

Cicero - Untested to Unmatched

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Starts of Speeches/Self-Presentation/Moral Character

What is most immediately striking to any reader of Cicero's *Pro Quintio*, the earliest of his speeches that survive today, is the sheer blandness of it in comparison to the orator's later speeches. It almost feels as though Cicero is simply going through the motions of a trial. In only the first two sentences, Cicero has already named four different people, each of which play a different role in the trial and therefore hold different consequences for him. Cicero assumes the existing knowledge of any given audience member to include the identity Gaius Aquilius, Quintus Hortensius, Sextus Naevius, and Publius Quinctius, never stating outright their relationship to him and to one another.

The complexity with which Cicero describes the matter at hand reveals his intended audience: those with a well-rounded education that provides them with an extensive knowledge of literary and legal topics. Only after several close re-readings of these two initial sentences may one without an intimate knowledge of Roman politics draw the conclusion that S. Naevius, represented by Q. Hortensius, would see the cause of P. Quinctius, whom Cicero is supporting, injured. Still, G. Aquilius remains somewhat of a mystery. Upon returning to this beginning after reading the speech in its entirety, it becomes apparent that Cicero had been addressing G. Aquilius as the judge of the case, yet it would be near impossible to understand G. Aquilius'

specific role from those initial sentences without a prior awareness of the dispute and its cast members.

This is in stark contrast with the opening of *Pro Caelio*, for example. In this speech, delivered a quarter century after *Pro Quinctio*, Cicero constructs an imagined persona that will say for him what he cannot. This stranger serves to ridicule the very premise of the case, reframing a tense murder trial as an act of pettiness carried out by two individuals with very personal motivations for pursuing Caelius. Atratinus intends to delay the trial of his father while Clodia intends to ruin her scorned lover. Then, of course, he appeals to the emotions of the jury, reminding them of the fact that they are working even on holiday.

In order to establish himself even further as a generally decent man that empathizes with and respects the lives of his fellow citizens, Cicero, having returned to his own voice, announces to all that he will go easy on Atratinus, the lead prosecutor, on account of either filial feeling, coercion, or tender age. Regardless of which reason Cicero chooses to spare Atratinus for, this statement serves the same three purposes. First, it reinforces the belief that Cicero is a good man who genuinely cares for the Roman people. Second, it undermines Atratinus' ability and reputation as a skilled orator. Finally, in the event that Cicero performs less impressively than the crowd might expect, he can simply cite his wish to be lenient on an up-and-coming youth.

In the instance of *Pro Caelio*, Cicero acts more as a comedian than an orator, scarcely spending any time on the actual facts of the case. Cicero, in *Pro Caelio*, is a stand-up comedian and Clodia, and essentially her entire bloodline, is the butt of his joke. As a modern stand-up comedian would, Cicero walks the unbelievably fine line between humor and offensiveness like it is a tight rope hanging between two sides of a chasm in The Grand Canyon. "Indeed, my refutation would be framed in considerably more forcible terms if I did not feel inhibited by the

fact that the woman's husband—sorry, I mean brother, I always make that slip—is my personal enemy.” He even is bold enough to slip in a line insinuating an incestuous relationship between Clodia and her brother, playing it off as though it were a mistake and entertaining the audience to no end. His main tactic is to undermine Clodia's integrity as a respectable member of society. Cicero leverages the forum as a traditionally male space and plays on female stereotypes to paint Clodia as a glutton that spends her days frolicking with and preying on young men. She's vengeful, sexually voracious, and, above all else, an unreliable narrator. He portrays her as a creature ruled by sensuality whose charges the audience is not meant to consider seriously. Cicero blatantly ignores Clodia's accusations of theft and attempted murder and instead places Caelius in the role of the victim. He spends more time mocking Clodia than defending Caelius against her accusations. Even though this is a murder trial, the overall tone of *Pro Caelio* is significantly more lighthearted than the rest of Cicero's orations.

In *Philippic 2*, the speech attacking Marc Antony that very well may have sealed Cicero's fate as a dead man, we see certain themes arise that are consistent with the image of himself that he puts forth in the later years of his career. Twelve years after *Pro Caelio*, rather than using humor or downplaying his capabilities as an orator, Cicero instead uses the opening sentences of this speech to establish himself as a loyal defender of the republic whom Antony is brutally attacking. In the very first sentence of the address, Cicero begs the question, “To what destiny of mine, O conscript fathers, shall I say that it is owing, that none for the last twenty years has been an enemy to the republic without at the same time declaring war against me?” In this way, Cicero creates a narrative in which it is significantly easier for his audience to support him than to support the opposition, Marc Antony. Cicero speaks not for his own cause, but for Rome and her

people. After all, who would dare to side with a single man when his opponent represents the entirety of their republic? That would nearly be treason.

However, as hard as may be to believe, Cicero did not always occupy his present role as one of the greatest orators of all time. Looking back at *Pro Quinctio*, we can observe that Cicero spends not an insignificant amount of time establishing himself as a young, inexperienced orator facing some of the greatest powers of his time. His position recalls that of David when he faced Goliath, and it encourages his audience to root for him, the underdog, just as they would David. When studying Cicero's life and works, we tend to focus on his later, more well-known performances, overlooking his earlier appearances which provide invaluable insight into his growth and development not just as an orator, but as a member of society.

Prosopopeia

Prosopopoeia is a rhetorical device that Cicero utilizes often throughout his career, representing various imagined or absent characters through speaking. He frequently uses the device to present points which, if expressed using his own voice, would not be as powerful or even acceptable. Beyond that, Cicero uses fictitious representations of people and ideals to make his speech more engaging for the audience which might otherwise be quite unentertained by the goings-on of the courtroom. As Cicero's status in Roman politics and society shifts, so too, does his intended audience. After years and years of delivering speech after speech to listless audiences, Cicero came to an important realization: it is not the judge that holds the most power in a courtroom, but the jury. Following this understanding, Cicero begins to play with the thin boundary between oratory and theatre, catering more so to their passions than their logic.

A prime example of this is in *Pro Caelio*. As mentioned previously, Cicero uses the voice of an imaginary stranger to Roman culture in order to amplify and ridicule the entire premise of

the case. Later in the speech, Cicero goes on to imagine himself as Appius Claudius, Clodia's stern great-grandfather. Through this voice, he reminds Clodia as well as the rest of the audience that she is not simply a random woman on the street, she is a woman from a respectable family with a duty to fulfill:

Did you never hear that your father, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and great-great-great-grandfather were consuls? Did you forget that only recently you were the wife of Quintus Metellus, a gentleman of the highest type, a distinguished patriot who had only to show his face to eclipse almost all other citizens in character, reputation, dignity? Born of a high-ranking family, married into a prominent family, how did it happen that you admitted Caelius to such familiarity?

By listing out a long line of her ancestors in quick succession and rapid firing multiple questions, Cicero is able to create this effect of incredulity, as if he cannot believe that a woman with such a standing as herself could fall so far from grace. This speech not only establishes that Clodia has shirked her duties as a woman of decent social standing, but it actively shames her and makes the crowd mourn her carelessness which has undone the life's work of all her ancestors who came before her:

Did I break the agreement with King Pyrrhus that you might every day enter into disgusting agreements with your paramours? Did I bring in the Appian Aqueduct that you might put its waters to your dirty uses? Did I build the Appian Way that you might ride up and down with other women's husbands?

Cicero's performance as A. Claudius is ingenious as it allows him to speak using the first person, providing a heightened sense of intimacy that draws the audience further towards his cause. Something so simple as slightly shifting the perspective makes a world of difference in instances such as these. If Cicero had used his own voice to speak of Clodia's great-grandfather's accomplishments, it may have been felt that he was overstepping in family matters.

Looking back at *Pro Quinctio*, we see that Cicero speaks on behalf of Naevius for brief periods of time. He utilizes phrases such as "does not this man openly declare" and "[t]his is

what in reality he openly declares by his deeds". In this way, Cicero makes his own interpretation of Naevius' actions the reality for all rather than just his perception. For Cicero need not persuade his audience that his word is truth for the rest of eternity in order for the case he makes to be considered successful. Cicero needs only to convince his audience members to accept his truth as their reality for the moment that they inhabit together in the courtroom or whatever stage he is occupying for his delivery. When Cicero introduces his own thoughts as Naevius' with such an air of confidence, so compelling is his oratory that the court has no choice but to agree with him.

Shifting our focus to the end of Cicero's life and career, we can further observe in the opening sequence of *Philippic 2* as Cicero muses about Antony's potential motivations for attacking Cicero so publicly before the senate. It really is ingenious how subtly Cicero manages to speak on behalf of Antony, effectively putting words the mouth of his opponent, without ever actually taking on Antony's perspective. Instead, what Cicero does is he considers three plausible reasons that would cause Antony to act in such a way and carefully dismantles the logic behind them.

What am I to think? That I have been despised? I see nothing either in my life, or in my influence in the city, or in my exploits, or even in the moderate abilities with which I am endowed, which Antonius can despise. Did he think that it was easiest to disparage me in the senate? A body which has borne its testimony in favour of many most illustrious citizens that they governed the republic well, but in favour of me alone, of all men, that I preserved it. Or did he wish to contend with me in a rivalry of eloquence? This, indeed, is an act of generosity; for what could be a more fertile or richer subject for me, than to have to speak in defence of myself, and against Antonius?

At this point, Cicero's audience is primed to agree with whatever comes out of Cicero's mouth next, regardless of the true validity of the subsequent statement. Cicero offers little to no evidence in his rebuttal of the three potential stances that Antony could possibly take, because the purpose of this section of Cicero's speech is not to prove that the story he shares is the most

truthful of them all. In fact, whether or not one is inclined to agree with the plausibility of Cicero's course of logic is virtually irrelevant to Cicero's main intention at this point in time. The most crucial aspect of this part of the passage is the fact that Cicero, through the mere act of walking us through his thought process, has intentionally placed us as his audience in a position where we naturally share the same perspective as him. Therefore, when Cicero continues with the phrase "[t]his, in fact, is the truth", even though he still speaks using the third person, we feel that Cicero has taken up the role of Antony for himself. We accept Cicero's word as fact as though it were Antony himself speaking through Cicero.

Risk Management

Being the earliest fully intact speech of Cicero's that survives today, *Pro Quinctio* is a spectacular representation of the manner or risks that a youthful Cicero took upon himself at the outset of his career as an orator. This is not necessarily due to any feature in the speech itself but rather the circumstances which surround this speech which marked the beginning of a legendary career that would be remembered for millennia.

At this point in time, around 81 BC, Cicero, at the ripe young age of twenty-five years old, is a fresh face that had yet to prove himself. Perhaps other orators would have made the decision to take cases that grew progressively riskier and take time building themselves up into a figure of significance. Not Cicero. Both Q. Hortensius, an esteemed Roman orator and politician, and S. Naevius, a politically and financially powerful man, are influential figures in Roman society. While victory would mean great glory for Cicero, a loss would guarantee humiliation. Cicero's career would have been over before it even began. It is certainly fortunate for us and for all students of the classics in the time between ourselves and Cicero that he ultimately prevailed in this matter.

We are once again treated to a fabulous display of Cicero's great ability for risk-taking as he personally attacks Clodia in *Pro Caelio*, painting the dispute as a lovers' tiff rather than an attempted murder trial. Cicero reframes the case in such a way that takes the jury and judge's minds off the actual substance of the trial as they take in the absolute work of theater that he puts on for them. Such an approach would have been extremely precarious at any point in time, but it was especially so for Cicero that day as he had just returned from his exile which, interestingly, had been ordered by Publius Clodius Pulcher, Clodia's brother and Cicero's intense political rival.

With this method, Cicero risks being viewed as undignified or cruel. In fact, if he had not spent the better part of his career establishing himself as the moral guardian of the republic and her peoples, Cicero likely would not have been allowed to make such comments without career-ending repercussions. Cicero acknowledges early on in *Pro Caelio* that humor, when executed poorly, could very easily be frowned upon. He states that "[a]buse, on the other hand, has no purpose except to be insulting. If its character is crude, it is called invective; and if it is amusing it passes as wit." Though here he is speaking in regard to Clodia's defamatory attacks against Caelius, there is no doubt Cicero realizes that this statement applies to his abuse against Clodia too. Cicero is a seasoned orator at this point that understands very well the potential consequences of taking such a bold offensive approach in his response to his client's prosecution and still chooses to proceed as such.

None of this, however, compares to the greatest risk that Cicero ever took, the one that cost him his life. In late 44 BC, Cicero published *Philippic 2*, the absolutely scathing beast of a speech that attacked Marc Antony in every manner imaginable both personally and politically. Cicero, being the sage and experienced orator that he is at this point in his career, publishes it

instead of delivering it live in the Senate, wisely avoiding any sort of immediate physical altercation. Cicero likely hoped that his searing review of Antony's character would rally Rome and her peoples enough effectively force Antony out of power. Alas, fortune was not in Cicero's favor this time around as Antony rose to even greater heights as part of the Second Triumvirate and ordered the immediate death of the esteemed orator. As they say, what goes around, comes around.

Ends of Speeches

Cicero brings *Pro Quinctio* to an end rather tastefully, portraying P. Quinctius as a poor old fellow that has turned to every corner of the world, every person with whom he has ever held a dear relationship, and been scorned by them all. Cicero severely guilties G. Acquilus, the judge, by reminding him of P. Quinctius' old age (incredibly remarkable that P. Quinctius made it to age sixty when the average lifespan in ancient Rome is twenty-five to thirty years).

[H]e begs that he, whose fidelity to duty has never been called in question, may not, in his sixtieth year, be branded with the mark of the greatest shame and ignominy; that Sextus Naevius may not disgrace all his distinctions by wearing them as trophies; that the good name, which has accompanied him up to his old age, may not be prevented through your decision from attending him even to the grave.

Cicero frames the case in such a way that G. Acquilus is the only entity standing between P. Quinctius and an honorable death, which is surely soon to come. Keep in mind, *Pro Quinctio* is delivered in front of a vocal live audience and in the days of the Roman empire theatrics and eloquent oratory were often prized more than a simple statement of the facts of the matter. The image that Cicero paints of P. Quinctius is so pitiable, so helpless, that if G. Aquilius, the judge, does anything but ruled in favor of P. Quinctius he would be detested by all for eternity. Therefore, G. Aquilius, regardless of who he truly thinks should prevail in this case, is forced to support the cause of P. Quinctius.

The manner in which Cicero elects to conclude *Pro Caelio* is similarly personal.

Although it complements his usual method of acting as a higher moral authority, because Cicero spends a significant part of the speech ridiculing Clodia, it almost feels strange to hear him speak with such sincerity and sternness. Cicero begs the audience to recall their own parents, their own children, sprouting a seed that he planted at the beginning of the speech when he described the sobs of Caelius' mother and the mourning clothes of Caelius' father.

...and as to what the parents feel, that is sufficiently proclaimed by his mother's sobs and indescribable distress, his father's dismal mourning clothes, and all the misery and grief you see because of this trial...Think of your own parents. Think of *your* children and how fond you are of them. Feel for him with the sympathy of sons or fathers and bring comfort to his grief.

No longer is it Caelius and his family that faces complete and utter ruin in court. It is the audience members themselves who are at once both the distressed parent and the accused child. At this point, Cicero has worked the judge and jury up into such a frenzied state that they are all desperate for some kind of resolution that will deliver them from their stress. Cicero then conveniently offers the judge and jury an opportunity to do just that by reminding them of their power to release Caelius and his family from the horrible charges laid against them.

In great contrast, we see in the ending of *Philippic 2* that Cicero has ascended to represent more than simply a mortal man. He is now the defender of the republic, the very vessel that Rome and her peoples live through.

"I defended the republic as a young man, I will not abandon it now that I am old. I scorned the sword of Catiline, I will not quail before yours. No, I will rather cheerfully expose my own person, if the liberty of the city can be restored by my death...To me, indeed, O conscript fathers, death is now even desirable, after all the honors which I have gained, and the deeds which I have done. I only pray for these two things: one, that dying I may leave the Roman people free. No greater boon than this can be granted to me by the immortal gods. The other, that every one may meet with a fate suitable to his deserts and conduct towards the republic."

Cicero has placed himself on the moral high ground. He mirrors the present with the past in a balanced structure, speaking of his prior victories in defense of the republic and implying a future victory for him in this matter. Cicero boldly declares that he will gladly embrace death if it means the continued prosperity of his city and of his people. It is all quite dramatic, and perhaps would have been unnecessary under any normal circumstances, but given the manner in which Cicero has just devastated Antony, it is crucial that he leaves the audience with an image of him as a good, well-meaning member of society. He is a very sly man. In his final sentence Cicero wishes that “everyone may meet with a fate suitable to his deserts and conduct towards the republic”, both condemning Antony and commending himself in one fell swoop. Cicero, in *Philippic 2*, has not only eviscerated his opponent, but he has also made himself a martyr for the Roman people. Now, even upon his death, Cicero will be remembered by all as the brave soul that stood up against the face of tyranny and eagerly sacrificed himself for his republic. He will be remembered as the very symbol of Roman piety.