays; therefore, this aspect cannot be taken into account here. Since references to works on the wider context can be found in the earlier study, engagement with secondary literature here will be limited.

for Octavian, the future emperor Augustus, in the final two years of his life (44–43 BCE), an important event for the development of the shape of Rome's political system, consists of a number of dramatic confrontations and concludes with the deaths of major figures; yet, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it forms the subject of separate dramas less frequently. The activities of these two years, however, feature in plays about Cicero's death or in those that cover extended sections of his life including the period leading up to his death.

Within the framework of looking at reactions to Cicero's actions and writings from 44–43 BCE through the ages, this study will explore eleven plays based on events of these years and featuring scenes involving Cicero, and it will comment on their representation of the conflict between Cicero and his opponents as well as on their characterization of the figure of Cicero. Therefore, in a chronological survey, these dramas will be presented and discussed individually. On the basis of this material it can then be considered in conclusion whether there are specific 'dramatic' ways of responding to the situation in 44–43 BCE, whether there are any developments in the format of its representation in drama and to what extent these pieces agree or engage with the description of the events by the historical Cicero.

The plays including elements of the last two years of Cicero's life (with a focus on Cicero and beyond a brief mention) are the following ones: Caspar Brülow, *Caius Julius Caesar Tragoedia* (1616); *The Tragedy of that Famous Roman Orator Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651); Pier Jacopo Martello, *Il M. Tullio Cicerone* (c. 1713); *Die Enthaubtung deß Weltberühmten Wohlredners Ciceronis* (1724); Pietro Chiari, *Marco Tullio Cicerone* (1752); Prosper Jolyot Crébillon, *Le Triumvirat ou La mort de Cicéron* (1754); Johann Jakob Bodmer, *Marcus Tullius Cicero. Ein Trauerspiel* (1764); Henry Bliss, *Cicero, A drama* (1847); Upton Sinclair, *Cicero. A Tragedy of Ancient Rome* (1960); Helmut Böttiger, *Cicero oder Ein Volk gibt sich auf* (1990); Robert Harris/Mike Poulton, *Imperium* (2017).

As for the distribution of these dramas, no particular patterns are immediately noticeable: plays showing the end of Cicero's life can be found in all centuries between the seventeenth and the twenty-first centuries; the highest number comes from the eighteenth century. These plays were produced by writers associated with a range of different countries: Britain, Italy, Austria, France, Switzerland, Canada, USA and Germany; accordingly, they are written in Latin, English, Italian, French or German. Moreover, these plays differ in their specific selection of incidents from Cicero's final years, the highlighted nuances, their political outlook as well as their historical accuracy.

## The seventeenth century

The first known dramas in which Cicero appears as a character do not seem to have favoured a particular focus on the events of 44–43 BCE and the role of Cicero within them. Thus, the earliest play in which Cicero's fate during this period is given some attention is Caspar Brülow's (1585–1627) *Caius Julius Caesar Tragoedia* (1616), written (for Strasbourg) almost fifty years after the first attested play featuring Cicero.<sup>2</sup> This Latin play, also translated into German by contemporaries, is named after Caesar and revolves around his assassination, but covers a longer stretch of the historical development, including Cicero's death in Act IV (on 7 December 43 BCE).<sup>3</sup>

After Caesar's assassination (on 15 March 44 BCE) the play's Cicero discusses future strategy with Octavian (Octavianus): he asks Octavian to confront the rebellious minds of Mark Antony (M. Antonius) and his partner Fulvia and thus free the Republic; Octavian promises to follow Cicero (IV 2). While there are historical sources for Octavian trying to liaise with Cicero (e.g. Cic. *Att.* 14.11.2; 16.8.1; 16.9.1; 16.11.6; App. *B Ciu.* 3.82), in the historical record Cicero engages with him less directly. The positive interaction in the play leads Cicero to proclaim that a Republic ruled by Octavian will be happy and to be confident in Octavian's reign as he represents a legitimate and morally sound model of government (IV 3). By contrast, in an open confrontation Antony and Fulvia attack Cicero with reference to his oratory and political record, while Cicero reproaches them for their misbehaviour (IV 3).

These scenes prepare the conflict between the two sides: Antony and Fulvia demand Cicero's death in the proscriptions; Octavian initially resists, explaining that Cicero has not done anything meriting death and has always been honoured, but eventually gives in when threatened, though he denies responsibility (IV 4) (cf. Keeline in this volume). Just before his death Cicero recalls the great number of dangers he has undergone for Rome's sake and regrets that he has wrong-

<sup>2</sup> CAJUS JULIUS CÆSAR | TRAGOEDIA, | EX PLUTARCHO, APPIA- | NO ALEX. SUETONIO, D. CAS- | sio, Joh. Xiphilino &c. maximam partem | concinnata, & adversus omnem te- | merariam se- | ditionem atque | tyrranidem ita con- | scripta | ut ἀξιομνησόνευς & præcipuas Roman. histo- | storias, ab V. C. ad Imp. usq; Octav. Aug. | breviter commemoret. | AUTHORE | M. CASPARO | BRÜLOVIO, | Pomerano, P. C. Secundæ Curiæ Argentoratæ | toratensium in Academiâ | Præceptore. | Publicè exhibita in Academiâ Argentor. Theatro, | nundinis æstivalibus, Anno fundatæ salutis, | M. DC. XVI. | ARGENTORATI, | Impensis Pauli Ledertz Bibliopolæ, Typis Antonij | Bertrami, Academiæ Typographi (<http://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/23684/1/cache.off>).

<sup>3</sup> On Brülow's biography see Hanstein 2013, 51–120; on this play see Hanstein 2013, 410–471, also Gundelfinger 1904, 52–56.

ly trusted Octavian, as the historical Cicero realizes his failed assessment at a late stage (e.g. Cic. *Ad Brut.* 1.18.3–4). Still, the drama's Cicero calmly awaits death, like a philosopher, as this is determined by nature, and he reflects on the life of the soul after death; he is confident that his writings will continue to be read (IV 5).

While this Cicero supports Republican virtues, he does not oppose Caesar's reign since it was established by the senate. Yet Cicero confronts individuals who act like tyrants and in immoral ways such as Mark Antony. That a monarchical system may be ultimately legitimized by Roman history is suggested in the play from the start via an initial appearance of Quirinus/Romulus and the fairly positive depiction of Octavian. At the same time the figure of Cicero is characterized as a human being displaying weaknesses: for instance, he is timid and rather credulous. Thus, the nuanced presentation helps to explore the complex political developments and the futility of Cicero's efforts in view of the actual power relations.

The final phase of Cicero's life takes on more prominence on stage in the anonymous piece *The Tragedy of that Famous Roman Orator Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651), which is probably the oldest play named after Cicero.<sup>4</sup> This play dramatizes the last eighteen months of the life of the historical Cicero, the period roughly from a few months after the assassination of C. Julius Caesar until Cicero's death.

While the overall plot of this tragedy follows the historical sequence of events fairly closely, on the basis of the writings of the historical Cicero and of later ancient historiographers (e.g. Plutarch's *Life of Mark Antony* and *Life of Cicero*, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* and Appian's *Civil Wars*), it includes additional subplots that make the story more personal and entertaining: Cicero's brother Quintus, the brother's wife Pomponia and their son are among the characters and interact with Cicero (I 4; III 12; IV 7; V 7), which provides an extended family setting for the character Cicero. Equally, Mark Antony's partner Fulvia has an enhanced role, which ensures that the two opposing sides are balanced also in the presentation of personal relationships and prepares Fulvia's triumphant and revengeful behaviour in connection with Cicero's death (V 10; cf. Dio Cass. 47.8.4).

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<sup>4</sup> THE | TRAGEDY | OF | THAT FAMOUS ROMAN | ORATOVR | Marcus Tullius | CICERO | London, | Printed by Richard Cotes, for John Sweeting | at the Angell in Popes-head Alley. | 1651 (available on Early English Books Online: <a href="http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full\_rec?SOURCE=var\_spell.cgi&amp;ACTION=SINGLE&amp;ID=12365474&amp;ECCO=N&amp;FILE=../session/1568275305\_28787&amp;SEARCH-SCREEN=CITATIONS&amp;DISPLAY=AUTHOR&amp;SUBSET=30&amp;ENTRIES=53&amp;HIGHLIGHT\_KEYWORD=default); modern edition: Clare 2002, 41–151. Some people (e.g. Morrill 1991, 97–98) have attributed the play to Fulke Greville, 1st Baron Brooke (1554–1628).</p>

Action on the level of ‘servants’ has been introduced, providing comic relief (esp. I 2).

That the play’s author was familiar with the writings of the historical Cicero is evident from references to some of them: the first two acts display reminiscences of the last group of speeches the historical Cicero delivered, the *Philippic Orations* (esp. Cic. *Phil.* 2; 12; 13; 14); the later acts, covering the period after the last *Philippic* (21 April 43 BCE), rely mainly on reports of later ancient historiographers, though the third act has some allusions to Cicero’s letters to Brutus written in summer 43 BCE. As a result of the chosen genre, the author sometimes converts summative accounts in those sources into drama: for instance, some incidents Cicero describes in the *Philippic Orations* are turned into dramatic scenes.

The result for the portrayal of Cicero is that this drama presents this figure as uncertain and in a shifting position without any whitewashing. Nevertheless, since Cicero functions as a defender of aristocratic Republican values despite his human shortcomings, the play conveys the political message of the danger to these values on account of the power hunger of individuals.<sup>5</sup>

In different ways all these plays from the seventeenth century depict Cicero as a fighter for liberty and Republican values, although he is ultimately unsuccessful in the political arena within a climate endangering these concepts and he might only be remembered later due to his qualities as an orator or his personal characteristics, although his human shortcomings are also alluded to.

## The eighteenth century

The theme of the final years of Cicero’s life was taken up again in Italy in the early eighteenth century. The playwright and dramatic theorist Pier Jacopo Martello (1665–1727) wrote treatises on tragedy as well as several pieces based on stories from ancient myth or history, one of which is *Il M. Tullio Cicerone* (c. 1713).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For discussions of the play in its contemporary context see e. g. Potter 1981, 295–296; Randall 1991; Morrill 1991; Wiseman 1998, 72–79; Clare 2002, 44–49.

<sup>6</sup> IL | M. TULLIO | CICERONE. | in: OPERE | DI | PIERJACOPO | MARTELLO | TOMO TERZO. || TEATRO | ITALIANO | DI | PIERJACOPO | MARTELLO | Parte Seconda. | In BOLOGNA | Nella Stamperia di LELIO DALLA VOLPE | M DCC XXXV. | CON LICENZA DE’ SUPERIORI (pp. 1–72) (available on Google Books: [https://books.google.it/books?id=ZK40AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_book\\_other\\_versions\\_r&hl=it#v=onepage&q=f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=ZK40AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_book_other_versions_r&hl=it#v=onepage&q=f=false), or at <https://archive.org/details/imageGIV182-3TeatroOpal/page/n7>).

While the title does not give any indication about the phase of Cicero's life depicted, the plot reveals that the play showcases the last few months of Cicero's life and his death in 43 BCE. In the preface the author claims that he has merely made minor changes to the historical record and that these have mainly been necessitated by theatre conventions; he goes on to explain that the dramatic character Cicero only speaks in four scenes of the first act, but that the entire piece is about him (*Proemio*, pp. 4–5). As the figure of Cicero only appears in the first act, there is hardly any presentation of Cicero's death or of Cicero as a character through his own actions. Instead, the focus is on discussions of the justification of Cicero's death and on the views of different people on Cicero's role in the period leading up to his death, on the appropriate response to his activities and on his status as a writer.

The second part of the play features controversies among the triumvirs and then between them and members of Cicero's family as to whether Cicero should be killed and whether his *Philippic Orations*, delivered against Mark Antony, should be destroyed (themes already popular in ancient declamation, cf. Bishop in this volume). In fact, when Mark Antony (Antonio) demands them, Cicero's *Philippics* are not handed over in return for his life and that of members of his family (IV 1–6). Eventually Cicero is killed because one of Antony's followers carries out his orders before Antony becomes doubtful and hesitant (V 3).

At the end of the play Antony reflects on the problematic nature of his conduct although he remains convinced of his political views while Octavian (Ottaviano) expresses his admiration for Cicero because of his fight for liberty. As the orator Cajo Rusticello is added to the dramatic characters and announces that he will continue the tradition started by Cicero (V 3), the expectation is created that Cicero's influence as an orator will continue. Thus, the dominant impression of Cicero at the end is that of a fighter for liberty, though without immediate impact on changes to the political system. The importance of texts written by Cicero (not highlighted to the same extent in most other plays) demonstrates the significance of Cicero as an orator, of political speech and of the potentially devastating effect of such speeches.

The next play in chronological sequence (1724) is a piece of a different nature: it is a comic drama belonging to the genre of so-called 'Haupt- und Staatsaktionen' (lit. 'important matters'), which were popular from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries in the German-speaking world and were typically a combination of scripted drama and impromptu theatre, with plots supplemented by a comic buffoon, called 'Hanswurst'. The most famous author and performer of dramas of this type was the Austrian Josef Anton Stranitzky (1676–1726); it is generally assumed that the Austrian play *Die Enthauptung des Weltberühmten Wohlredners Ciceronis* ("The beheading of the universally fa-

mous elegant orator Cicero") is also by him.<sup>7</sup> The existence of a comic version of a dramatic presentation of Cicero's death suggests that the character of Cicero as a dramatic figure and perhaps also the incidents at the end of his life were so familiar that this theme could be considered a suitable object of ridicule in drama and the resulting comic references could be expected to be recognized by audiences with the desired effect.

Not unexpectedly, this play does not offer a historically accurate portrayal; it rather uses material from ancient sources for particular effects. For instance, entertaining links to Cicero and his works are created when 'Hanswurst' utters *o tempora o mores* (III 13), the famous phrase from Cicero's *First Catilinarian* (Cic. *Cat.* 1.2), or when Hanswurst comically misunderstands Cicero's effusive description of justice (I 10).

Nevertheless, the play has a political dimension: the desire for revenge felt by the power-hungry Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius) triggers Cicero's death and consequently his daughter's hatred of him (Cicero's daughter Tullia is still alive at that point in this play); yet, the unhistorical love between Tullia (Tulia) and Mark Antony's son Julius (a young man in the drama) eventually enables reconciliation (with a motif reminiscent of opera). Throughout, Cicero appears as a contrast to Mark Antony: he feels obliged to fight for justice constantly and to accept death in order to remain true to his principles and his reputation. Cicero's wife Terentia questions Cicero's decision: she cannot see how it will benefit the country; at the same time she feels that Cicero does not pay enough attention to his family (I 9). Thus, in this play, the human implications of political decisions are displayed: while Cicero, appearing as an eloquent orator and as an upright and dutiful defender of justice and the state, cannot satisfy the demands of his family and of promoting his political convictions, the love between the opponents' children is shown to transcend their differences (with a happy ending as required by the genre).

Just under thirty years later another Italian writer took up the topic: Pietro Chiari (1712–1785), known for his comedies written in the time of Carlo Goldoni, also produced novels and tragedies, one of which is *Marco Tullio Cicerone* (1752).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Die Enthaubtung | deß | Weltberühmten Wohlredners | CICERONIS | Mit HW: | den seltsamen Jäger, lustigen Gallioten, verwirten Briefftreger, lächerlichen Schwimer, übl belohnten Botten ec. Daß Übrige wird die Action selbsten vorstehlen. | Componiert in | Jahr 1724, den 12 Junij., in: *Wiener Haupt- und Staatsaktionen*. Eingeleitet und herausgegeben von Rudolf Payer von Thurn. I. Band, Wien 1908 (Schriften des Literarischen Vereins in Wien X) (pp. 69–132) (available at <https://archive.org/details/wienerhauptundst01paye>).

<sup>8</sup> MARCO TULLIO | CICERONE | TRAGEDIA | Rappresentata | NEL TEATRO GRIMANI | DI | S. GIO: GRISOSTOMO. | Prima Edizione Bolognese. | IN BOLOGNA MDCLXV. | Nella Stamperia di S. Tom-

In the preface Chiari defends his choice of subject matter by the observation that the name of Cicero is so well known that everyone derives pleasure from watching his character, his experiences and his death and that the selected section of history has not yet been dramatized except in a play by Pier Jacopo Martello (*L'autore a chi legge*; 1755, p. 4). It is true that both Chiari's and Martello's pieces have the name of Cicero as the title and dramatically present the final months of his life in 43 BCE; yet, they do so in different ways since Chiari has a more complex and more dramatic plot, especially since he adds further characters and love stories.

In terms of the presentation of Cicero, he again appears as a supporter of liberty and a defender of his country. Cicero's main impact is seen through his oratory, as he is presented as giving speeches to the People in the Forum and opposing Mark Antony; the group of the *Philippic Orations* is again a key feature determining the reactions of other characters to Cicero. Octavian (Ottaviano) tells Cicero that he will live if he yields his *Philippics* to Mark Antony (Marco Antonio). Cicero comments that he is going to die soon anyway and will not do anything to reduce the fame emerging from his writings (V 1). Earlier in the play Cicero says that his glory was more important to him than his family; he is keen to have his *Philippics* preserved since he regards them as the basis of future fame (IV 1). His wife (here called Livia), however, is concerned for his safety and would prefer to have Cicero's *Philippic Orations* burned as these provoke Mark Antony's hatred while Cicero's son (here called Quinto) is eager to honour his father's wish to preserve these speeches (IV 1). Ultimately, similarly to what happens in Martello's play, Cicero is killed because one of Mark Antony's followers carries out his orders (V 7–9). The play closes with Octavian announcing happy centuries under himself as Ottavio Augusto (V 9). This prospect implies that Cicero has not been able to prevent the change from Republic to Principate, which may also be due to his misjudgment of the situation and of the characters involved. Nevertheless, as the life-threatening fight over the text of his *Philippics* vividly illustrates, Cicero's fame as a great orator and defender of the Republic will be preserved and live on.

Two years later (1754) there was a French play on the final years of Cicero: the second drama by Prosper Jolyot Crébillon (1674–1762) on events from Cicero's life (after *Catilina*, 1748); some of Crébillon's plays prompted alternative versions by Voltaire (1694–1778; *Rome sauvée, ou Catilina*, 1752). Crébillon's *Le Triumvirat ou La mort de Cicéron* ("The Triumvirate or Cicero's death") is the only

play featuring Cicero as a character that has a reference to the triumvirate (of 43 BCE) in the title.<sup>9</sup> The piece puts some emphasis on the attested situation that one member of the triumvirate, Mark Antony, wishes Cicero's death while another, Octavian, does not (*Plut. Cic.* 46). Essentially, however, it is not a drama about the triumvirs, but rather a triangular love story, between Cicero's daughter Tullia (Tullie) and Sextus, the son of Pompey the Great, as well as Octavian (Octave Cesar), combined with the political controversies of the 40s BCE. This structure enables the discussion of principles of behaviour of politicians and citizens, absolute rulers and supporters of the Republic: Cicero is keen to save the Republic, even disregarding his own life; yet, he is momentarily persuaded to side with Octavian while his daughter Tullia is adamant in her defence of the Roman Republic and opposes Octavian's advances. Ultimately both Cicero and Tullia remain true to their political convictions, but both die.

By means of the unhistorical construct of a love affair that has both Sextus Pompeius and Octavian be in love with Tullia (still alive in 43 BCE here), who prefers Sextus, Crébillon creates a close connection between political and personal issues. Cicero's initial offer of his daughter in marriage to Octavian may suggest that he even exploits his daughter's happiness to achieve a higher political goal. Still, Cicero appears as the defender and saviour of the Republic and as an opponent of individuals he regards as tyrants, attempting to incite Octavian to more responsible behaviour. Since, ultimately, the focus is on Sextus and Tullia, who fight for traditional Roman values of virtue and the principles of the Republic, Cicero does not emerge as the only representative of the Republican cause or opponent of the triumvirs. Cicero's death, although mentioned in the title, happens offstage (IV 2; V 2; V 3); Mark Antony and Fulvia are not even included among the *dramatis personae*. Thus, there is less emphasis on the appreciation of Cicero as an individual or his achievements as a statesman though Cicero appears as the most prominent of the defenders of the Republican system.

The well-known Swiss literary theorist and writer Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783) wrote two plays involving Cicero; the second of these, *Marcus Tul-*

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<sup>9</sup> LE | TRIUMVIRAT | OU LA MORT | DE CICÉRON, | TRAGÉDIE. | Par M. DE CREBILLON, de | l'Académie Françoise. | *Représentée par les Comédiens François*, | le 20 Décembre 1754. | Prix 30 sols. | A PARIS, | Chez CHARLES HOCHEREAU, | Libraire, Quai de Conti, au Phénix. | M. DCC. LV. | Avec Approbation & Privilége du Roi (text available e.g. at [http://www.theatre-classique.fr/pages/pdf/CREBILLON\\_TRIUMVIRAT.pdf](http://www.theatre-classique.fr/pages/pdf/CREBILLON_TRIUMVIRAT.pdf) or [http://www.mediterranees.net/histoire\\_romaine/ciceron/crebillon/index.html](http://www.mediterranees.net/histoire_romaine/ciceron/crebillon/index.html)).

*Ilius Cicero. Ein Trauerspiel* (“Marcus Tullius Cicero. A tragedy”), was published in 1764.<sup>10</sup>

This play focuses on the final stages of Cicero’s life, after his last public appearances in 43 BCE. The sequence of events is mainly based on the narrative in Plutarch (*Plut. Cic.* 46–48). From the start the drama’s Cicero is presented as preparing for life in the afterworld. Several times he acknowledges his misgivings because he misjudged Octavian and because Brutus, one of Caesar’s assassins, was right to warn him (I 2; II 2), echoing sentiments of the historical Cicero expressed in late letters to M. Iunius Brutus (e.g. *Cic. Ad Brut.* 1.18.3–4); equally, the drama’s Cicero insists that he never acted against the Republic and did not do anything dishonourable in relation to the gods.

Bodmer depicts Cicero as one of the heroes of true greatness and superior character (cf. *Vorbericht*, pp. II–III). The play’s Cicero merely states that the just sometimes have to commit smaller mistakes in order to avoid bigger ones (IV 3), which functions as an excuse for his wrong assessment of Octavian. The piece closes with Cicero being praised by his secretary Tiro, who laments Cicero’s death and simultaneously honours him (V 5). Cicero’s humanity (V 3–5) contrasts with the behaviour of Fulvia, who dishonours Cicero’s severed head (cf. *Dio Cass.* 47.8.4) and has Quintus killed (V 3–5).

This appreciation of Cicero is conveyed throughout the drama, which also presents important stages of his life retrospectively, such as his exile (IV 3) and his grief at the death of his daughter Tullia (III 3). Thereby the piece encompasses a portrayal of Cicero in all his functions, as a former politician, a successful orator and a thoughtful philosopher. It is thus rather a presentation of this famous figure than a complex consideration of political issues.

In the eighteenth century Cicero remains a character who is politically active and represents particular political views, but he is depicted more integrated into a personal and family setting (including comic scenes and love affairs), so that the political focus is not as prominent and is somewhat relegated to the background.

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<sup>10</sup> Marcus Tullius | Cicero. | Ein | Trauerspiel. | Zürich, bey Orell, Gefßner und Comp. 1764 (<http://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vd18/content/titleinfo/5208190>).—On this play see Scenna 1966, 82–88.

## The nineteenth century

The only drama from the nineteenth century to cover the final years of Cicero's life is *Cicero*, *A drama* by the Canadian writer Henry Bliss (1797–1873), which appeared in 1847, attributed to "The author of 'Moile's State Trials'", identifying the writer not by name, but rather by a reference to an earlier work.<sup>11</sup> While the author defines *Cicero* as a 'drama' and divides the text into acts and scenes, it is not a 'drama' in the standard sense: there are no ordinary dialogues; instead, it is a dramatic narrative, presenting scenes of different types, including reports, soliloquies, speeches in public and conversations, written in a sequence of English rhyming couplets.

The title of this drama indicates Cicero as the main protagonist while it does not reveal whether his entire life or a particular phase will be shown. The first scene mentions the death of Cicero's daughter Tullia (45 BCE) and Mark Antony's attack on Rome's freedom (44/43 BCE), which indicates that the play is concerned with events towards the end of Cicero's life.

It turns out that the piece charts the main historical events from Caesar's assassination until Cicero's confrontation with Mark Antony in September 44 BCE broadly accurately. For this purpose, the writings of the historical Cicero have obviously been adduced; these elements are supplemented by scenes for which no historical evidence exists. For instance, when Cicero is summoned to a meeting of the senate (II 7), this must refer to the session on 19 September 44 BCE, when Mark Antony delivered the speech to which the historical Cicero reacted with the second *Philippic*: historically, this 'speech' was written up, but never delivered, since Cicero did not attend the meeting of the senate on that day. In the drama he does so; accordingly, the provocative speech by Antony (presumably developed on the basis of the response by the historical Cicero) and Cicero's reply can be juxtaposed directly (III 4; III 5); the shape of the confrontation means that Cicero appears superior despite all criticism.

This piece thus gives an overview of the events in the last year of Cicero's life and demonstrates Cicero's key characteristics as a politician and orator; the portrayal is nuanced since the views of others are also provided. The play does not end with Cicero's death, but rather with the delivery of a '*Philippic*' against Mark Antony in the senate (III 5); in this speech Cicero justifies his career and accuses Antony of misdeeds; it is successful with the audience. Thus, despite the trou-

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<sup>11</sup> CICERO, | A DRAMA. | BY THE AUTHOR OF | "MOILE'S STATE TRIALS". | LONDON: | SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO., | STATIONERS' HALL COURT; | AND | B. KIMPTON, 43, HIGH HOLBORN. | MDCCXLVII (available at <https://archive.org/details/cicerodrama00blisuoft>).

bled situation in Rome, the drama closes with Cicero at a high point in his life, showing him as the consummate orator. Yet, even though Cicero seems to be superior at the end, the general tenor is subdued: already at the beginning Cicero regrets in a soliloquy that he did not die at peaks in his life, when Catiline and Clodius had been vanquished, he was courageous, wielded an impressive oratorical art and was called a ‘new founder of the state’ (I 1; p. 14). Accordingly, this Cicero appears as a great orator who has had political successes, but also as someone who has passed the zenith of his effectiveness.

## The twentieth and twenty-first centuries

The theme of the end of Cicero’s life was not taken up again until more than one hundred years later, in the piece *Cicero. A Tragedy of Ancient Rome* by the American Pulitzer Prize winner Upton Sinclair (1878–1968), first performed in 1960.<sup>12</sup>

The play covers major events during the last twenty years of the life of the historical Cicero, from the year of his consulship (63 BCE) until his death (43 BCE). The extended time period covered does not mean that historical events are condensed in a non-historical way; by contrast, there is an explicit chronological progression, indicated by stage directions. Moreover, there are references and extended ‘quotations’ of literary works of the historical Cicero and also of the poet Catullus (who appears as a character) throughout.

Because the play’s Cicero is mainly shown in conversation with his secretary Tiro, his wife Terentia and/or his friend Atticus, but never in public, and since the works of the historical Cicero are represented when the play’s character dictates them to his secretary Tiro or privately practises speeches, Cicero’s character and personal biography take centre stage. His feelings and concerns about his career and his standing are made explicit, as he is presented in such intimate conversations. Beyond his individual situation, this Cicero expresses disappointment at the political and moral development of Rome.

The play creates the expectation that Cicero’s works (published by Atticus) will survive through the ages and even schoolboys will read them. Equally, it suggests that the political and philosophical ideas supported by Cicero will not outlive him because the Romans of his day have become interested in their own advantages, money and pleasure: the loss of virtue leads to a loss of liberty, and there will be a change to a monarchical society as Cicero predicts.

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<sup>12</sup> Upton Sinclair, *Cicero. A Tragedy of Ancient Rome*, [s.l.] 1960.

Thus, the play has a moral and political message with a general application, despite being focused on Cicero's personal situation.

Later in the twentieth century, in 1990, the German writer Helmut Böttiger (b. 1940) published a play on Cicero with his own publishing house, *Cicero oder Ein Volk gibt sich auf* ("Cicero, or a nation abandons itself").<sup>13</sup>

This play is set in 43 BCE and dramatizes Cicero's death as part of the development from Republic to Principate. As a note at the beginning indicates (p. 3), the drama's main focus is on demonstrating how Caesar's assassination led to the establishment of inappropriate monarchical rule because of the failures of the individuals involved. Accordingly, Cicero's death is only shown in the brief final act; most of the plot is devoted to the presentation of the feelings of and negotiations between Mark Antony (Mark Antonius), Octavian (Octavianus), Cicero, the senators and ordinary citizens. These interactions indicate the inability of the system to cope with challenges and result in an ambiguous presentation of the character Cicero.

Thus, while the triumvirate comes to power and is victorious in the end, it is not a joyful success since various scenes demonstrate that the current system has weaknesses, that the senators are not up to the job and that ordinary people are unhappy, yet not in a position to make changes. Accordingly, monarchical rule becomes inevitable, but is not a proper solution for the problems of the existing system. Within this framework the character of Cicero displays the well-known attributes of a polished orator (including reminiscences of the works of the historical Cicero) and a preserver of the Republican system. But, as the author has Octavian comment (III 2), he does not offer any substantial idea of how to shape the system, so that it could cope with the issues facing it.

Moreover, although the measures envisaged by Cicero would probably not have changed the eventual outcome, they are not even attempted, i.e., he is unsuccessful because of the attitude of the representatives of the traditional order, which he intends to preserve. As a result, the failure of the Republican system is indirectly attributed not only to Cicero, but also to the lack of insight among the senatorial elite.

The latest incarnation of Cicero and of Cicero's final years on stage is the dramatization of Robert Harris' trilogy of novels by Mike Poulton, which was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company first in Stratford-upon-Avon between November 2017 and February 2018 and then in London in summer 2018. The dramatic version is organized into two performances of three plays each. The two

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<sup>13</sup> CICERO | oder | Ein Volk gibt sich auf | Tragödie von Helmut Böttiger | Jubiläumsausgabe zum 50. Geburtstag des Autors am 2. März 1990 | Dr. Böttiger Verlags-GmbH.

performances are entitled *Imperium, Part I: Conspirator* and *Imperium, Part II: Dictator*; the six plays are called *Cicero*, *Catiline*, *Clodius*, *Caesar*, *Mark Antony* and *Octavian*.<sup>14</sup>

The sequence of plays ends with Fulvia displaying the head of the dead Cicero (cf. Dio Cass. 47.8.4), while Octavian and Agrippa are dressed for a triumph (*Octavian*, Epilogue [p. 268]); thereby it is acknowledged that Cicero ultimately is unsuccessful with his political initiatives and dies in the face of opposition. Neither is it denied that Cicero has personal weaknesses, for instance insecurity, ambition and desire for glory. At the same time the play stresses that this Cicero wishes to preserve the ‘democratic’ structure of the Roman Republic against autocratic tendencies displayed by men like Catiline, Pompey, Mark Antony or Caesar. While Cicero becomes progressively disillusioned, he is still shown supporting a worthy cause in “defending the Republic” (*Caesar*, Scene Six [p. 178]). Even in the last play Cicero says: “Antony is the last obstacle on our road to freedom—I shall destroy him as I destroyed Catiline. For a second time I’ve saved the Republic. Single-handed. Let the boy know nothing happens in Rome these days without my approval—nobody knows where my power begins and ends. It’s better than being Dictator –” (*Octavian*, Scene Six [p. 248]).

Thus, the way in which Cicero is portrayed in this drama comes fairly close to the image that the historical Cicero tried to create of himself: someone who is proud of having saved the Republic and aims to continue doing so while he does not reflect upon whether this is still the most appropriate approach. The conclusion of the piece thus shows that Cicero overestimates his influence.

In the last three centuries, then, the dramatization of the end of Cicero’s life is still used to make political statements, now often rather general, in obvious reaction to the political situation in the writer’s present and connected to social issues, and also to create powerful dramatic scenes, but the small number of plays makes the range of approaches appear even more diverse.

## Conclusion

If one looks back over this series of plays presenting aspects of Cicero’s final years in versions for the stage, one notices that all playwrights have made use of the dramatic potential of the events of these years for the plots of their

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<sup>14</sup> IMPERIUM | The Cicero Plays | Adapted for the stage by | Mike Poulton | From the novels by | Robert Harris | With an introduction by Mike Poulton | NICK HERN BOOKS | London | [www.nickhernbooks.co.uk](http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk) [2017].

dramas. This applies with respect both to Cicero's life and to the political turmoil of the period, even though not all plays end with Cicero's death as a dramatic climax. All playwrights follow the sequence of historical events in the main, although some add further (mostly minor) figures, slightly alter the biography of historical characters or insert more personal scenes, to create more vivid and entertaining effects and to give the dramatic events a more lifelike quality. The general faithfulness may be caused by the availability of a sizable amount of material, especially in Cicero's own writings, and the inherent dramatic quality of the events themselves. Thus, there are numerous variations, but no obvious tendency or development over the centuries; this may also be linked to the fact that only rarely do later playwrights seem aware of the works of their predecessors.

It is telling that Poulton, the adapter of Harris' novel trilogy, decided to omit most of what is narrated in the first novel (entitled *Imperium*), covering Cicero's early years, and, for the two parts of the dramatic action, to focus on Cicero's fight against Catiline in his consular year of 63 BCE and on the events of 44–43 BCE (perhaps inspired by the connections the historical Cicero creates between these two periods). Apart from the dramatic effectiveness of this selection and the resulting compression, such a focus makes sense for a play highlighting the failure of a political system and the tensions between monarchical and Republican rule (with intended parallels to the present).

For, if one wishes to explore the question of the respective advantages and disadvantages of different political systems as well as their potential developments and to illustrate the ramifications, what happened in 44–43 BCE is one of the most suitable case studies, as this sequence of events can be used to showcase positive and negative features of Republican and monarchical structures, in general or with oblique allusions to the writer's present. This is especially true when the events are presented with a focus on Cicero's fate and activities, since the series of his powerful oratorical interventions, ultimately followed by his death, demonstrates both his ideals and his failure to promote them with lasting effect. While this is valid for any intellectual engagement with the material relating to 44–43 BCE, it particularly applies to drama because the stages of the development can be juxtaposed and presented from different perspectives or commented on by a variety of people while the playwright is not forced to commit explicitly to a particular view.

At the same time, though, the selection of incidents and their presentation in a sequence of scenes convey a particular point of view. Thus, for instance, in Böttiger's play, the second most recent version, the switch to a monarchical system, due to happen after Cicero's death, is presented as a negative development, while the failures of the Republican system are equally highlighted: it could not be saved because of the lack of decisive actions on the part of Cicero and

of support from the senatorial elite. Bliss too presents Cicero as a great orator who has had limited success, but ultimately is not able to stop the development towards autocratic rule, though this is not linked to the same extent to an analysis of society.

Bodmer, by contrast, focuses more on a portrayal of Cicero as an individual. In Crébillon's piece Cicero is only one among others to support the Republican cause. In the comic version there is more emphasis on the personal aspects of the underlying political situation. The Italian plays add the dimension of Cicero's impact as an orator. Still, even when Cicero is less prominent or there is more emphasis on his personality, the political framework and the opposition between Republic and monarchy is a paramount theme. A general linear development in the assessment and presentation of events in the final period of the Republic over the centuries cannot be observed although there seems to be a tendency towards a more and more pronounced social analysis.

As for the general questions raised by the focus on the reception of the events involving Cicero in 44–43 BCE, one may offer the following responses with regard to drama: because of the dramatic format there is no direct explicit and reflective engagement with Cicero's writings from the period, but it is obvious that the playwrights were familiar with these in addition to other ancient (and later) sources. Since Cicero's death is a dramatically effective event and a suitable closure, it is often a key point in the plot of plays focusing on the final years of his life: this incident colours the general presentation of the figure, but the display remains nuanced in that Cicero is presented as a great orator and a staunch supporter of the Republic, even if his initiatives are ultimately unsuccessful in the longer term.

Beyond depicting Cicero as an orator (and sometimes also as a writer and philosopher), these plays are not interested in showcasing literary details of his works. They show awareness of earlier speeches and literary productions, but these do not play a major role in the plots; only in the two Italian plays is the existence of the *Philippic Orations* a major factor in discussions about Cicero's death. The fact that letters by the historical Cicero survive from the time after the last extant speech enables playwrights to draw on Ciceronian material for the depiction of much of 44 and 43 BCE; only for the final stages do they need to have recourse to the descriptions of later historiographers.

The recent production of *Imperium* emphasized explicitly comparisons to the political situation in the modern world. Because Cicero (or at least his name) is still famous and evokes associations of other major figures he dealt with and because, at the end of his life, he was heavily involved in the final stages of the development from Republic to Principate, which influenced all subsequent European history and demonstrated the characteristics of each of these political sys-

tems, this important role and the transferability of the context endow Cicero's activities in 44–43 BCE with perennial interest. This is shown in drama by regular take-up on and off through the centuries until the present day, which says as much about Cicero as about the political and intellectual situation in the various countries and centuries.