

“Je t’aime, Papa”: Theatricality and the Fifth Canon of Rhetoric in Justin Trudeau’s Eulogy for his Father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau

Tracy Whalen
University of Winnipeg

Rhetorical theory has long engaged with—and has been quick to distinguish itself from—theatricality, particularly in discussions of the fifth canon (*pronuntiatio*, *hypokrisis*, or delivery).¹ Aristotle connects the art of delivery and the “actor’s art” in the *Rhetoric*, but maintains the distinction between speaker/rhetor and actor; the rhetor is advised to make clarity, not flattery, the guiding principle of good speaking. Aristotle laments the state of oratory under democracy, where speakers, he felt, pandered to the crowd through theatrical flourish: “The honours of dramatic contests fall, as a rule, to the actors; and, just as, on the stage, the actors are at present of more importance than the poets, so it is, owing to the vices of society, in the contests of civil life” (1403b). Pseudo Cicero’s *Ad C. Herennium* continues the anti-theatrical bias (not to mention class bias) in its discussion of physical movement: “Accordingly the facial expression should show modesty and animation, and the gestures should not be conspicuous for either elegance or grossness, lest we give the impression that we are either actors or day labourers” (III. XV.26). Jody Enders traces from Greco-Roman times a persistent tradition of equating theatricality not only with bad rhetoric, but also with the “emasculat[i]on of eloquence” (255). She points to the castrating language of Quintilian and Tacitus, who decry a once-rigorous rhetoric that, in the form of histrionic delivery and theatrical declamation, had

¹ George Kennedy writes, “The prevailing meaning of *hypokrisis* in Greek is acting and the regular word for an actor is *hypokrites*” (218, note 1). Jody Enders notes that “[t]he idealistic association of a purified theatre with morality tended to anchor in questions of nobility, beauty, and character the precept that *hypokrisis* (denoting acting, feigning, or counterfeit) was for orators, while *hypocrisy* was for actors” (267).

been mutilated and made soft. Such language revealed an anxiety about those who often successfully used these so-called effeminate techniques—women, homosexuals, and actors—and constituted a sustained effort to exclude such threatening candidates from hegemonic discourse.

Accusations of excess, insincerity, lying, and fakery have not been confined to the fifth canon of delivery alone, but are the same dispersions leveled at rhetoric as a whole. Socrates tells Polus in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric, the counterfeit of a branch of politics, is not an art but a “knack” like cosmetics, which is “crooked, deceptive, mean, slavish, deceiving by shaping, colouring, smoothing, dressing, [and] making people assume a beauty which is not their own” (465b).² This antagonistic attitude towards rhetoric is particularly evident in seventeenth-century thinking. John Locke calls the artificial figures of rhetoric “perfect cheats,” as they arouse the passions and subdue the rational faculties (III, X, 34). Clergyman Thomas Sprat of the British Royal Society called for a “world without rhetoric, a world where people could speak of things as they really were, without the colourings of style, in plain language as clear as glass” (Bizzell and Herzberg 642). Not much has changed today: rhetoric is frequently contrasted with reality and keeps company with adjectives like *mere*, *empty*, or *political* (referring, of course, to the politics one does not identify with). Just as rhetoric scholars are critical of such definitions of rhetoric as deceitful and cosmetic, they might also question longstanding assumptions about the fifth canon as extraneous, supplemental, superficial—or in its self-conscious and explicit forms, insincere.

² W.R.M. Lamb’s earlier translation (1925) favours the word *rascally* to describe rhetoric, a particularly good term.

Questions of theatricality and rhetoric came to the fore in a Canadian context in 2000, when Justin Trudeau delivered a eulogy for his father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who served as Prime Minister of Canada from 1968-1979 and again from 1980-1984.³ Justin's delivery was characterized by deliberate enunciation, gestures, and pauses. Canadian print reviews of the delivery revealed a dominant theatricality and anti-theatricality discourse. Trudeau's delivery signified for some a moving moment, while for others it indicated aesthetic misjudgment and, more than that, insincerity—a perceived distance between genuine feelings and disingenuous performance.

Using theories of theatricality and rhetoric, this article problematizes traditional interpretations of sincerity as the congruity between inner feeling and outer performance. Sincerity can be understood instead as an effect of media presentation. Further, the study of delivery cannot be confined to the gestures, vocal inflection, and facial expression of one live event, but must also consider media editing and the various uses that others will make of that performed moment. Rhetoricians Jim Ridolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss caution critics not to assume that “the time, place, and medium of delivery will necessarily be the same for both the speaker and the speaker's audiences” (“Composing for Recomposition—History,” para. 3). Textual performances occur in a complex environment of technology, reproduction, remixing, and re-appropriation. This paper considers how Justin likely planned his delivery strategies, anticipating how his eulogy would be cut, pasted, reframed, and reconfigured across various media and ponders whether his selections travelled well. It explores, too, why some reviewers found the arguably self-conscious theatricality of this eulogy off-putting. Critics of Justin Trudeau's

³ The eulogy can be viewed at the CBC Digital Archives, <http://archives.cbc.ca/society/family/clips/1620/>

eulogy may have acknowledged that statesmen are essentially actors, but scorned a performance that made that fact explicit.

Theatricality and Rhetoric

The terms *theatricality* and *rhetoric* are both shape-shifters when it comes to definition. Rhetoric centres on strategies of suasion and how it is instantiated through symbolic action, but also concerns itself (among other things) with writing and speaking well, the constitution of community, reasoning, incommensurability, and consensus building. Theatricality has been abstracted from its original associations with the stage to refer to everything from the smallest studied gesture to generally understood practices of human communication. Glen McGillivray refers to the “somewhat schizophrenic definitions of theatricality” (113) and argues that theatricality has been paired with terms like *theatre*, *performativity*, *realism*, and *truth* to suggest, ultimately, that one’s own philosophical position is the good one: “In this case, defining theatricality as empty, amorphous, unlocatable, and useful only in juxtaposition with something else is a common strategy” (McGillivray 112). Like rhetoric, theatre has been equated since ancient times with deceit, emptiness, illusion, impersonation, the feminine, and “the mimetic excess of artifice” (Postlewait and Davis 6).

These attitudes were particularly evident during the eighteenth-century elocutionary movement, a school of thought and practice that prioritized the manner of delivery in expressive declamation. Elocutionist instructors and readers were often disparaged for their artificial and excessive oral reading techniques. The movement has until recently been given short shrift in rhetorical studies, too. Dana Harrington suggests that the marginalization of the elocutionists in rhetorical scholarship stems from a

widespread perception that the movement was more pedagogical than theoretical and thus not a sufficiently intellectual system of thought. Philippa Spoel has pointed to the elocutionists' link with passion and embodied practice and the relegated place traditionally granted to both subjects in rhetoric's anxious hierarchies. Despite a reputation for being theatrical, elocutionists did, in fact, prize decorous delivery and oral reading that was not too obviously performed. Jacqueline George contends that public readers were faced with the challenge of balancing theatricality and sincerity and declaiming with "performed naturalness": "the experience of public reading required an appearance of authenticity; readers were charged with reading convincingly as well as correctly, conveying veracity even as they followed rules of correct speech" (372). Elspeth Jajdelska, who contrasts the techniques of teaching reading in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, argues that seventeenth-century oral reading was characterized by "strongly marked contrasts of emotions; high volume; slow tempo; a regular pattern of pitch variation—a 'sing-song' style" (143) that instruction in the eighteenth-century worked to abolish.

William Keith explains how in the early twentieth century the emerging discipline of public speaking in the U.S. moved away from the elocutionists' expression model and towards plain approaches to speaking. Whereas the elocutionists celebrated the speeches of British and American politicians and viewed oratory as high art, public speech practitioners shifted the emphasis to democratic, ordinary communication for practical, professional contexts (Keith 251). James Winans and others in the public speaking camp focused on the "strategic dimension of communication" and on the needs of an audience, on function rather than style (Keith 253). These early practitioners were not in the main

interested in aesthetically pleasing delivery or voice production, but rather in strategies of civil discourse and debate. They championed conversation as the guiding model for effective public speaking and saw these conversations as an important means of participating in democratic life. One can discern in the historical discourses of a once-emerging discipline, and can still discern today, a tension between the practical/functional element and the aesthetic/stylized element in the teaching and evaluation of public speaking. This tension was evident, as will be discussed, in the mixed reception to Justin Trudeau's eulogy.

Close-up on Justin Trudeau

The state funeral for Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000) took place on 3 October 2000 in Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal. There had been five days of mourning before this day, as the former Prime Minister lay in state at Parliament Hill and was then taken by train from Ottawa to Montreal, the train slowing down along the way so people could pay their respects. People lined the streets as Mounties flanked the car that took the casket from Montreal City Hall to the Basilica. Walking behind were Trudeau's former wife Margaret Trudeau Kemper, from whom he had separated in 1977, and their two sons, Justin and Sacha; Trudeau's sister, Suzette; and Montreal lawyer Deborah Coyne and her daughter with Trudeau, nine-year-old Sarah. The church was filled with well-known international figures: Fidel Castro, Jimmy Carter, Prince Andrew, Margot Kidder (who had been friends with Pierre for many years), and His Highness the Aga Khan. Canadian politicians and celebrities included then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, Joe Clark, John Turner, and Leonard Cohen. Outside the church in the streets thousands gathered, watching the funeral on large

screens; many Canadians at home and in public spaces that day also watched the funeral broadcast on television.

Pierre Trudeau had protected Justin and his brothers from the media gaze as they were growing up; the public, in fact, had not really heard much from Justin before this point. At the time of the funeral, Justin was a French and theatre teacher at West Point Grey Academy, an elite private school in Vancouver, and was spokesperson for Katimavik, a youth program for community development. After the 1998 death of his brother Michel in a skiing accident in British Columbia, a death that devastated the whole Trudeau family and very much so Pierre, Justin spoke publicly with the Canadian Avalanche Foundation to promote safety awareness. Justin was not a politician when he delivered the eulogy. It was not until 2007 that he officially entered the political ring when he contested the nomination for the Papineau riding in north-central Montreal and unseated Bloc Québécois candidate Vivian Barbot. He is currently the Member of Parliament for that riding, a notable accomplishment, given the Liberal's dismal results in the May 2011 federal election.

On the day of the funeral, Justin stood at the lectern of the Basilica dressed in a black suit, grey shirt, and grey tie, with Pierre's trademark rose in his lapel and a white handkerchief in hand. For most of the delivery, Justin was filmed front on and at relatively close range. He began with a small smile, raised his eyebrows, and slowly enunciated the words "Friends . . . Romans . . . Countrymen," pausing between each word. He may have been counseled to speak slowly to accommodate the large physical space, potential audience clapping and laughter, or possible sound delays in media

equipment. After this opening quotation from *Julius Caesar*,⁴ he paused again, bit his lower lip and sustained that pose, a gesture that was repeated throughout the oration. The delivery was punctuated by head nods, hand gestures (a finger pointed to the ceiling, for instance), eyes closing tight, and moments when Justin's tongue thrust out between his teeth, a sign of excessive effort to carefully and forcefully enunciate words.

Apart from the *Julius Caesar* reference in the exordium, two moments in particular attracted media attention and comments about his theatrical performance. The first was Justin's anecdote about visiting Alert, Nunavut, the world's northernmost inhabited point, when he was six years old. His father, it turns out, had arranged a viewing of Santa Claus, which prompted Justin to declare, "And *that's* when I understood just how *powerful* and *wonderful* my father was." The second theatrical moment noted by reviewers occurred with the peroration, a moment intensified by anaphora (the repetition of "he came back"); epistrophe (the repetition of "us" in "It's all up to *us*, all of *us*, now"); the literary allusion to Robert Frost (with its rhyme and assonance); and the final apostrophe in his address to his father:

But he came back for Meech. He came back for Charlottetown. He came back to remind us of who we are and what we're all capable of. But he won't be coming back anymore. It's all up to us, all of us, now. The woods are lovely, dark and deep. He has kept his promises and earned his sleep. Je t'aime, Papa. ("Justin Trudeau's Eulogy")

With these last whispered words to his father, his voice broke. As the audience applauded, Justin walked from the lectern, wiping one eye and then the other with his handkerchief, descended the steps to his father's coffin, and put his head down on it,

⁴ This opening literary allusion received some criticism. Jane O'Hara in *Maclean's* called it "a quirky start to an otherwise compelling oration" (para.6).

where he remained in profile, face partially hidden. As the television camera came closer, his shoulders shook and his mouth moved with quiet sobs.⁵ The eulogy received immediate response: CBC's switchboards received more than 1,000 requests for transcripts on the day of the funeral. Many in Notre-Dame Basilica, including award-winning journalist Christie Blatchford, wept. The eulogy sparked speculation about a Trudeau dynasty and rumours that the young Justin might follow in his father's footsteps and enter politics.

Discourses of Theatricality and Anti-theatricality

Donovan Ochs argues that the best way “for judging the quality of a funeral ceremony . . . would be *appropriateness* as perceived by the participants . . . a communal sense of *rightness or correctness* about the rhetorical behaviours used in the ritual” (22). On this point, Canadian writers and journalists were mixed. On the one hand, critics writing immediately after the speech believed Justin Trudeau's speech to be a moving one. John Gray and Tu Thanh Ha of the *Globe and Mail* called the speech “by turns electrifying, poetic, and politically astute.” Hugh Winsor, also in the *Globe*, believed the eulogy to be stirring, tender, and poignant. Jane O'Hara, writing for *Maclean's* magazine, termed it “an eloquent tribute” and “a compelling oration.” But others were not quite so impressed. Peter Worthington of the *Toronto Sun* admitted that he was likely being “churlish” at a time of national mourning, but opined that the gushing of rave reviews for the speech was reminiscent of “Princess Diana-like rhetoric and mythology,” and argued that talk of Justin-as-future-politician was “inflated, fatuous nonsense . . . from many who should know better.” Writing four months after the eulogy, film critic Geoff Pevere

⁵ This eulogy can be accessed online at the CBC archives: <http://rc-archives.cbc.ca/emissions/emission.asp?page=14&IDLan=1&IDEmission=736&IDClip=1620>

speculated that much of the brouhaha around the oration in Canada was due to millennial-era newspapers' "editorial fondness for the scions of the nation's powerful and wealthy," which, he felt, explained why the "naïve, idealistic, privileged, contradictory [and] shallow" son of Pierre was getting such attention, attention Justin repeatedly and publicly bemoaned in national newspapers and magazines.

Whether media sources applauded the speech or criticized it, a consistent framework for understanding the eulogy was that of theatre and acting. Hugh Winsor, in his generally sympathetic *Globe* review, mentions Justin's media-savvy *technē*: "The kiss on the coffin, both before and after his eulogy, was heaven-sent for television, although the long, three-way embrace between Justin, Sacha, and their mother Margaret after the eulogy was intensely real and moving." His use of the word "although" implies that the kiss on the coffin might not have been "real," while the family hug afterwards was. Jane O'Hara also uses the language of theatre and, like Winsor, communicates possible ambivalence. She describes the speech as "both moving and highly theatrical," the coordinating structure making it difficult to know whether this is an oppositional pairing or simply a complementary one.

Arguably the most critical review (not surprising, given his longtime opposition to Pierre's policies) was that of the aforementioned right-wing journalist Peter Worthington, which revealed an unapologetic anti-theatrical bias. "Frankly," he writes,

I thought Justin's eulogy smacked of "performance" as well as genuine grief—a staged, calculated, neo-political speech. I'm not suggesting his grief wasn't real, but Justin, a drama teacher, is his father's son—and father was a consummate actor, ham, show-off, poseur, exhibitionist. Maybe "performing" was the only way Justin could handle the emotional trauma. ("Still Seduced")

Worthington puts the word *performance* in scare quotes, perhaps to signal its complexity, performance being a matter of degree. He still, however, opposes performance to “genuine grief” and suggests that the performing body was not the “real” Justin, but rather a disassociative self, a persona that allowed an inner mourning person to survive the private pain in so public a forum. Further, Worthington suggests an ulterior motive on Justin’s part, a political intent manifested in what he interprets as a carefully calculated speech. His criticism of intent points to the fact that missing the mark stylistically, being seen as theatrical, is viewed not only as an aesthetic flaw, but also as an ethical one. Eugene Garver writes that “epideixis is politics bracketed or suspended, said but not asserted” (96). Many criticized Justin, fairly or not, of making this occasion an explicit opportunity to jumpstart his own political career. Justin did begin his eulogy with the opening words of Mark Antony’s political (and duplicitous) funeral oration. If one were to gauge *ethos* on the basis of these lines alone, a reading of political ambition is not unreasonable. University of Ottawa politics professor John Trent detected hints of political ambition in Justin’s speech and located this motivation, interestingly, in his delivery. While he did not explain what exactly he meant by “political delivery,” Trent expressed the view that “[i]t was definitely a political delivery. He was not just moaning” (Bueckert).

Reviewers of the funeral oration mentioned with either admiration or disdain Justin’s ability to work the cameras and capture newspaper headlines. Geoff Pevere, for instance, accused Justin of “playing so willingly and so heartrendingly for the camera” and mildly scorned the “headliner friendly *Je t’aime, Papa*.” Justin’s performance, it seems, highlighted the relationship between orator and *medium* of communication rather

than the relation between speaker and audience. The camera or recording device became the addressee in a technological manifestation of apostrophe: Justin turned away from a congregated audience, which became a third party overhearing or witnessing a discourse between the speaker and the *medium* of presentation, a gestural apostrophe reinforced by the final lexical apostrophe, “*Je t’aime, Papa.*” Even though Justin did not explicitly say, “You *Globe and Mail* for whom I now wipe my eyes,” his stylized performance enacted a gestural apostrophe in his prioritization of the inanimate object—the camera, the newspaper, the radio.⁶ Alan Richardson argues that apostrophe is not necessarily excessive or embarrassing and is, in fact, found frequently in everyday discourse. Yet he does acknowledge with reference to Wordsworth that addresses to inanimate objects are often seen as precious: “Apostrophes to inanimate objects, then, should prove readily comprehensible yet also carry a note of strain or artificiality, heightening their perceived degree of poeticity: ‘And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,/Forbode not any severing of our loves!’” (376) While all performed language is an act of inhabiting, Justin’s eulogy made that relationship between body and language, the dynamic of incorporating a script and trying to possess it, particularly evident. This dislocation, amplified by the camera work, produced an effect of insincerity, a sense that the inner state of the subject and his outer articulation in language were not quite aligned.

Of course, those sitting in the church that day would have had a very different experience of delivery and authenticity than those watching the eulogy on television. Justin had to negotiate different speaking situations (live presentation and video), a

⁶ I am using the term “stylized” as Nikolas Coupland does in his research about television news: “a knowing and self-aware performance of a style or genre drawn from a pre-established repertoire” (422).

hybrid situation that can be difficult to reconcile. The cathedral's large size would have demanded larger movements. Those present would not necessarily have read the lip bites, hand gestures, or eye dabbing as disproportionate. Television cameras, however, highlight every micro-gesture and imbue each facial movement with amplified televisual presence. A perceived lack of authenticity would have been augmented further by the media coverage around this eulogy. As discourse analyst Nikolas Coupland argues, "Mainstream news broadcasting pursues an authentication project to bolster its claims to serious, weighty, and factual news reporting" (413). News broadcasters' more tempered and less explicitly stylized display—evidenced in the pre- and post-funeral broadcasts—would only have emphasized the difference between "legitimate" forms of truth telling and Justin's mannerisms of delivery.

The relationship between theatre and video is a complicated one, as is the question of agency, or deliberateness, in the delivery of oratory. While theatre refers generally to one transient performance (or a series of non-repeatable performances), a televised speech or newspaper photograph captures a repeatable moment that can be circulated, framed, and reframed in different contexts. Even if Justin was not coolly planning his political future in his speech, he was no doubt rhetorically astute enough to anticipate how his performance would be taken up by third-party replays and structured his delivery accordingly for the sound-bite, iconic photograph, or memorable gesture. He was a man well aware of the nation's thirst for heroes and unifying moments. The work of Ridolfo and DeVoss, particularly their idea of *rhetorical velocity*, provides a useful way of understanding the relationship between strategic rhetorical practices and rhetorical replay. Rhetorical velocity refers to "a conscious rhetorical concern for distance, travel,

speed, and time, pertaining specifically to theorizing instances of strategic appropriation by a third party” (“Composing for Recomposition—Intro,” para. 4). My concern is not with the speed of copying and pasting *per se*, but rather with an orator’s strategic anticipation when designing and delivering one’s text, what Ridolfo and DeVoss see as “composing for strategic recomposition” (“Intro,” para. 2). This crafting of one’s composition and delivery calls up the work of Kenneth Burke, whose dramatisitic model illustrates his keen awareness of the theatrical element of rhetoric. One can look to Burke’s pentadic ratios, particularly the agent-agency ratio, to understand the rhetorical situation where a rhetor (the agent) anticipates and works to her advantage the means, medium, or instrument (agency) of her discourse. This relationship is frequently enacted, particularly in digital environments.

Justin Trudeau anticipated third-party uptake and accommodated media circulation with a notably paratactic arrangement and delivery, offering information in simple, side-by-side intensified pieces. His gestures were sustained long enough to oblige the camera shot that would isolate each movement. His anticipation of the many after-lives of this speech may explain the deliberate operations of his body, which at times seemed oddly mechanical. Important words, lists, and parallel phrases were separated by noticeable caesura, each lexeme cut off from the adjacent one (“Pierre . . . Elliott . . . Trudeau”; “Statesman . . . Intellectual . . . Professor . . . Adversary . . . Outdoorsman . . . Lawyer . . . Journalist . . . Author . . . Prime Minister”). This paratactic structure was replicated in the visual editing, the camera shots moving for short segments from Justin to various high-profile audience members, effectively providing at-home audiences with

cues as to how one was to respond to the delivery. The final sound-bite was almost certainly crafted for re-appropriation and redistribution.

Similarly, the image of Justin with his forehead on his father's coffin was framed, figuratively speaking, with perforated edges; it was easily detached and relocated on local and international newspaper pages and Internet sites. Of all the photos taken that day, the picture of Justin sobbing on his father's casket received the most media attention.⁷ Taken by CP photographer Paul Chaisson, it won the 2000 Canadian Press news Picture of the Year award. The Canadian flag-draped coffin runs from the lower-left corner of the shot, its diagonal vector leading to Justin's head, which occupies the middle of the frame. A visually paratactic assemblage (as the eulogy was lexically), the shot constitutes a synecdochaic compilation of Canadian and Trudeauesque items: the red and white colours, the Canadian flag, the rose in Justin's lapel. The intensity of the image emerges from the large number of implied narratives (nationalism, a deceased personage of great stature, the mourning son) within a small photo-visual frame. Further, the shot draws upon classical, contained visual codes for understanding moments of grief: the head bowed in sadness and the decorously averted facial profile, for instance. The studied element of the photo, a shot no doubt crafted for the camera, and Justin's deliberate delivery, if arguably excessive, would have nonetheless quieted emotional excess with its disciplined self-conscious performance. With its detached presentation, the eulogy satisfied to a certain extent the requirement for a carefully coded containment of emotion through an aesthetic disposition. Rhetoricians Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites contend that "when public life appears emotional, it is assumed to be imperiled" (5).

⁷ This photograph is not widely available online. It can, however, be found at http://www.search.com/reference/Death_and_state_funeral_of_Pierre_Trudeau.

Public discourse in contemporary Western democracies generally suppresses uncontrolled emotional display. No matter how distraught the mourning nation was, in that photo-visual moment the flag, roses, curls, and suggestion of grief were perfectly aligned and suited to the ideological demands for composure. The shot is not complicated, nor was it meant to be. The rapidity of its uptake across various media forms (in the short term, anyway) depended on the quick recognition of its codes. It was *Globe and Mail* cover worthy; it had Photo of the Year written all over it. One could today imagine this photograph in a YouTube tribute to Justin or to his father, a slideshow sequence accompanied by the requisite heartrending music.

While some Canadians can call up this picture from memory, the shot has not enjoyed wide distribution these past ten years. At the time of writing, only two versions of this photograph—both quite small—come up in a Google search. Its limited shelf life can be explained in part by a key difference between this photo and those images Hariman and Lucaites view as iconic and enduring. Unlike the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima photo or the Tiananmen Square protestor photograph, the Trudeau picture does not feature a relatively anonymous “everyperson” who serves as a metonym for collective values or emotions. This picture is ultimately about Justin Trudeau (and, tangentially, his father). Its meaning derives from the specific actor depicted and is not created by visually reconciled tensions or striking composition. Famous portraiture shots (like Yousuf Karsh’s photo of Winston Churchill) centre on powerful personalities, but iconic photos (which Hariman and Lucaites argue function differently) often work by aligning powerful ideologies with photographic composition—with vectors, energies, oppositions, and

points of view.⁸ The celebrity focus on Justin in the days after the eulogy—one that he lamented in many interviews—confirmed his visibility in the delivery. Therein lies one of the challenges of public speaking, particularly funeral oration: if one appears to be too deliberate, too strategic, if one draws too much attention to either design or delivery, then a eulogist runs the risk of deflecting attention from the deceased. This balance between speaker and the spoken-of is a tricky one. If Canadian media responses (and the fadeout of a prize-winning photograph) are any indication, Justin did not perform the requisite “statuesque transparency” with complete success.⁹

Politics and Acting: Complications and Contradictions

Theatre scholar Maaïke Bleeker, writing of Michael Moore’s documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*, contends that his “rhetoric recalls this old anti-theatrical prejudice in which theatre is equated with falseness, artificiality, and exaggeration as opposed to something more true, more authentic, and more sincere, something to be taken more seriously precisely because it is not theatre” (251). She discusses Moore’s shots of then U.S. President George W. Bush making warm-up faces before announcing the second Gulf war on television and of the Bush family getting their hair and makeup done for the camera and argues that the problem is not really that politics is a form of acting. We accept that elected politicians “act” on our behalf in democratic government instead of acting on their own beliefs. What is important, she stresses, is “not sincerity or authenticity, but reliability” (253). Bleeker concludes that the central problem with Bush

⁸ Unlike the famous portraits of celebrated figures (like Marilyn Monroe, Che Guevara, or Winston Churchill) that do endure, this funeral image centres on a subject whose celebrity is secondary; it derives from his father. The power and meaning of this photograph ultimately depend on the person who is not directly depicted, but is suggested by the coffin: Pierre Trudeau. While Justin enjoyed media attention after the eulogy, he does not loom large in the cultural imaginary, generally speaking.

⁹ Robert Bringhurst coined the phrase “statuesque transparency” to describe the ideal typeface (17); it should also, in his words, aspire to “creative non-interference” (19).

was not, in fact, the disparity between Bush the president/character and Bush the person/actor (a gap one necessarily finds in political performance), but rather the difference between Bush's expressed interests in the Middle East and his unexpressed political connections, not to mention his fabricated narratives about weapons of mass destruction. In short, to some people Bush was not trustworthy, was not reliable, and this is really the premise, she observes, of Moore's documentary. Moore, however, frames this central problem of reliability in terms of *theatricality*; his anti-theatrical rhetoric deflects attention from the real problem—one of trust.

Canadian critics are also suspicious of politicians who are perceived to be acting. Ten years after Justin's eulogy, during the Helena Guergis and Rahim Jaffer political scandal, *Globe and Mail* television editor John Doyle argued that ousted Conservative MP Guergis played for CBC cameras during an interview with news anchor Peter Mansbridge:

It rarely works when politicians or other public figures try to morph into actors and play out scenes that might bring sympathy. Most can't act, and the phoniness is glaring. It's interesting that many politicians facing accusations of poor behaviour choose the role of victim. They forget what gets a politician elected in the first place – being passionate, articulate, smart, humorous and down-to-earth. The TV camera can capture that. It can also capture phoniness, instantly. (“Helena Guergis”)

While this one excerpt may not reflect Doyle's general view on the matter, the statement here argues that cameras “capture” down-to-earthness instead of *creating* such effects. The media also captures phoniness; it plays no role in its construction. Those who understand sincerity as a media effect would want to complicate this thinking. Jill Bennett, for instance, studies moments of political ineptitude and demonstrates how

sincerity is instantiated through a semiotics of appearances, rather than an alignment of outward avowal and inner feeling of the subject. In televised moments of pained awkwardness and error and getting caught out—what she calls “forced improvisation” (201)—politicians are exposed as not being able to figure something out in language. These moments, which produce contortions, facial freezing, and sputtering, effectively allow such politicians as George W. Bush and right-wing politician Pauline Hanson in Australia to “capitalize on linguistic ineptitude” (200). In short, they seem sincere in such moments because they demonstrate a momentary inability to be slick.

Again, at the time of his funeral oration Justin was not a politician, but as an orator during a state event, he was interpreted in a similar light and was read, certainly, as a proto-politician. It is not a far stretch, then, to apply insights about politicians and anti-theatre discourse to Trudeau’s eulogy as well. As Bleeker points out, all politics involves acting of some sort. It’s just that we accept a paradoxical premise in politics: “what we [want] to see is the behavior of a brilliant actor who is not acting at all, the promise of an actor who is sincere” (254). This sentiment was expressed by Peter Worthington, for instance, when he opined that “pirouetting behind the Queen’s back, which won Trudeau [Sr.] headlines, is hardly the stuff of statesmanship.” The public audience for political oratory is also accustomed to the model of Hollywood acting, the basis of which, Bleeker says, is Lee Strasberg’s method acting. According to this approach, actors are to draw upon their own experiences and memories to evoke the thoughts and feelings of a character and to produce credible life-like performances as opposed to starting from the outside with mimetic facial expressions and vocal modulation.

Critics might reflect, too, on a central contradiction at play in accusations of Justin's theatricality negatively understood. One might ask whether Canadian audiences really wanted Justin to be himself, a conventional understanding of sincerity. Media response suggested that viewers ultimately wanted Justin to be his *father*. Hugh Winsor noted that "The concept, the timbre, and the slightly nasal intonation [of Justin's delivery] were so familiar you could easily imagine it was Pierre Trudeau at the microphone. Obviously the genes run deep." John Gray and Thanh Ha wrote admiringly of Justin delivering his speech with "Trudeauesque flair." A CBC news story included this quotation from a bystander: "'He was absolutely so eloquent,' said one man, wiping tears from his face. 'He has the mouth of his father. You could see it. It was very inspiring'" ("Trudeau's Funeral"). Assessment hinged on how successfully Justin pulled off a seamless impersonation of Pierre. While Justin was to stand up at the podium for his father, to some extent he was also expected to stand *in* for him, to exist for us as a channel through which Pierre could speak. He was to embody the oration his father might have given, especially the flamboyance. David Hutchison argues that the flashy media coverage of Trudeau's funeral highlighted through contrast "the mediocrity and dullness of current political leaders, Chrétien in particular, and the desirability of style and flamboyance in politicians" (34). The death of Pierre Trudeau warranted media excess, which was also a means of national validation, the Trudeaus representing a Canadian version of the Kennedys for international viewers of the event.

One could argue that the connection between acting and politics is not the problem—*bad* acting is. For some, the eulogy exposed Justin's behaviour not only as theatre, but as bad theatre. It was theatre that took itself too seriously (failed kitsch or

sentimentalism) and was therefore not to be taken seriously by others; rather, it was to be condemned as painful or embarrassing. Bleeker reminds us that “[t]he problem is not that politics is theatre. The problem is that politics is theatre but we don’t want to know it” (252). Again, she points to the fact that insincerity defines political representation in that politicians do not act on their own inner impulses, but on behalf of the constituents who elect them. A preoccupation with stylization and theatricality deflects attention from questions we might instead ask about elected representatives: Do we believe them to be acting for the good of the people? Are they dependable, consistent, and responsible? Bleeker invites us to ponder the following question, with reference to the “natural” acting of Al Gore as presented by Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*: “Does this good, natural acting not make it even more difficult to see what kind of theatre he is playing?” There might be some benefit in seeing the mechanisms of performance. There might also be a lesson here in generosity, watching a body as it grapples with a crisis in representation: trying to be both oneself *and* one’s father, for instance. A viewer might see Justin’s exaggeration and overacting and be tempted to cringe; the delivery matched the emotional sentiment and intensity of the day, but seems overwrought ten years later. But speaking the direct quotations from Shakespeare, Robert Frost, and his father (and the imagined lines of a statesman), Justin did what politicians do all the time. While not yet a politician, he was nonetheless “speaking the words of others and enacting them and in ways that correspond to assumptions about what will look right, true, and convincing from the point of view of those represented by them” (Bleeker 260). These likely were *Justin*’s assumptions and they may have missed the mark. For many, Justin’s theatricality exposed the performance

and threatened the binaries between acting and the “real” that we hold in place to quiet our general uneasiness about the theatre and insincerity of our own lives.

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