

FANTASTICAL REALISM IN CICERO'S POSTWAR PANEGYRIC

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1. *Seeing the unseen*

In her post-war novel *The Mandarins*, Simone de Beauvoir explores the moral and psychological dilemmas of intellectuals who, despite their good intentions, frequently act in bad faith to their friends, their political allies, and themselves. The two characters she fleshes out most fully, writer Henri Perron and psychiatrist Anne Dubreuil, confront what is for de Beauvoir the key point about human action: that one acts always in conditions that are not and cannot be fully known, so actions resemble wagers or leaps in the dark – but one is responsible for them nonetheless. The novel returns repeatedly to action's unforeseen consequences, especially unexpected or unwanted obligations of love, family, and friendship.

Alongside these familiar existentialist concerns, *The Mandarins* brilliantly illuminates how the choices of its characters, which they discuss with one another almost exclusively in political terms, are shaped by other powerful forces they tend to overlook, ignore, or dismiss as “private” concerns. Most significantly, Henri and his friends repeatedly long for (but in postwar Paris only occasionally secure) good food and wine, fashionable clothes, reliable transportation, and other comforts; they pursue painful, sometimes deeply damaging love affairs. Though they almost always brush off their deprivations and erotic distractions with self-deprecating humor, the frequency of scenes of frustrated desire and its effects on the plot make it clear that the characters' most pressing political dilemma – the choice of whether to throw support behind a French alliance with the United States or with the USSR – is intimately bound up with their personal tastes and frustrations. As we follow Anne's passionate doomed affair with an American and Henri's abandonment of his bohemian lover for a much younger woman with whom he has a child, de Beauvoir suggests that the notional line between political sensibility and personal desire is not easily maintained, and that the way Henri and Anne actually *see* the political landscape is not so much in tension with their personal concerns as it is a product of them.

The Mandarins ultimately rewrites its characters' choice between communism and capitalism into a richer and ethically challenging narrative about the field of action under the conditions of modernity, where radically expanded access to goods and services create new modes of empowered, individual selfhood whose realization depends heavily on consumption. Henri and Anne neither explicitly acknowledge this development, nor do they take it seriously as a major force in their political vision and life choices. But the novel's foregrounding of desire and consumption subtly suggests that the source of their struggles lies precisely here: not in a choice between conflicting pure ideologies, but in an unresolved, unexamined, vain hope to reconcile old belief systems with the bourgeois, consumerist, individualist worldview that has engulfed them. By showing how her characters fail to see the true challenges of modern politics, de Beauvoir prompts us to examine more closely the ways we understand the crises through which we live, to see how certain values, habits, and purposes we unseeingly adhere to may incubate the drive toward political or social conflict, and to identify what values, habits, and purposes may assist in creating a secure future.

In this essay, engaged with a drastically different political context, I argue that Cicero's *pro Marcello* raises similar questions. Cicero's orations entered the Western curriculum in the earliest stages of modernity because they were considered to be a vital part of civic education. They do not simply transmit ideologies, values, and dispositions; they open up space for critical reflection on moral dilemmas and uncomfortable spaces of politics, especially compromise and deceit and other tensions that inject political life with tragedy¹.

The proto-panegyric *pro Marcello* probes the delicate transition between resistance and submission to Caesar. It memorializes the death and suffering of recent civil war and establishes the limits on action in the political conditions of the postwar present, creating a space of shared pain and complicity. Within this space, the speech diagnoses its senatorial audience's complicity in the war, and sketches new values and habits of self-regard that will help them emerge from long silence (*diuturni silenti*, 1) and preserve themselves and their community (32-33).

¹ On the early modern investment in reading a morally complex Cicero, see V. COX, *Ciceronian Rhetoric in Italy, 1250-1360*, "Rhetorica" 17 (1999), 239-288; *Ciceronian Rhetorical Theory in the Volgare: a Fourteenth-century Text and its Fifteenth-century Readers*, in C.J. MEWS - C.J. NEDERMAN - R.M. THOMPSON (edd.), *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward*, Turnhout 2003, 201-202; also J. RICHARDS, *Assumed Simplicity and the Critique of Nobility: or, how Castiglione read Cicero*, "Renaissance Quarterly" 54 (2001), 460-486.

2. *The discomfort of praise*

In recent years many scholars of poetry have demonstrated a sensitive grasp of the dynamic oscillation between terms like “reconciliation” and “resistance” that colors much Roman writing from the civil war and the Julio-Claudian period. For them, the old bipolar approach appears largely dead². But this sensitivity is less frequently found in scholarly discussions of prose, including what some consider the first significant Roman experiment in the genre of panegyric, Cicero's three Caesarian orations of 46 and 45 BC, the *pro Marcello*, the *pro Ligario*, and the *pro rege Deiotaro*³. Panegyric is an uncomfortable genre, and contemporary scholarship on these speeches continues to avoid approaches that allow for deep and unresolved ambiguities in favor of comparatively straightforward questions about Cicero's intentions and credibility. In 1802, Friedrich August Wolf set the tone for modern criticism when he found the flattery in the *pro Marcello* so insupportable that he published an edition denying its authenticity. As the author of the Notes in the 1813 *Classical Journal* anxiously reports:

Markland had already suspected some of the orations to be apocryphal, but the learned began to murmur when M. Wolf, with more hardihood, attacked the celebrated oration *pro Marcello*, on which the admirers of Cicero found his strongest claims to immortality. It was in 1802, that M. Wolf printed, at Berlin, this oration, with a preface, in which he boldly stated his reasons for doubting its authenticity. M. Olaus Wormius, the Danish Professor of Eloquence and Ancient Literature, at Copenhagen, first undertook to answer M. Wolf ... M. Kalau, of Frankfort, next entered the lists in 1804. The Literary Journals at first gave an account of the controversy with reserve, and a kind of fear. At length, in 1805, an adversary worth of Wolf appeared: M. Weiske published his ‘Commentarius perpetuus et plenus in Orationem Ciceronis pro Marcello.’ In his preface, M. Weiske indulges in some pleasing raillery against the world of his adversary, and endeavours to demonstrate, in a happy strain of irony, that the world of M. Wolf, on this very oration of Cicero, could not be written by him, but by one who had assumed his name. In a graver tone, however, he proceeds to show, that we might on the same grounds dispute the authenticity of the oration *pro Ligario*, which M. Wolf himself admits, is genuine beyond all question.

Defending the speech against Wolf, Michael Winterbottom interprets it as a frank *gratiarum actio* for Caesar's clemency. Giovanni Cipriani reads it as a

² D. KENNEDY, ‘Augustan’ and ‘anti-Augustan’: Reflections on Terms of Reference, in A. POWELL (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, London 1992; M. LOWRIE, *Writing, Performance, and Authority in Augustan Rome*, Oxford 2009, esp. 342-348.

³ On the place of the Caesarian orations in the history of Latin panegyric, see S. BRAUND, *Praise and Protreptic in Early Imperial Panegyric*, in M. WHITBY (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 1998, 53-76.

didactic *suasoria* intended to encourage Caesar to exercise his power honorably: this is panegyric as Erasmus would define it, as the “mirror of princes.” Taking the opposite tack, Paola Gagliardi ingeniously argues that it is a veiled exhortation to tyrannicide, with R.R. Dyer going so far as to suggest that it celebrates, and was even composed after, the Ides of March⁴.

What are the costs of interpreting the speech in these binary terms? In an essay composed for the 2009 Friuli convegno *Cesare: precursore o visionario?* William Batstone probed the temporal and interpretative significance of labeling Julius Caesar with either title. Call Caesar a “visionary,” Batstone pointed out, and one ascribes to the Roman dictator an uncanny awareness of history before the fact. Call him a “precursor” and a more troubling suggestion emerges that Caesar is one of a chain of figures locked in place by immutable and ineluctable forces of history. For Batstone, neither approach holds much historical or humanistic interest: not only do they “always lie outside the evidence to the extent that they require access to Caesar’s desires, intentions, and self-knowledge” but worse, as de Beauvoir would also claim, they take for granted a coherence and predictability in human psychology and relationships that we would do well to suspect.

For the same reasons that Batstone questions the utility of evaluating Caesar’s intentions, I want to close the door definitively on the reductive habit of reading a text like the *pro Marcello* as either authentic or sincere. Like de Beauvoir’s Parisian mandarins, who cannot know and are unable to control the consequences of their actions, including their speech and writing and others’ interpretations of their words, Cicero could exert only limited power over his utterances and their effects. Better, I think, to reflect on how and why the speech has presented such a hermeneutic puzzle – why, that is, the speech appears to keep both options decisively open: praise and blame, celebration and critique.

To this end, I will pursue two separate but related readings of the *pro Marcello*. First, I will show that the text should be understood as an exercise in political fantasy. I frame my reading with that term because scholars of politics are often reluctant to consider the role that fantasy plays in politics; but drawing on work by Jacqueline Rose, Slavoj Žižek, and others, we can understand it as the structure in which we project our desired relations with others⁵. We see that, far from being strictly opposed to our public, political, social, “real” exist-

⁴ M. WINTERBOTTOM, *Believing the pro Marcello*, in C. DAMON et al. (edd.), *Vertis in usum*, Chapel Hill 2002; G. CIPRIANI, *La Pro Marcello e il suo significato come orazione politica*, “A&R” 22 (1977), 113-125; R.R. DYER, *Rhetoric and intention in Cicero’s pro Marcello*, “JRS” 80 (1990); P. GAGLIARDI, *Il dissenso e l’ironia: per una rilettura delle orazioni ‘cesariane’ di Cicerone*, Napoli 1997.

⁵ See, for example, J. ROSE, *States of Fantasy*, Oxford 1996; D.E. PEASE, *States of fantasy: Barack Obama versus the Tea Party movement*, “Boundary” 2 (2010), 37.2; S. ŽIŽEK, *Living in the End Times*, London 2010.

tence, fantasy plays a central role in the real world, or to put it more precisely, in making the world comprehensible to its inhabitants. We shall see that the entwined fantasies of revenge, obedience, and future security that Cicero articulates in the *pro Marcello* do not offer an escape from reality. Woven together and expressed in terms that underscore the language of perception, especially seeing and hearing – and here we may recall Cicero's first sentence dwelt on his rising to speak after a long period of silence – these fantasies compel their audience to acknowledge real traumas of civil war and defeat, and incorporate past trauma into a vision of future Caesarian peace. Ironically, historically speaking, this vision will never come true: new civil wars are just around the corner. But locked in its particular time, Cicero's speech imagines both the victor and the vanquished, the triumphant and the guilty, to have a share in the world to come.

Second, I will argue that the *pro Marcello* confronts head-on the challenge of Caesar's victory and the question of what the Pompeians will do in response by acknowledging the responsibility of both senatorial factions in the recent civil strife. His exhortation to his fellow senators to join him in praise of Caesar reminds them of their role in the Pompeian cause and in its failure. This acknowledgment is not passive and it does not look exclusively backward in time. It calls for action and orientation toward the future, for Cicero suggests that efforts to preserve the sovereignty of action as it ostensibly existed under the old republican order can end only in that order's utter destruction.

Recent work in political theory over the past half century has borrowed the term "sovereign" from the statist frame and transferred it to the realm of the self. Drawing on this work, we may say that, by sharp contrast with his later *Philippics*, Cicero does not play at being sovereign in the *pro Marcello*⁶. Instead, most prominently by repeatedly returning to the trope of panegyric incapacity ("I cannot praise Caesar as he deserves"), Cicero pursues an uncomfortable experiment in articulating his acknowledgment of the new limits on sovereignty. He replaces traditional claims of self-determination and freedom (in Roman terms, the cluster of characteristics and capabilities captured in the terms *dignitas*, *auctoritas*, and *libertas*) with a self-consciously ironic embrace of unpredictability – the literal unpredictability of what Caesar will do next, and the open-ended unpredictability of the type of action Cicero proposes to pursue in the new conditions of Caesarian domination, that is, the action of speech rather than the contest of arms, whose tragically finite outcomes his audience knows all too well.

⁶ Relevant work on sovereignty and its limits: H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, esp. 234; I. BERLIN, *Two concepts of liberty*, in *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford 1969; M. ORLIE, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, Cornell 1997, esp. 143-168; I borrow the phrase "play at being sovereign" from P. MARKELL, *Bound By Recognition*, Princeton 2003, esp. 34-38; 183-189; M. FOUCAULT, *The Government of Self and Others*, New York 2010, esp. 61-73.

3. Hyperbole, pain, and unexpected resemblances

With its title, the *pro Marcello* suggests that it is pressing the case for Marcellus' return from exile, but in fact this is not the case. Caesar has already guaranteed the safety of the Pompeian partisan, who was living in self-imposed exile on the island of Lesbos, so Cicero is praising and thanking Caesar for a deal already done. He opens by giving an account of himself, explaining his choice to speak after a long silence (*diuturni silenti*) not because of fear (*timore*) but rather pain and shame (*dolore, verecundia*) – an important theme, as his audience will soon realize. The second sentence introduces a frequent tactic throughout the speech: using hyperbole as a response to the challenge of expressing that which is impossible to express. Cicero praises Caesar's "unusual, unheard-of clemency" (*tam inusitatam inauditam clementiam*), his "incredible wisdom, practically divine" (*tam incredibilem sapientiam paene divinam*), which is so overwhelming that Cicero does not have the capacity to ignore it (*praeterire nullo modo possum*) – though he will soon add, and repeat, that he cannot describe it either (4, 9, 12).

Let us consider this programmatic paradox seriously for a few moments. The central thesis of the opening paragraphs, and indeed of the speech as a whole, can be summarized in these two expressions of the impossible. It is important for my reading to distinguish here between the kind of flattery that records a truth to which the audience can easily testify (for example, Caesar is praise-worthy because he has not killed all the Pompeians) and the kind that veers into the literally false. Cicero is uttering a literal falsehood when he says it is not possible for him to describe Caesar's greatness, since of course he proceeds to describe it in the following sentences. But he is making a surprise sound like a falsehood when he says of Caesar that it is not possible that Caesar can act in this way, by granting clemency to his defeated enemies, but he is nonetheless doing it. It is virtually a rule of the panegyric genre to acknowledge the speaker's incapacity in the face of the difficult task of praise (cf. Isoc., *Evagoras* 8-10). What bursts forth as unusual here is the way Cicero ties the impossibility of describing Caesar with the impossible scale of Caesar's achievements – above all, his clemency. "I cannot be saying these things; he cannot be doing these things": in the repetitive statement of the two linked impossibles, rhetorical form conveys shock at Caesar's action and the sense of profound confusion it has generated among those opposing him.

Caesar's clemency is not just a welcome surprise, it is "unheard-of," and Cicero's incapacity to describe it is not just his, it applies to everyone in the present and even the future. Caesar's achievements are so far beyond belief that they prompt insanity: "And if I did not admit that these deeds are so great that virtually no one's mind or cognition is able to grasp them, I'd be crazy:

but there are things even greater" (*quae quidem ego nisi ita magna esse fatear, ut ea vix cuiusquam mens aut cogitatio capere possit, amens sim: sed tamen sunt alia maiora*, 6). Cicero's shock at this greater deed, the granting of clemency, gives rise to one of the most convoluted sentences in the speech (12):

Et ceteros quidem omnis victores bellorum civilium iam ante aequitate et misericordia viceras: hodierno vero die te ipsum viciisti. Vereor ut hoc, quod dicam, perinde intellegi possit auditum atque ipse cogitans sentio: ipsam victoriam vicisse videris, cum ea quae illa erat adeptus victis remisisti. Nam cum ipsius victoriae condicione omnes victi occidissetis, clementiae tuae iudicio conservati sumus. Recte igitur unus invictus es, a quo etiam ipsius victoriae condicio visque devicta est.

And indeed all the other victors in civil wars you had already vanquished in fairness and pity: this day, you vanquish yourself as well. I fear that what I am saying cannot be understood when it is heard as thoroughly as I understand it myself as I reflect on it: you appear to have vanquished victory itself, since you have given up those things that are taken away from the vanquished. For although, by the condition of victory itself, all of us who had been vanquished would have fallen into ruin, we have been preserved by the judgment of your clemency. Rightly, then, you alone are unvanquished, by whom the condition and power of victory itself have been utterly vanquished.

In these sentences, Cicero makes Caesar's clemency into something, as American college students say these days, "unreal."

This tortured hyperbole is the style of expression that made Friedrich Wolf want to exile the speech from the legitimate Ciceronian corpus. But before we file the passage away as an exceptionally excessive example of flattery, let us ask again: what political work is this aesthetic experience carrying out? Quintilian reminds us that there is meaning in hyperbole. He defines it in the following terms (*Inst. Orat.* 8,6,75-76):

Tum est hyperbole virtus cum res ipsa de qua loquendum est naturalem modum excessit: conceditur enim amplius dicere, quia dici quantum est non potest, meliusque ultra quam citra stat oratio.

And so hyperbole is a virtue when the thing of which we speak exceeds the natural limit: for we are allowed to amplify, because the exact extent cannot be described, and speech is better when it goes beyond than when it stops short.

By Quintilian's definition, hyperbole is the proper figure for the state "exceeding natural limits" in which Cicero's audience finds itself. Cicero asserts that he must speak *nullo modo* (1); he suggests no one will ever be able to praise Caesar adequately; he compares Caesar to a god (*simillimum deo*, 8); he says he thinks of Caesar day and night (22). Such hyperbolic terms constitute

a discourse of simulation. They disclose the world anew in terms that are not strictly, simply true, and in their excess of truth, as Quintilian says, they better represent an “unreal” reality that no one expected, though everyone ought to have expected it, for it is the reality of autocracy experimented with by Marius and Sulla half a century earlier. Hyperbolic speech assumes the task of absorbing the shock of living in the end times of the republic – and further, its unreal dimension propels its listeners into new identities and relations in a world where identity and relations have profoundly changed. By adopting hyperbole as the governing figure of this new style of senatorial speech, Cicero holds out the promise not of a morally legible universe, but of a recognition that every Roman now lives in conditions virtually “impossible to believe”: the emergence of one ruler, under whom the chains of traditional obligations do not consistently hold. Hyperbole is the supremely appropriate figure for the state of emergency “exceeding natural limits” in which Cicero’s audience finds itself.

Here we may usefully turn to Peter Brooks’ recent work on French melodrama, which examines the Parisian theater after the suspension of the moral and legal order in the Revolution and suggests that its hyperbolic style is born of “the anxiety created by the guilt experienced when the allegiance and ordering that pertained to a sacred system of things no longer obtains”⁷. In the Roman postwar context, hyperbolic praise summons an unusual kind of consensus, one based not on a logical, sensible order, but rather on disbelief and irreducible uncertainty.

Oddly enough, hyperbolic fantasy is a profoundly inclusive rhetorical strategy. Cicero’s image of Caesar is an image in which each part of his partisan audience may invest in different ways: pleasure and pain, glee and envy. In the space of hyperbole everyone is invited. Of course Cicero’s Caesarian audience will share in the hyperbolic celebration of their leader, even as they are reminded of the costs of his victory. But there is real pleasure here for the Pompeians in the audience, too. Recall Quintilian’s statement that hyperbole knows that it asserts that which is not, from the consciousness of falsehood: that is, it is always accompanied by irony. Paul De Man, commenting on irony, argues that irony splits the self into two, “an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity”⁸. Hyperbole enables the self-delusion not only of Caesar, but of the resistant listeners, whose envy and resentment are eased by their ironic awareness of it. Hyperbole preserves a space in which they may say “I don’t believe this” without saying “I will

⁷ P. BROOKS, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, New Haven 2008, esp. 4; 12; 200.

⁸ P. DE MAN, *Blindness and Insight*, Minneapolis 1971, 214.

not obey." The double consciousness by which the irony of hyperbole allows the acknowledgement of inauthenticity mediates the experience of domination by reinstating the speaker and the listener as agents even as they give up agency. It allows the resistant listener to distance himself from the assent to power at the same time that he assents to limits on his political sovereignty. By harnessing the power of fantastical untruth, Cicero becomes what Shelley calls the poet, an "unacknowledged legislator," exercising the power he and his audience has to remake the world in light of the new understanding of it which his literally, self-consciously false words unlock⁹.

We begin to see how the speech aims not only to praise Caesar, but to bury civil war. As he speaks in the aftermath of the bitter zero-sum game that the Roman senatorial order had made of republican politics by the middle first century, a game that had produced Big Men with big armies on a scale never seen before, Cicero's grief at the collapse of the republican *libertas* vies with the desire to negotiate the uncertain future under the current Big Man. His speech reveals how praise addresses past and present breaches in the body politic, but not simply by establishing conditions for the formation of consensus ("now we must all praise Caesar, and woe to those who don't"). He configures the politics of the new post-civil war era by summoning up images and emotions in which each part of his partisan audience may invest: the hyperbole and pathos of his language make it possible for his audience to "feel" the shock of life in the new world of Rome after the civil wars. In short, he creates a collective *aesthesis* – what Jacques Rancière calls the "sensible texture" of the community. *Aesthesis*, because it involves the generation of affective reactions, is multivalent by nature: even within the experience of the individual subject, each of us feels pity, fear, and many other things in the course of a single play. The complexity of the *aesthesis*, the sensible texture, of the speech transcends the classical generic categories of praise and blame as well as the late antique and modern interpretive categories of sincerity and "figured" irony.

But we have not yet exhausted the significance of the programmatic prologue. The second theme introduced in the proemium is suffering, *dolor*. Suffering is the motivation for Cicero's decision to speak (*dolore*, 1). His suffering derives from his recognition that Marcellus was suffering unjustly: "I was intensely grieving and feeling violent pain, senatorial fathers, that such a man, though he had stood on the same side as I, was not in the same happy condition" (*dolebam enim, patres conscripti, et vehementer angebar virum talem, cum in eadem causa in qua ego fuisset, non in eadem esse fortuna*, 2). The theme recurs repeatedly, most memorably in the images of the devastation caused by civil war.

⁹ Further remarks on Shelley in PEASE, *States...*, 100.

In her subtle reading of the *pro Marcello*, Paola Gagliardi argues that Cicero's emphasis on *dolor* is a central element of his "figured" ironic strategy. For her, the juxtaposition of praise for Caesar's clemency with repeated reminders of the suffering he caused, both in making war against Pompey and offering clemency to the losers, makes a "sincere" reading of his panegyric impossible. I see other dynamics at work here. First, suffering is part of the consensual *aesthesis* of the speech: it unfolds as an experience that links the Roman community, inside and outside the senate. Marcellus has lost many members of his family (*iam ad paucos redactam*, 10); Caesar suffers from his own clemency because it requires him to put aside private resentments (*doloribus*, 3); the Roman people suffered in the war (18; cf. 23, 24, 31, 34); Cicero himself feels pain repeatedly (*doleo*, 16, 22). By suggesting that the experience of suffering ties the entire audience together, Cicero installs suffering at the heart of the identity of the senate in its post-civil war form, both Caesarian winners and Pompeian losers. This tactic (a classic of identity politics) works to stabilize a collective whose traumatic formation would otherwise render it unstable; it forges a "politically coherent, continuous, and conscious identity" out of past and present antagonism and shared pain¹⁰. This scene of trauma goes on to become the heart of the historical narrative that reduces autocracy into an ethical and personal crisis for the senatorial order, best known to us from Tacitus.

Second, as Cicero explains when he compares Caesar's clemency to his fearful anticipations in the past of the excessive form Pompeian vengeance might take (18), it becomes clear that his suffering also derives from the pain of recognition that Caesarian clemency bears out his fears about the limits of the Pompeians' virtue. So his praise is also an expression of guilt at his collusion with an order in which the dominant element abandoned its concern for the common good, and thus ended up "rushing on, without desire or hope, prudently and knowingly, to voluntary death" (*nulla non modo cupiditate, ne spe quidem, prudens et sciens tamquam ad interitum ruerem voluntarium*, 14). As Cicero makes guilty accommodations to power, he acknowledges that guilt for his past failures spurs his desire for security – while he still tries, painfully, to do a certain justice to the doomed Pompeian resistance by memorializing it.

The question now, as Cicero sets it up, is what the Pompeians will choose to do. This brings us to the other *laudandus* in the speech, Marcellus, to whom no one is "superior in good birth, or honesty, or in zeal for study, or purity of life, or any other excellence" (4). Cicero repeatedly assimilates Marcellus to himself: at the beginning, when he identifies him as his rival and imitator (*illo aemulo atque imitatore*, 2); throughout the speech, when he identifies Marcel-

¹⁰ W. BROWN, *Politics Out of History*, Princeton 2001, 55.

lus as the beneficiary of Caesar's favor (*nam num M. Marcellum deprecantibus vobis rei publicae conservavit, me et mihi et item rei publica ... reddidit*, 13, 33-34); and most importantly, when he contends that he and Marcellus agreed in hating violence and loving peace (16). But this is another element of the speech's unreal aspect: this Marcellus is scarcely recognizable. As Giusto Picone has pointed out in an essay that examines the letters between the two men as well as the younger Seneca's account of Marcellus in his *Consolation of Helvia*, Marcellus is no Cicero¹¹. He resisted accepting Caesar's clemency and resisted returning to Rome. Seneca describes him as "nobly enduring his exile; his change of place made no change at all in his mind" (*Cons. Hel.* 9,6 - 10,2). Cicero falsifies his Marcellus, tendentiously transforming the ex-consul into another Cicero capable of sacrificing his Pompeian convictions in the name of the collective good.

When Cicero identifies himself with Marcellus as a lover of peace while speaking in conditions that identify himself as Marcellus' opposite, as the one who quickly accepted Caesar's offer of clemency, Cicero both acknowledges and displaces the problem of his own submission by praising Marcellus as inferior to none and punishing Marcellus by falsifying his identity. The suggestion is this: to resist is to die, or live in exile, to lose yourself; to accept clemency is to be Cicero. But when Cicero assimilates Marcellus to himself in front of an audience who knows the truth of the matter, they see that the consequences of accepting clemency are the same as resisting: either way, you lose yourself.

The second significant doubling in the speech links Cicero and Caesar. Like Cicero in the *Catilinarians*, Caesar is the savior of the day who must guard himself against assassination (this is the main theme of the longest sustained section of the speech, sections 21-32); Cicero assimilates Caesar to himself at the beginning of the *Post Reditum Populo*, when he "got back the republic when it was almost lost" (5). There is some self-glorification here, but the pattern of assimilation also draws attention to men's resemblances to, relations with, and responsibilities toward one another. The doublings of Cicero and Marcellus, Cicero and Caesar, highlights the lines of communal interdependence even, and especially, post-war. It also puts a de Beauvoirian question mark after these actors' self-sovereignty: none of us can be in perfect control of who we are, and we can rarely be quite what we say we are, under conditions of severe political stress.

¹¹ G. PICONE, *Il paradigma Marcello: tra esilio e Clementia Caesaris*, in *Clementia Caesaris: modelli etici, parenesi e retorica dell' esilio*, Palermo 2008.

4. Realism, perception, and an alternative self-sovereignty

Cicero writes in his letters to Marcellus that though Marcellus refused to see out the end of a hopeless civil war, he yet retained his allegiance to the old order (*Fam.* 4,8 *et al.*). In the *pro Marcello*, by falsely assimilating Marcellus to himself, Cicero suggests that no one is as he once was: both the civil war and Caesar's victory have changed everything. Marcellus and the Pompeians cannot depend on old political identities or relationships – and there is pain and guilt in Cicero's acknowledgement of this, particularly in his reference to the diminution of Marcellus' family (10) – but they can invent new political identities and relationships.

To learn to be subjects, in the sense of selves as well as subordinates, Cicero exhorts his audience to look clearly at their political situation. They must *see* the present situation and the immediate past. Here is the explanation for the repeated emphasis in this speech on *seeing* the present situation and the immediate past: “As for you whom we gaze upon, present among us, whose minds, feelings, and countenance we at this moment see...” (*te vero, quem praesentem intuemur, cuius mentem sensusque et os cernimus*, 10); “I saw, along with you, his tears, and the memory of all the Marcelli filled my breast” (*lacrimas modo vobiscum viderem, omnium Marcellorum meum pectus memoria obfudit*, 11); “For which reason your generosity ought to be more welcome to us, who have seen (*vidimus*) these things [the violence of civil war]. We saw (*vidimus*) your victory ... we did not see (*non vidimus*) your sword unsheathed in the city” (16-17). Caesar, too, must look into the dark spots in the souls of those who might wish to kill him (*in animis hominum tantae latebrae sint et tanti recessus*, 22) so that he fully understands his role and duties.

Once Cicero's addressees see the post-civil war world clearly, they must understand their past, the pitfalls of the system they used to live by, which led them “knowingly” to ruin (14). They must then look to the future without immediate recourse to violence; they must think of themselves anew. Remembering that they are preserved by the choice of Caesar, a fact Cicero repeats several times, he and the senatorial audience are compelled to proceed from that fact, with a sense of ironic good fortune. To maintain both moral and political sovereignty in exile in Athens or Mytilene is not supportable, because it is a lie: “wherever you may go,” Cicero writes to Marcellus, “you are under that man's power” (*Fam.* 4,7). Some abdication of sovereignty is required – the refusal of the violent defense of political sovereignty in its familiar form, which is to say, clemency for Caesar and obedience for the senators. Picking up and transforming the language of his *post reditum* speeches, Cicero here underscores the necessity of replacing the old republican model of sovereignty – individual striving for glory – with a new model of collective endeavor: as the senate had begged

for Cicero's return, now Cicero and Marcellus' brother and other senators have worked collectively to influence Caesar and securing Marcellus' return.

The task of understanding how to become subjects is not as simple as recognizing Caesar as victor and dictator and perhaps a future king and god. As recent work on self-sovereignty emphasizes, exploring alternatives to traditional conceptions is as risky and painful as it is necessary. In the context of the fatal but apparently eternally recurrent cycle of civil war, Cicero's hyperbolic act of praise replaces an ethico-political code that inscribes the individual at its center with a new one. The code implicit in the *pro Marcello* puts first the relations of *amicitia* and obligation among the senators, relations facilitated by the exchange of communication, from which Cicero withdrew during the war:

Diuturni silenti, patres conscripti, quo eram his temporibus usus – non timore aliquo, sed partim dolore, partim verecundia – finem hodiernus dies attulit, idemque initium quae vellem quaeque sentirem meo pristino more dicendi. Tantam enim mansuetudinem, tam inusitatum inauditamque clementiam, tantum in summa potestate rerum omnium modum, tam denique incredibilem sapientiam ac paene divinam, tacitus praeterire nullo modo possum.

To a long silence, senatorial fathers, which I have taken advantage of in recent times – not due to any sort of fear, but partly due to suffering, partly to a sense of shame – this day has brought an end, and similarly it has brought the beginning of saying what I like and what I think, according to my old habit. For such mildness, such unaccustomed and unheard-of clemency, such moderation in the exercise of the highest power over all, and finally, such unbelievable wisdom, nearly divine, I am in no way capable of passing over in silence.

Returning to speech is not (only) a celebratory strategy, though Cicero colors his return to speaking in celebratory terms. It also involves painful loss – the abandonment of the old code and the ethical exemplars that embodied it, most prominently, as we shall see, the younger Cato and everything he represents. Here and in his letters to Marcellus, Cicero redefines the role of the senator from seeking glory and defense of *dignitas* to a much more limited role: seeking to contest authority when it is exercised unjustly. He raises what must have been a deeply uncomfortable question for his audience, namely: they desire freedom, but if this desire is not truly emancipatory, if it demands violence on the broad scale of civil war, where are they to turn? This speech in praise of a man who chose to preserve another man's life reconfigures republican politics as a system of mutually responsive "relations of dependence" where the question is not, what do I gain?, but to whom I am responsible?¹²

¹² MARKELL, *Bound...*, 188.

Cicero refuses to adopt Cato and his suicidal sacrifice as an exemplary model. “As for the *Cato*,” he writes to Atticus, referring both to the book and the man, “it’s a problem for Archimedes” (*Att.* 12,4,2). To Papirius Paetus, he writes, “Cato died well; let’s die well too, but let our death be not so necessary to us as it was to him!” (*Fam.* 9,18). Cato kills himself: he embraces necessity and chooses to end the play of chance. Given what he has to say about sight in the *pro Marcello*, it is no surprise that Cicero casts Cato as a figure who literally *cannot see* the new conditions of Caesarian politics. In *De Officiis*, Cato cannot “look upon the face of tyranny” (*Off.* 1,112). Writing to Atticus, Cicero remarks, “but really, that man cannot be praised sincerely unless these things are mentioned, namely that he saw the way things are now and will be in the future, and he struggled lest they come about, and he gave up his life so that he would not see them done” (*Att.* 12,4,2). He warns Marcellus in similar terms: “You preferred being absent perpetually than to see those things which you did not want to see” (*ut abesse perpetuo mallet quam ea quae nolles videre*, *Fam.* 4,7). “Perhaps you may see many things that you do not wish to see, but they are no more than what you hear daily. And it is not your habit to be affected by the sense of sight alone ... You may not be able to say what you think, but you may certainly be silent” (*multa videbis fortasse, quae nolis, non plura tamen quam audis cotidie. Non est porro tuum uno sensu solum oculorum moveri ... dicere fortasse, quae sentias, non licet, tacere plane licet*, *Fam.* 4,9).

With regard to Cato, Cicero takes Adorno’s stand in *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (163): “We may say in general – and this is what is valid about this critique – that it is right to feel a certain wariness toward people who are said to be of pure will (die sogennante reinen Willens) and who take every opportunity to refer to their own purity of will. The reality is that this so-called pure will is almost always twinned with the willingness to denounce others, with the need to punish and persecute others, in short, with the entire problematic nature of what will be all too familiar to you from the various purges that have taken place in totalitarian states.” The *pro Marcello* turns instead to the difficult encounter with a new form of power and a venture into “making an uncontrollable future”¹³.

As I argued earlier, the figure of impossibility, hyperbolic adynaton, embodies Cicero’s sense of risk and disbelief moving forward in an uncertain world: in a darker tone, the speech’s operative gestures of submission to Caesar suggests Cicero’s and his fellow senators’ self-disempowerment. Cicero draws to his conclusion by reminding his Pompeian audience that like himself, they owe their lives to Caesar. I suspect that part of the resistance to Ciceronian authorship among readers like Wolf derive from this part of the speech, because

¹³ BROWN, *Politics...*, 46, discusses freedom and trusting to the future in these terms.

it openly acknowledges the limits on Cicero's sovereign agency that have arisen out of his vulnerability to Caesar's unpredictable actions. This is not to say that Cicero is invested in submission for its own sake, but that he sees that the avowal of his own finitude, signified by Caesar's role in fixing the terms of his life, amounts to a sort of abdication of self¹⁴.

The effort to find a way forward requires the construction of an ironic sensibility that acknowledges the falsity and the necessity of praise. When Cicero refers to the fact that "all dissension is crushed by the arms and extinguished by the justice of the conqueror" (31), his irony does not express or speak to the standpoint of resistance, but rather what the philosopher Richard Rorty calls "the capacity to identify illusions that overstate the social-moral goods human beings have to offer¹⁵." His speech is "world-disclosing" in Rorty's sense: its language of praise loosens the hold on us of the world we desire, by calling attention to the ways our own unrecognized or unacknowledged fictions structure that world.

5. *Prosaic patterns in poetry*

Before closing, I want to point out that understanding the *pro Marcello* in these terms helps us better understand certain aspects of Augustan poetry – specifically, the appeal to Bacchic poetics in Horace's odes, especially the Roman odes of book 3. Consider Horace *Odes* 3,25:

*Quo me, Bacche, rapis tui
 plenum? Quae nemora aut quos agor in specus
 uelox mente noua? Quibus
 antrum egregii Caesaris audiar
 aeternum meditans decus* 5
*stellis inserere et consilio Iouis?
 Dicam insigne, recens, adhuc
 indictum ore alio. Non secus in iugis
 exsomnia stupet Eubias,
 Hebrum prospiciens et niue candidam* 10
*Thracen ac pede barbaro
 lustratam Rhodopen, ut mihi deuio
 ripas et uacuum nemus
 mirari libet. O Naiadum potens
 Baccharumque ualentium* 15
proceras manibus uertere fraxinos,

¹⁴ I was prompted to consider the relationship of finitude and abdication by MARKELL, *Bound...*, 36.

¹⁵ R.L. SMITH, *Morals and Their Ironies*, "Journal of Religious Ethics" 26 (1998), 379.

*nil paruum aut humili modo,
 nil mortale loquar. Dulce periculum est,
 o Lenaeae, sequi deum
 cingentem uiridi tempora pampino.*

20

Where, Bacchus, do you tug me,
 full of you? Into what groves and what caves am I brought,
 fast, in a novel mood? In what
 caves shall I be heard
 practicing to graft the everlasting glory of pre-eminent Caesar
 into the stars and the council of Jove?
 Let me speak of what is great and new and as yet
 unspoken by another mouth. Just as on the ridges
 the unsleeping Bacchant gapes,
 gazing at the Hebrus, and white with snow
 Thrace, and Rhodope marked
 by barbarian tread, so I delight
 in gazing at off-road riverbanks and the quiet grove.
 O ruler of Naiads
 and of vigorous Bacchants
 with hands that uproot tall ash trees,
 let me say nothing trivial or humble,
 nothing merely mortal. It's a sweet risk,
 o Lenaeus, to follow the god
 binding our temples with green vine-tendrils.

Egregii Caesaris at line 4 comes as a shock. Commentators have accounted for the appearance of Augustus in a poem initially “about” Bacchic frenzy as a sign of intense excitement at a new theme (Williams), a protreptic excuse of divine madness for any missteps Horace might take as he embarks on the challenging new task (*nova mente*) of panegyric (Fraenkel, West), or as a bid to establish the grandiose aesthetics of Horace’s new Augustan poetics (Schiesaro)¹⁶. If we read 3,25 against 2,7, a different set of concerns emerges. In 2,7, Horace welcomes his friend Pompeius back to Italy after Philippi. Nisbet and Hubbard find little to admire in Horace’s “whimsical” greetings to a friend in such uncomfortable conditions. Tarrant remarks more sympathetically on his “frantic jollity,” especially in lines 26-27:

*...non ego sanius
 bacchabor Edonis. recepto
 dulce mihi furere est amico.*

¹⁶ Discussion and bibliography in A. SCHIESARO, *Horace's Bacchic Poetics*, in L.B.T. HOUGHTON - M. WYKE (edd.), *Perceptions of Horace*, Cambridge 2009.

...no more sane than
 an Edonian, I will run wild like a Bacchant.
 It's *sweet* to go mad at the return of a friend!

Horace never speaks of Philippi with open regret or anger. He represents civil war in a different register. The “sweet” madness described in both poems describes the symptoms of a body afflicted by trauma. To begin with, this body belongs to the poet, but the invocations of Bacchus and his implied invitation to his friend suggest that the social body of his readers is implicated too. When this inspired body speaks, it uses the hyperbole and irony of Bacchic poetics to redirect the pain of defeat at Philippi evoked in 2,7 toward imagining a new world ruled by *egregius Caesar*. The ironic dissonance created by the images of practicing panegyric in a Bacchic frenzy and of inviting a partner in civic disaster to join the poet in mad drunkenness articulates the shock of a world turned upside down by the emergency of Augustan autocracy, and calls for an ironic sensibility that can accommodate this new world.

I have argued that this first speech in the Roman panegyric tradition defies attempts to define it as “pro-“ or “anti-” Caesar. Its praise for Caesar as a peace-bringer is sincere; it is also resentful, guilty, collusive, quietist, sarcastic, resistant. The speech is inclusive in its quiet insistence on the remainders left behind in the construction of a new consensus. It is visionary in its refusal to play at the old republican game – refusing to claim sovereign agency in the face of tyrannical power when claiming sovereign agency means death (the death Cato chose) or more violence. It works in both directions at once: it relies on, and works the interval between, registers of sincerity and irony, praise and blame, in its effort to speak to all parties across the fractured political spectrum within the senate: the Caesarians, the Pompeians, and the rest. This is a eulogy that attempts to come to terms with the loss of the republic; it is an attempt to fix a certain tragic memory of the republic; it clarifies to Cicero and his audience his view of “the nature and stakes of the shared situation”¹⁷ and their duties in it; it is also an attempt to remind Caesar of what Cicero is, and what the other senators are, in an effort to define his responsibilities and to demarcate “limited limits” to Caesar’s potentially tyrannical freedom of action.

The speech also contains provocative normative claims. It establishes a moral imperative to respond to tyrannical conditions with a new form of self-envisioning that preserves within itself potential practices of future liberation, namely the spoken word, which Cicero implicitly claims as his central weapon in the struggle against domination. It also calls on its audiences to cultivate

¹⁷ MARKELL, *Bound...*, 186.

two habits that pull in what first appears to be opposite directions: sharing in a collective act of imagination, fantasy if you will, as a tactic in healing breaches in the civic order; and seeing conditions of Caesarian power for what they are.

Cicero is punished for this at the hands of Wolf and others who cannot *see* the *pro Marcello* because it disobeys the rule of republican ethics, but he too, in this speech, anticipates the irreducible play of pleasure, desire, rage, and hope that characterize a community wounded by but still in love with an out-dated model of itself, uncertain as to what the future will bring, and divided on the rightness of consensus itself under conditions hitherto unthinkable in the republic – unthinkable, that is, before Cicero speaks out. Cicero summons up images in which each part of his partisan audience may invest in different ways; he stages emotions that some will watch with pleasure and some with pain, including the glee of Caesarian triumph, and Pompeian grief at defeat and even vengeful rage at the victor, the object of praise. It is Cicero's inclusive acknowledgement of these various mental and political states that makes his speech worthy of study, because it reveals the accommodations Cicero believes both losers and winners must make in order to live under the new conditions of Caesarian domination.