

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Political Acts and Political Acting: Roman Gesture and *Julius Caesar*

Miranda Fay Thomas
King's College London
miranda.thomas@kcl.ac.uk

This article explores the manipulative power of gesture and the parallels Shakespeare draws with the performance of politics within the Roman society he presents in *Julius Caesar*, as well as its application to Elizabethan England.¹ I look at the gesture of handshaking and its supposed connections with the quality of constancy, and the use of hands in the assassination of Caesar; the use of reported gestures and what it means in terms of both performance and sincerity; and the ways that rhetorical gesture is used to convince a crowd of people, with consideration given to the Puritan fears of theatricality. It is my contention in this piece that gestures are embodied social metaphors: they are the epitome of the political as personal, and vice versa. The agency of gesture is all the more potent for its ephemerality: hands continually write and re-write the script of the political moment on air that leaves no trace of itself. The very deniability of gesture ensures the continuance of misdeeds and malpractices. Whether using a handshake to wordlessly seal conspiracy, rearing a knife in an assassination, or being emotionally and politically manipulative through gesticulation, Shakespeare's play reveals not only how hands can alter the course of history, but how such theatrical practices themselves aid and abet such a diversion. It is these actions, performed via gesture, that I explore within *Julius Caesar*, and in doing so connect Shakespeare's self-conscious theatricality of action with concerns about the increasingly performative nature of politics, both in Caesar's Rome and in Elizabethan England.

¹ I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their suggestions and advice.

Cicero once claimed that, ‘everyone knows how few actors there are, or ever have been, whom we could bear to watch’.² Despite this, there is strong evidence that theatrical performances were influenced by rhetorical practices. As Andrew Gurr observes, Shakespeare would have been tutored as a schoolboy ‘in the long tradition of Quintilian’s rhetoric with its emphasis on careful speech and studied gesture’,³ as well as pithy Ciceronian epithets on delivery such as: ‘*est enim action quasi sermo corporis* (action is truly the body’s speech)’,⁴ and Demosthenes’ assertion that the three most important elements of rhetoric were ‘delivery, delivery, delivery’.⁵ It is likely, therefore, that this knowledge of Roman oratorical traditions influenced both Shakespeare’s writing and the movements used by his actors.

The quandary of gesture as a communicative tool is that it is motivated by the need for conviction rather than sincerity, an ambiguous performative issue that was not lost on Cicero or Quintilian. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Cicero quipped, ‘we have to study actors as well as orators, that bad practice may not lead us into some inelegant or ugly habit’.⁶ Yet this statement on the apparent lower status of actors needs to be problematized, given that orators too were given to using affectation in order to persuade. It is noted by Heinrich F. Plett that ‘the Greek term for the art of delivery, also means “hypocrisy: and “dissembling” [...] the Latin *actor* first denotes “actor” but later “orator” as well’.⁷ There is, then, a complex relationship between the apparently distinguished act of rhetoric and the alleged vulgarity of theatrical performance. This is all the more relevant given the anti-theatrical movement in Elizabethan London, spearheaded by anti-theatrical campaigners such as Stephen Gosson (*Plays Confuted in Five Acts*, 1582) and Phillip Stubbes (*The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583).⁸ Gesture’s power,

² Cicero, *De Oratore Books 1 and 2*, from *The Works of Cicero in Twenty-eight Volumes: Volume Three*, trans. by E. W. Sutton (London and Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 15.

³ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 97.

⁴ John Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare’s Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 46. Geoffrey Miles argues that Shakespeare almost certainly read *De Officiis* at school. See *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 14-15.

⁵ Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore Books 1 and 2*, p. 107.

⁷ Heinrich F. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), p. 255.

⁸ Jennifer A. Low, ““Bodied Forth”: Spectator, Stage, and Actor in the Early Modern Theater”, *Comparative Drama*, 39.1 (2005), 1-29 (p. 16).

as well as its danger, becomes symbolic of the wider arguments about the theatre: as a performative act, it disassembles at the same time as it represents. While critics have discussed *Julius Caesar* with relation to both theatricality and the workings of signification, the role of gesture has yet to be fully applied to these issues. Mark Rose suggests that the reading of the play's omens raises the dramatic irony 'to a metaphysical level [...] presented as fate',⁹ but perhaps this argument can actually be taken further, if we consider that the reading (or misreading) of such 'omens' serves as a means of deconstructing the theatricality of signs themselves. There is a sense of fatalism in the play's preoccupation with signifiers, of which the use of gestures is a crucial, and, until now, overlooked example.

Gestures are performed actions: they are not necessarily evidence of certain emotions being felt, but they reflect the *desire* for there to be evidence. A play such as *Julius Caesar* revels in such ambiguities, and therein lies the problem with performative gesture. In fact, the play's concerns about the ethical quandary of performance are all the more troubling for its application to reality: Francis Gentleman commented in 1773 that all members of Parliament should be made to memorise the play.¹⁰ Given these conflicts within Renaissance performance, it is apt that gesture specialist Adam Kendon should discuss the unnaturalness of 'acting naturally', and how gesture can be at times honest, contrived, universal, or specific. He cites an excellent example of this in Giovanni Bonifacio's 1616 work, *L'Arte de' Cenni*, which outlines the initial belief that, 'from bodily actions one can comprehend the inclinations of the soul, and from the acts, gestures, and bearing of bodily members our internal feelings can be conjectured'.¹¹ Yet Bonifacio also equivocates by acknowledging the possibility of controlling physical movements in order to give a false impression of oneself.¹² On the other end of the spectrum, Renaissance physician and natural philosopher John Bulwer declined to openly recognise the potential duplicity of gesture. Although a follower of Francis Bacon, who maintained that all languages – including the language of the hand – were artificial constructions, Bulwer believed that gestures 'like hieroglyphs, showed a direct relationship between form and meaning'.¹³ With this in mind, it is not a little ironic that

⁹ Mark Rose, 'Conjuring Caesar: Ceremony, History, and Authority in 1599' in *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age*, ed. by Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 256-269 (p. 264).

¹⁰ Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 231.

¹¹ Cited in and trans. by Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [2004]), p. 23.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 28.

Bulwer's guide to 'the natural language of the hand' insists that gestures ought to be shaped by art to achieve their full potential,¹⁴ thus relegating their alleged naturalness to a mere appearance of it: the language of the hand becomes a construction just as Bacon imagined it. Of course, it is exactly this supposed sincerity that actors (and, of course, orators) must take advantage of in order to give a convincing performance: performers *consciously* make movements to imply motivations that are *unconscious* in the fictitious character they are embodying. Actors and, indeed, rhetoricians, must use their skill to make the audience *believe* that their gestures move freely and spontaneously along with the words that are being spoken, thus imitating reality. Indeed, such performances are at the heart of *Julius Caesar*. Ian Donaldson remarks of the play that,

though the play appears to possess an internal logic from which political truths may be derived, it is tantalizingly difficult to say at last what that logic is. This relative absence of political reasoning within the play sharply delimits any possible sense in which it might be described as "subversive."¹⁵

This article argues the opposite: such ambivalence is what makes a play like *Julius Caesar* especially ripe for subversion. Its confused sense of reality lends itself to re-interpretation and re-appraisal, as per the gestures of the play itself.

Give me your hands all over, one by one

Julius Caesar contains three key scenes that involve a handshake to signify a binding promise: first, when Caska and Cassius agree to take action against Caesar in 1.3; second, when Brutus is persuaded to join the conspirators in 2.1; and third, when Antony shakes hands with Caesar's assassins in 3.1. Gestures such as these emphasise the relationships between people, reinforcing the power dynamics between the 'honourable men' of *Julius Caesar*. This is something which Shakespeare lifts directly from his source material: Thomas North's translation of Plutarch mentions that Cassius and Brutus 'imbraced one an other' when Cassius persuades him to join the conspiracy.¹⁶ Throughout the play, we see Roman allegiances evidenced by the

¹⁴ John Bulwer, *Chirologia Or The Natural Language of the Hand* (London: 1644), p. 153-4.

¹⁵ Ian Donaldson, "'Misconstruing Everything': *Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus*" in *Performing Shakespeare*, ed. by Grace Iopollo (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 88-107 (p. 96).

¹⁶ Plutarch, *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes compared together by that graue learned philosopher and historiographer, Plutarke of Chaeronea; translated out of Greeke into French by Iames*

classical, Medieval, and Renaissance sources.¹⁸ Bulwer's introduction to the gesture of handshaking begins by stating:

TO SHAKE THE GIVEN HAND is an expression usuall in friendship, peacefull love, benevolence, salutation, entertainment, and bidding welcome; reconciliation, congratulation, giving thanks, valediction, and wel-wishing.¹⁹

As Bulwer's description develops, he unilaterally equates the gestural action with a motivation of sincerity. For instance, he tells us that when two people shake hands, it signifies:

[...] that they are both content that their works shall be common [...] this naturall expression seems to result from the sympathy between the will and the Hand: for, the will affectionately inclined and moved to stretch forth herselfe, the Hand, that is moved by the same spirit, willing to goe out and set a glosse upon the inward motion, casts itselfe into a forme extending to a semblance of the inward appetite[.]²⁰

¹⁸ Joseph R. Roach makes a convincing case for the viability of using Bulwer's treatise: 'To understand the full import of his work, it is necessary to appreciate his intellectual background and ambitions. Himself a physician and son of a physician, Bulwer consciously and methodically set out to fulfil Bacon's program for a modern science of gesture [...] Science, for Bacon, meant ordering and clarifying natural reality, and his method included the proliferation of instances drawn from all manner of authorities, ancient and modern, reputable and otherwise. Bulwer's methodology closely resembles Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum* in its range of erudition and curious mix of empiricism and gullibility. Among his representative references in various works, Bulwer quotes liberally from the rhetorics of Cicero, Quintilian, and Cresollius, Aristotle in his entirety, the histories of Xenophon, Plutarch, and Tacitus, the poems of Ovid and Virgil, the Bible in both testaments, and the patristics; he has fully digested the classical medical doctrines of the Hippocratics and Galen (a 'miracle of wit'), and the modern anatomies of Vesalius, Fabricius, Eustachius, Laurentius, Columbus, and Fallopius, as well as the iatrochemical theories of Paracelsus and, of course, the current medical literature in English, including Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Helkiah Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia, a Description of the Body of Man*.' See *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 33. I include such a lengthy citation from Roach's study to clarify just how much ground Bulwer covers in his *Chirologia and Chironomia* and how, despite its publication in 1644, it is still a crucial text for gestural history, given that the work covers nearly 2000 years of cultural history. Other early modernist scholars who consult the work of Bulwer include Farah Karim-Cooper in *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London: Arden Bloomsbury, 2016), *passim*, and Tiffany Stern in "'This Wide and Universal Theatre": The Theatre as Prop in Shakespeare's Metadrama', in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. by Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Arden Bloomsbury, 2014 [2013]), pp. 11-32 (p. 17).

¹⁹ Bulwer, p. 109.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 110.

This alignment of meaning between a hand and a state of mind is also noted by Katherine Rowe, who observes how ‘the hand represents and effects a point of contact between collective notions of person and the world of interiority, intentions and will’.²¹ Handshakes are therefore a gesture implying constancy, indicating a performed act of agreement.

Such constancy is a key feature of Roman society. Cicero imparts the wisdom that his readers must ‘be constant to ourselves for the whole length of our life, not wavering in any of our duties’,²² and Geoffrey Miles reminds us that the ‘constancy’ derives from the Latin verb *constare*, meaning ‘to stand firm’.²³ Brutus himself takes pains to tell his fellow conspirators,

[...] do not stain
The even virtue of our enterprise,
Nor th’insuppressive mettle of our spirits,
To think that or our cause or our performance
Did need an oath, when every drop of blood
That every Roman bears, and nobly bears,
Is guilty of a several bastardy
If he do break the smallest particle
Of any promise that hath passed from him.
(2.1.131-9)

Instead, Brutus urges that they ‘Give me your hands all over, one by one’ (2.1.111) as a means to seal their pact. He explicitly links this element of constancy with the quality of noble Roman blood, and emphasises this in his distinction that they not be ‘too bloody’ in their act of assassination:

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
To cut the head off and then hack the limbs –
Like wrath in death and envy afterwards –
For Antony is *but a limb of Caesar*.
[...]

²¹ Katherine Rowe, ‘God’s Handy Worke’, in *The Body In Parts*, ed. by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 285-309 (p. 286-7).

²² Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. by M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 46.

²³ Miles, p. 6.

And for Mark Antony, think not of him,
For *he can do no more than Caesar's arm*
When Caesar's head is off.

(2.1-161-4; 180-2, my emphases)

Brutus' resolve not to kill Antony reiterates his belief that Antony is a limb or an arm, as opposed to the head of state as represented by the body of Caesar, and thus ineffective after Caesar's death. Even though the conspirators never actually behead Caesar, the metaphor is crucial for Brutus to try and explain away Antony's potential influence. This repetition attempts to convey a sense of reassurance which Brutus himself may or may not fully believe; and, of course, we go on to see what such a 'limb of Caesar' can do after the head of state's assassination.

Antony's decision to join hands with the assassins in 3.1 wholly mirrors the handshakes between the conspirators in 2.1, especially in that the meaning and motive behind it is inverted. Note the deictics written into the text, irrefutably specifying the need for an actor to perform the gesture:

Let each man render me his bloody hand.
First, Marcus Brutus, *will I shake with you.*
Next, Caius Cassius, *do I take your hand.*
Now, Decius Brutus, *yours.* Now *yours*, Metellus.
Yours, Cinna; and, my valiant Caska, *yours.*
Though last, not least in love, *yours*, good Trebonius.

(3.1.184-189, my emphases)

An audience recalling Brutus' speech declaring that a Roman 'Is guilty of a several bastardy / If he do break the smallest particle / Of any promise that hath passed from him' (2.1.137-9) will realise the ignoble implications of Antony shaking hands with men he means to be revenged upon. The insincerity of his gesture, and the blood he collects on his hands in the process, is a stark visual metaphor for Antony's vicious disingenuousness, as noted by critics such as David Bevington,²⁴ but Antony is also following in the Machiavellian vein in more explicit ways. The advice in *The Prince* that 'one must know how to colour one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver'²⁵ is reflected in how Antony, in shaking the bloody hands of Brutus' faction, 'effectively

²⁴ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 160.

²⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by George Bull, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 57.

changes the blood from sacred to corrupt'.²⁶ Robert S. Miola argues that, 'as Brutus becomes more like Caesar, so Antony becomes more like Brutus [...] Unlike Brutus, however, Antony uses the handshaking ritual to mask his true designs'.²⁷ Here I disagree with Miola; Antony does not become more like Brutus, but actually remains true to himself: an ironic sincerity, perhaps, given his larger deception. As any noble Roman should know, a handshake implies a duty; only, when Antony shakes hands, the duty he confirms is not to Brutus and the other conspirators, but to himself and to his pre-existing pledge of friendship with Caesar.

As such, constancy can be seen as a performative – and, therefore, artificial – posture. This becomes particularly apparent when Brutus tells the conspirators,

Good gentlemen, look fresh and merrily.
Let not our looks put on our purposes,
But bear it as our Roman actors do,
With untired spirits and formal constancy.

(2.1.223-6)

Critics of the play have long noted the paradoxical nature of this advice. How can actors, those masters of dissembling, be described as 'constant'? Miles observes how these lines contain an implicit uncertainty over whether or not constancy can be thought of as 'a spiritual reality or a matter of outward appearances'.²⁸ Jonathan Goldberg also raises concerns over Brutus' advice, noting the contradiction between asking the conspirators 'to put on a "look" even as he asks them not to have their "looks put on our purposes"'.²⁹ We must note that, Justus Lipsius, whose *De Constantia* was a primary source for Shakespeare's ideas about constancy, opposes its equation with theatricality. However, Hassan Melehy argues that the playwright responds to Lipsian notions by 'inverting' them, presenting constancy as 'mainly a matter of theatrics'.³⁰ In doing so, we see how *Julius Caesar* is a text which consciously plays with both the nature of constancy as a performance and the necessity for a performance to be constant or

²⁶ Lisa S. Starks-Estes, *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare's Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 135.

²⁷ Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 102.

²⁸ Miles, p. 17.

²⁹ Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 164.

³⁰ Hassan Melehy, *The Poetics of Literary Transfer in Early Modern France and England* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), p. 228.

consistent in order to be believable. The show of constancy becomes just that: a show. As such, 'acting constant' becomes a paradox ready for theatrical exploitation.

Before we move on, a note on the hands used in the assassination itself. As the Senate gathers, Cinna pointedly says to Caska, 'you are the first that rears your hand' (3.1.30). Here, 'hand' works as a kind of synecdoche that implies but does not explicitly state the dagger that will be held in it, nor whom the hand itself is raised against, nor the handshake used to seal the assassination plan; the hand is seen as the key agent, and is all the more potent for the term's ambiguity. One might even go as far as to say that the democracy of the Senate, where votes were often taken by the show of hands, is still being adhered to in an assassination where Caesar is defeated by senators rearing their hands against him. In doing so, it depersonalises the act of murder, equating it with more political motives. The way in which Caska is reminded of what his hand must do is deeply evocative about the act he is committing in the political arena of the Senate House.

The gestures of political states and states of mind

Gesture is crucial to the play's plot even when it happens off-stage. In a couple of noteworthy incidents, gestures are reported as a past event: when Caska tells of Caesar denying the crown, and Portia's concern for Brutus.

Shakespeare often takes ideas for his theatrical spectacle directly from his source material, and his use of gesture is no exception. In the first instance, Caesar's refusal of the crown is well documented by historians. Plutarch has this detailed description of the event:

When he was come to *Caesar*, he made his fellow ronners with him lift him up, & so he did put this laurell crowne vpon his head, signifying thereby that he had deserued to be king. But *Caesar making as though he refused it, turned away his heade*. The people were so reioyced at it, that they all clapped their hands for ioy. *Antonius* againe did put it on his head: *Caesar againe refused it*, and thus they were striuing of and on a great while together. As oft as *Antonius* did put this laurell crowne vnto him, a fewe of his followers reioyced at it: & as oft also as *Caesar* refused it, all the people together clapped their hands.³¹

³¹ Plutarch, sig. NNNN2r-v.

There is a similar account by Suetonius in *The Twelve Caesars*.³² Shakespeare takes these incidents and re-writes them into his script, but instead of showing us the refusal of the crown onstage, he has Caska relate the incident:

[...] I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown – yet 'twas not a crown neither, 'twas one of these coronets – and, as I told you, *he put it by once*; but for all that, to my thinking, he would fain have had it. Then he offered it to him again; *then he put it by again*; but to my thinking, he was very loth to lay his fingers off it. And then he offered it the third time; *he put it the third time by*; and still as he refused it the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked Caesar; for he swooned and fell down at it. (1.2.235-47, my emphases)

The similarities leap off the page. All the elements are there, from the crown being offered several times, to the delight of the crowd. Vivian Thomas' reading of the historical evidence is that the event was 'a rehearsed device to set up another test of popular feeling'.³³ With this in mind, it would appear that even before Caesar's life was dramatised by Shakespeare, the level of public ceremony and ritual in Rome ensured that Caesar was using gesture to act out a part and convince Rome of his sincerity. We see exactly this kind of affair taken apart by Machiavelli:

Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands, because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are [...] The common people are always impressed by appearances and results.³⁴

This level of considered performance is enhanced by the gestures described in the refusal of the crown, purely because such gestures are ephemeral. While an act such as writing 'preserves the words and submits them to the judgement of the reader, who has the time to give them his considered attention',³⁵ gestures cannot be so easily recalled or

³² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by Robert Graves (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 38.

³³ Vivian Thomas, 'Shakespeare's Sources: Translations, Transformations, and Intertextuality in *Julius Caesar*' in *Julius Caesar: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Horst Zander (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 91-110 (p. 101).

³⁴ Machiavelli, p. 58.

³⁵ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (trans. by George Bull) (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 71.

held to account. Heinrich F. Plett argues that *actio* represents a natural sign language comprehensible to everyone, even the uneducated and those untrained in language', which accounts for its persuasiveness.³⁶ Such gestures as Caesar's also anticipate the successful *actio* of Antony in his funeral oration, which I shall explore further in my final section.

Shakespeare specifies the need for a gesture in his script when Casca says, 'Why, there was a crown offered him; and being offered him, he put it by with the back of his hand, *thus*, and then the people fell a-shouting' (1.2.220-2, my emphasis). The repetitive gestures would look pantomimic if this scene were actually staged – as indeed they are in Vitagraph's 1908 silent film of *Julius Caesar*, where the lack of dialogue except for intermittent German intertitles renders the filming of the refusal scene essential. But when the gestures are merely reported, it emphasises to the audience what the incident actually is: a necessarily theatrical scene where Caesar goes through the motions of convincing the Romans that he has no wish to be a tyrant, playing the role of modest and trustworthy leader just as Plutarch implies. The episode recalls a similar incident in *Richard III*. After murdering his way to the top, Richard denies the crown so that he might appear unambitious:

Alas, why would you heap this care on me?

I am unfit for state and majesty.

I do beseech you, take it not amiss;

I cannot, nor I will not, yield to you.

(3.7.203-6)

Shakespeare's preoccupation with dramas surrounding the lives of kings and rulers may be down to the way he sees the workings of power as being inherently theatrical. Holger Schott Syme considers this in his study, *Theatre and Testimony in Shakespeare's England*: '[a]ll we ever see in the theatre are figures claiming to be someone they are not; making us see those imaginary or historical figures is always [...] primarily an intellectual rather than a visual accomplishment'.³⁷ The ceremonies that surround kingship are inescapably tied to the rituals of the stage; and, with both, the pretence of gesture is a vehicle for persuasion and power.

³⁶ Plett, p. 258.

³⁷ Holger Schott Syme, *Theatre and Testimony in Shakespeare's England: A Culture of Mediation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 245.

There is a striking similarity of imagery between *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*, both of which tell a similar story, albeit from different perspectives. In *Richard III* we are shown the chasing of power by a tyrant, who inevitably gets his comeuppance; in *Julius Caesar* we see the work behind removing such a tyrant as the main action of the piece, an action which then in turn is reacted against by a different faction with their own objectives. Caesar and Richard III are in no way tyrants of equal standing: one is assassinated in case he becomes a tyrant, the other because he fundamentally is one. We may note how the first tetralogy contain a variety of references to Julius Caesar, including the prince in *Richard III* asking if Caesar built the Tower of London (3.1.68-9). Indeed, Andrew Hadfield argues that the tetralogy is ‘Shakespeare’s *Pharsalia*’, given the plays’ emphasis on the bloodiness of civil war.³⁸ It is possible that Shakespeare is capitalizing on the fact that in 1599 when *Julius Caesar* was first performed, his audiences will already know his *Richard III*. As a dramatist, he may build on the knowledge of the crowd, who have already seen a play where a tyrant needs to be stopped, and perhaps this helps to explain why the Roman conspirators move too soon. Reading the plays solely within the period in which they are set is almost never helpful, but if we read the plays in the order of composition, we can see the shared political nous that Shakespeare is building up among his audience. The essential story of *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar* remains the same: a problematic ruler is dispatched, and the wheel of history keeps on turning. But what remains pertinent is the overlap of images between the two plays and what that suggests about Shakespeare’s conception of the fashioning of power at key political moments - and how gesture plays an important role in how such power is presented.

When Caska describes the reaction of the crowd to Caesar’s refusal of the crown, we are told that the people ‘clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps’ (1.2.243-4). Similarly, in Shakespeare’s earlier play, the Duke of Buckingham tells Richard of his attempts to stage-manage the people into accepting Richard as their King by getting some of his own faction to hurl ‘up their caps’ (3.7.35). Buckingham’s frustration that the crowd ‘spake not a word, / But like dumb statues or breathing stones / Stared on each other and looked deadly pale’ (3.7.24-6) is reiterated by Richard’s own annoyance: ‘What tongueless blocks were they!’ (3.7.42). We are reminded of this in *Julius Caesar*, when Marullus the tribune voices his anger at the Roman crowds by calling them, ‘You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!’ (1.1.36) The lexical similarity of these scenes, both of which involve the performance of state-craft

³⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [2005]), p. 105.

before a crowd who must be convinced of a political leader's sincerity, is striking. It becomes even more so when we hear Cassius say to Brutus:

And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
That you have no such *mirrors* as will turn
Your hidden worthiness into your eye,
That you *might see your shadow*.

(1.2.55-8, my emphases)

This itself recalls Richard's own line, spoken alone: 'Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a *glass*, / That I *may see my shadow* as I pass' (1.2.365-6, my emphases). These lines, both spoken in the second scenes of *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*, occur at a crucial stage of action within the plays: Cassius is convincing Brutus of his worthiness as a leader, and Richard has just been convincing Anne of his sincerity. Both instances follow the Ciceronian advice neatly summarised by Miles: 'The good man must not only be virtuous but must be seen to be virtuous: *esse est percipi*'.³⁹ Perhaps this helps to account for Caesar's desire to be seen to be 'constant as the northern star' (3.1.60). Rather similar advice also appears in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, who counsels that a ruler 'need not necessarily have all the good qualities I mentioned above, but he should certainly appear to have them'.⁴⁰ There is perhaps a sense of the necessity of self-composition in order to mask vulnerability; indeed, *The Book of the Courtier* makes reference to Caesar 'wearing a laurel wreath, in order to hide his baldness'.⁴¹ This is yet another example of appearances masking reality, but also reveals a telling connection between Caesar's own desire for power to hide his ageing body. There are, of course, consequences when a character has all the appearance of virtue but none of the substance: the vicious character who appears to be virtuous is indistinguishable from the genuinely good man.

Advice such as Cicero's is all the more relevant to the presentation of power in *Julius Caesar* when we recall T. W. Baldwin's weight of evidence that Cicero's *De Officiis* was a set text in Elizabethan grammar schools, alongside works by Quintilian such as *De Oratore*.⁴² When we look at the following passages from these texts, the evidence of influences upon Shakespeare's dramatic work is striking. After noting the similarity of

³⁹ Miles, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Machiavelli, p. 57.

⁴¹ Castiglione, p. 150.

⁴² T. W. Baldwin's *Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, Vol 2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), p. 586 on *De Officiis*, p. 63 on *De Oratore*.

the mirror imagery between *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III* and the gestures implied therein, this advice from Quintilian becomes all the more potent:

Seemliness also comes from Gesture and movement. This is why Demosthenes used to plan his performance in front of a big mirror; despite the fact that the bright surface reverses the image, he had complete trust in his own eyes' ability to tell him what effect he was making.⁴³

Not only are we reminded of self-reflection and its necessity for believable performance in the characters of Richard and Cassius, it also evokes the most famous advice that Hamlet gives to the players:

[...] the purpose of playing whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (3.2.20-4)

Quintilian offers further counsel on how gesture should complement the words being spoken:

The Gestures of which I have been speaking all appear to be natural concomitants of words.⁴⁴

The old experts on this subject rightly added at this point that the hand movement should begin and end with the sense, for otherwise the Gesture will either anticipate the voice or lag behind it, and in either case the result is unsightly.⁴⁵

As does Cicero:

For we must act in such a way that we attempt nothing contrary to universal nature[.]⁴⁶

For just as the eye is aroused by the beauty of a body, because of the appropriate arrangement of the limbs, and is delighted just because all its parts

⁴³ Quintilian, *The Orator's Education, Books 11-12*, ed. and trans. by Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: 2001), 11.3, p. 121.

⁴⁴ Quintilian, 11.3, p. 131.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 11.3; p. 141.

⁴⁶ Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.110, p. 43.

are in graceful harmony, so this seemliness, shining out in one's life, arouses the approval of one's fellows, because of the order and constancy and moderation of every word and action.⁴⁷

Here, we are irresistibly reminded once again of Hamlet's acting recommendations:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance – that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature (3.2.16-18).

Such advice is regurgitated in *The Book of the Courtier*, where we are told that words should be:

accompanied by a suitable manner and gestures. These, in my opinion, should consist in certain movements of the entire body, not affected or violent but tempered by an agreeable expression of the face and movement of the eyes giving grace and emphasis to what is said, together with gestures to make as plain as possible the meaning and sentiments of the orator.⁴⁸

It is through texts such as Castiglione's where we see the Renaissance's focus on antiquity make a mark on Shakespeare's plays. Cicero even goes as far as to mention how in Athens, Solon faked his own madness 'in order both to make his own life safer, and the more to assist the republic',⁴⁹ a strategy also associated with Lucius Junius Brutus (Brutus' grandfather). Perhaps this story influenced Shakespeare's composition of Hamlet, with its focus on a student of classical rhetorical tradition faking madness in an attempt to return his country to a state of order.

The timing of *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*'s composition, and the extent of Roman rhetorical influence upon these plays, has an obvious contextual source. By 1599, concern over the successor to Elizabeth I was creating new levels of anxiety in London, leading Shakespeare to turn to 'ancient history for inspiration, choosing to put on stage an exemplary crisis from the past: the end of the Roman republic'.⁵⁰ Barbara L. Parker also notes the similarities between the rule of Caesar and of Elizabeth, notably their heirlessness and 'sterile curse', susceptibility to flatterers, and projections of

⁴⁷ Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.98, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Castiglione, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.108, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Maddalena Pennacchia, 'Antony's Ring: Remediating Ancient Rhetoric on the Elizabethan Stage', in *Identity, Otherness and Empire in Shakespeare's Rome*, ed. by Maria Del Sapio Garbero (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 49-59 (p. 49).

immortality.⁵¹ There is therefore a precedent for critical attention to draw parallels between the leadership of Caesar and Elizabeth, and the states they headed up. Of particular note is Mark Rose's observation of the similarity of Marullus the tribune to the indignant Elizabethan Puritans that were heard preaching in London.⁵² What these observations reveal is an undeniable concern of Shakespeare's during this period of the performativity of a believable truth, and the inheritance of a classical anxiety about separating sincerity from the mere appearance of it. Jennifer Low discusses this with regard to the London playhouses. Examining how spatial elements control the subject, and the intraperformative transaction between actors and their audience, Low argues that the penetrative thrust stage of outdoor amphitheatres such as the Globe would have had a crucial effect on spectators in a way that a nineteenth century proscenium stage would not.⁵³ Writing about Shakespeare's later play, Low contends that Coriolanus refuses to open himself up to public spectacle or 'figurative penetration'.⁵⁴ But we also see similar qualities in Brutus, when he is refusing to open up to Portia about his inner state. Here, however, the role of gesture is crucial to understanding the scene.

We have seen the effect of reported gesture in Caska's rendition of Caesar refusing the crown, but reported gesture serves a different purpose when Portia worries about her husband's mental state:

[...] Y'have ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed: and yesternight at supper
*You suddenly arose, and walked about,
Musing, and sighing, with your arms across;*
And when I asked you what the matter was
You stared upon me with ungentle looks.
I urged you further: *then you scratched your head
And too impatiently stamped with your foot.*
Yet I insisted, yet you answered not
*But with an angry wafture of your hand
Gave sign for me to leave you.*

(2.1.236-46, my emphases)

⁵¹ Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 89-90.

⁵² Rose, p. 256-7.

⁵³ Low, p. 23; p. 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

Unlike the report of Caesar refusing the crown, here the use of described gesture shows something sincere about a character: as this incident happens in a private household, Brutus has no reason to put on a pretence about his mental state. Indeed, Bevington claims that, ‘although these actions are described as having taken place offstage, they appear to be an honest expression of the relationship we see on stage’.⁵⁵ It also reveals the thought process leading up to Brutus’ oddly sudden, ‘It must be by his death’ speech (2.1.10), and evidence of this internal struggle allows the audience to give him the benefit of the doubt before choosing whether or not to write him off as an easily manipulated murderer. What is important is that it makes the audience *imagine* the gestures and what they symbolise; if they were simply performed in front of their eyes, they might take it – literally – at face value. However, it also calls to attention that if Portia can embody a gestural emotion she does not actually feel (by imitating Brutus’ melancholy), then so can the person initially enacting it. Starks-Estes problematizes notions of Roman constancy, arguing that Shakespeare’s Roman works reveal a critique of neo-stoicism as an early modern adaptation of traditional Roman stoicism by showing up the inconsistencies between characters who claim to be constant and yet are hindered by their emotions.⁵⁶ This makes perfect sense after Portia’s description: despite Brutus’ preference for a solemn Roman handshake instead of an oath, we are told through Portia’s description of his earlier distractions. What he wants the conspirators to see as his sense of self-control is, in fact, an illusion where, more than anyone else, he is deceiving himself.⁵⁷ Were it not for the gestures reported by his wife, we would not be privy to this crucial insight to Brutus’ character.

Our hearts you see not

My final gestural examples involve the presentations at Caesar’s funeral. When it comes to the abuse of rhetorical skill, Brutus sums up the problem of telling the difference between appearance and reality by saying, ‘Our hearts you see not’ (3.1.169). Yet, the citizens also do not see Antony’s heart when he is setting mischief afoot.

Despite Cicero’s contemptuous comments about actors, he acknowledged the overlaps between rhetoric and theatrics. He even had affable contests with the actor Quintus Roscius: Cicero would try and describe a particular thought with words, and Roscius

⁵⁵ Bevington, p. 95-6.

⁵⁶ Starks-Estes, p. 138.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 141.

with gestures.⁵⁸ Indeed, Aldrete asserts that orators prepared gesture and visual aids such as props with the same care as an actor, and that, in fact, ‘many of the actual gestures used by these two groups were the same’.⁵⁹ In many ways, this stands to reason. Both orators and actors set out to persuade and convince not through logic, but through appeals to emotion, using their physicality to stir up empathy in an audience. By communicating through a shared space, and gesticulating to the people and surroundings within it, actors and rhetoricians alike enhance the idea of common ground shared between speaker and audience. Heinrich F. Plett’s commentary on rhetoric in Renaissance culture helps to further problematize the unclear distinction between oratory and theatre and the sense of morality which may or may not be attached to either. He notes that orators and actors share the belief that ‘an inner *actio* forms the precondition for an effective outer *actio*’, giving us the sense that both kinds of performers make use of method acting; furthermore, he reminds us of the rhetorical principle that ‘only the person who is himself moved can move others’.⁶⁰ In fact, Plett goes as far as to say that the intense similarity between acting and rhetoric was a basic assumption, observing how Richard Burbage was praised for having ‘the *gradatio* of “an excellent Orator, animating his words with speaking, and Speech with Action”’.⁶¹ However, not all rhetoricians were able to use the advice of actors to their gestural advantage: the orator Quintus Hortensius was criticised for using gestures excessively and being too theatrical; of similar ridicule was Sextus Titius, whose overly supple gestures ensured that a popular dance, ‘The Titius’, was named after him.⁶²

Despite the similarities between acting and rhetoric, there was a massive discrepancy between the status of orators and the status of performers in ancient Rome; so much so, that emperors expelled actors and dancers on various occasions in an attempt to improve Rome’s moral climate.⁶³ They saw the distinction between oratory and theatre as being that one is supposed to be sincere and truthful, and the other a vulgar form of entertainment. Yet the delivery of both is designed to persuade and move an audience, ensuring a clash between *veritas* and *vulgaris* that becomes hard to untangle. Therefore, the trend towards orators becoming increasingly theatrical represented a rise in unscrupulousness – at least, it did to the Roman aristocracy. But the presentation of this in *Julius Caesar* also reflects a contemporary Elizabethan concern, given the anti-theatrical Puritan movement which succeeded in closing the theatres in 1642. Starks-

⁵⁸ Aldrete, p. 54.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

⁶⁰ Plett, p. 256-7.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 264-5.

⁶² Aldrete, p. 67-8.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 54.

Estes argues persuasively that Antony's performance at Caesar's funeral is a form of icon-building which uncomfortably links Christianity with paganism;⁶⁴ and reveals Shakespeare's ultimate ambivalence over hagiography: he is 'at once an iconoclast, unveiling the manipulative process by which Antony transposes Caesar into a martyr, and simultaneously an icon builder, affirming the theatrical power of the image'.⁶⁵

In order to assert some kind of dividing line between oratory and theatrics, Quintilian 'distinguishes between gestures "which proceed naturally from us" and "others which indicate things by means of mimicry"'.⁶⁶ The problem with this, Corbeill points out, is not lost upon Quintilian: learning how to act naturally requires formal training.⁶⁷ The trend towards naturalism in performance is also discussed by Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*, who advises the use of 'a certain nonchalance', or, in the Italian, *sprezzatura*:

[S]teer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practise in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless. I remember once having read of certain outstanding orators of the ancient world who, among the other things they did, tried hard to make everyone believe that they were ignorant of letters; and, dissembling their knowledge, they made their speeches appear to have been composed very simply and according to the promptings of Nature and truth rather than effort and artifice. For if the people had known of their skills, they would have been frightened of being deceived.⁶⁸

This text would appeal to a playwright who must create believable characters in a way which seems uncontrived. Of course, this notion is echoed by Stephen Greenblatt's view that the literature of the Renaissance oversaw, 'an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process'.⁶⁹ As such, the reactionary response of the anti-theatricality movement developed precisely because the

⁶⁴ Starks-Estes, p. 137.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 138.

⁶⁶ Fritz Graf, 'Gestures and conventions: the gestures of Roman actors and orators' in *A Cultural History of Gesture from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 36-58 (p. 39).

⁶⁷ Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) p. 3.

⁶⁸ Castiglione, p. 67.

⁶⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005) p. 2.

dividing line between appearance and reality is apparent to the enactors of performative rhetoric, but not always to the audience who witness it. The moral ramifications of this are not easily resolved, if they can be resolved at all, and such complexities are epitomised by Antony's way of performing at Caesar's funeral: his gestures that imply a *pretence* of sincerity are more believable than Brutus' genuine truth. But this is the crucial issue when arguing about the immorality of dissembling, as it is a vital part of Renaissance creative culture. George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* insists that a 'good poet or maker ought to dissemble his art'.⁷⁰ The so-called vulgarity of pretence is not merely used by the theatres, but also by what was considered to be the highest form of Renaissance literature: poetry.

When Marullus addresses the plebeians as 'You blocks, you *stones*, you worse than senseless things!' (1.1.35, my emphasis), it seems like a chastisement erupting in the heat of the moment. Yet it is paralleled at a crucial moment half way through the drama when he speaks at Caesar's funeral and announces his desire to 'move / The *stones* of Rome to rise and mutiny' (3.2.222-3, my emphasis), Antony claims Caesar's murder will shake Rome to its very foundations; what transpires is that it is the citizens who are the foundation, and that he is rousing them to action through his rhetoric. His emotive words and gestures chip away at the 'senseless' public, sculpting them to his own ends. While *The Book of the Courtier* gives the advice that the words of an orator should be chosen in order to shape an audience 'to his purpose like wax',⁷¹ the same can also be said of the gestures used in such a performance, which also help to shape an audience's opinion. This is why Marullus is so frustrated at the play's opening: seeing the citizens parading through the streets in Caesar's honour, he laments their manipulability, and what this means for the good of Rome; a scene that mirrors the puritanical concerns about the London theatre scene, with its insincere theatrical signifiers considered an ungodly link to Catholicism and anti-Romish sentiment.

Cicero's belief that 'a speaker can no more be eloquent without a large audience than a flute-player can perform without a flute',⁷² is exactly the kind of oratorical advice that Antony subscribes to – and he plays the audience to great effect.⁷³ When emotive actions are used in such a way, Fritz Graf argues that they 'serve the overall aim of ancient rhetoric, *psychagogia*, "winning of men's souls"'.⁷⁴ Indeed, a speaker's lack of

⁷⁰ Quoted in Plett, p. 276-7.

⁷¹ Castiglione, p. 77.

⁷² Cicero, *De Oratore Books 1 and 2*, p. 455.

⁷³ Cicero's advice also recalls Hamlet's frustration with the insincerity of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: 'Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?' (3.2.361-2).

⁷⁴ Graf, p. 40.

gesticulation was thought to indicate emotional disengagement from the argument being orated, and was frowned upon;⁷⁵ consequently, it is no wonder that Brutus' performance pales in comparison to Antony, who goes out of his way to demonstrate his emotional engagement with Caesar's death, gesticulating towards his wounds:

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
You all do know *this* mantle [...]
Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through:
See what a rent the envious Caska made:
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stabbed,
And as he plucked his cursed steel away,
Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it[.]
(3.2.167-8; 172-6, my emphases)

The deictic 'this' and the imperatives 'look', 'see', and 'mark' all imply a gesture which Antony must deploy to point out specific wounds. It might seem like a cheap, manipulative trick, but it is a well-deployed rhetorical gesture: Cicero himself recalls a case where Antonius tore off his client's tunic to show the judges the scars beneath.⁷⁶ Once Antony starts pointing out Caesar's individual wounds, all the plebeians remember of Brutus' rhetoric is that his placating hands were still soaked with blood. Over the top as his gestures might appear, Antony is following Cicero's advice, who 'spoke approvingly even of very sudden and violent motions, such as foot-stamping and striking the head, because such dramatic gestures were particularly effective in exciting the emotions of the audience'.⁷⁷ Such actions, however, speak to emotions rather than to intellect, further moving Antony's performance away from political rhetoric and into theatrical acting, and this was a concern for Quintilian, who said that the use of a 'trembling hand' in orations 'really belongs on the stage'.⁷⁸ But theatre-loving Antony is merely following sound rhetorical advice. Following the lines 'Bear with me; / My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, / And I must pause till it come back to me' (3.2.106-8), Antony turns away as if to recollect himself. By presenting himself as physically moved by his emotions, Antony follows the advice of *De Oratore* by 'pretend[ing] to summon all his energies for the effort, confess[ing] to nervousness by a deep sigh'.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Aldrete, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Plett, p. 263.

⁷⁷ Aldrete, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Quintilian, 11.3; p. 139.

⁷⁹ Graf, p. 45.

Miola notes that the handshake is ‘a gesture of respect and love all the more affecting for its sharp contrast with the earlier handshaking rituals’,⁸¹ and as the final handshake implied by Shakespeare’s text, it is a particularly fitting conclusion to Brutus’ life as an ‘honourable man’. Interestingly, Suetonius’ account of the life of Caesar claims that on his last night, he dreamt that he flew to the heavens and shook hands with Jupiter;⁸² another physical gesture between two people that precedes the acceptance of one’s final moments. Although, as Starks-Estes contends, *Julius Caesar* in many ways provides a critique of stoicism and the limitations of self-constancy, Brutus ends his life in a manner in keeping with his aspirations to honour. The final handshake between him and Strato is a poignant reminder of the hands shaken by Brutus when deciding upon Caesar’s assassination. At this point, the agency of hands has come full circle; the cycle of Brutus’ political acts begins, and ends, with a handshake. The scene between Strato and Brutus has a quality of intimate dutifulness, revealing a potent compact of the personal act of suicide as a political act of concession.

Brutus’ suicide is his final gesture, although it surpasses ephemeral gesture itself, becoming action and the ultimate sign of Roman constancy and allegiance to duty.⁸³ Yet the crux of the matter is this: for the character, suicide is an action; but for the actor, it is a gesture, for thirty lines later, he will rise again to take the applause of the crowd. As soon as the audience witnesses an unambiguously sincere act in a play that consistently toys with ambivalent actions, the play ends, and the ultimate illusion of constancy is revealed. A play such as *Julius Caesar* questions gestures performed in a nominally un-theatrical space and the consequences of taking them at face value in a politicised state. Shakespeare uses Roman concerns about the increasing theatricality of rhetorical gesture and its inflection on the moral climate of Rome in a move that, if not openly sympathises with, then at least intellectually and ethically concedes to Puritan concerns about Elizabethan theatrical culture.

⁸¹ Miola, p. 112

⁸² Suetonius, p. 40.

⁸³ Miles writes that it ‘is not surprising that Brutus welcomes death. Only in death can he end the strain of pretence [...] ultimately, to play “a Roman’s part” is to die’ (p. 148).