

CICERO

An Introduction



Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC)

Cicero as statesman

Cicero as man of letters:

(1) political and forensic speeches

(2) theoretical works on philosophy and rhetoric

(3) Letters

(4) Poetry

(1) Oratory

Cicero was 'the name, not of a man, but of eloquence itself' (Quintilian)

Excelled in the three branches of oratory, deliberative, epideictic (display speeches), and forensic.

Political speeches before the Senate and popular assembly show how he presented issues differently to different audiences, almost always with success. E.g. he persuaded the people not to pass measures concerning relief of debts and land redistribution; persuaded Senate to vote powers to Octavian (though the result was not what he anticipated)

Epideictic oratory, eulogy and invective (praise and blame): e.g. praise of Pompey's achievements and Caesar's conquests; caricatures of Stoic Cato and jurist Sulpicius Rufus in the *Pro Murena*

Forensic (legal) oratory

Cicero dominated courts during sixties and fifties BC

Importance of appeals to passion and prejudice: Aristotle; old example of Servius Sulpicius Galba (cos. 144), who secured acquittal by producing his weeping children in court

Cicero's ability to 'throw dust in the eyes of the jury', and to arouse and calm the emotions of jurors and spectators (usually gave the concluding speech in defence)

Periodic style (like Isocrates), with balanced clauses and careful rhythmic cadences. But also force and ornament of grand style, hence 'that supreme manipulator of men's hearts' (Quint. 11.1.85, cf. 8.3.4)

Learnt techniques of dramatic delivery from actors Aesopus and Roscius

Rhetorical theory

Periodic style too ornate for younger generation of 'Atticists': Brutus' speech to people after Caesar's murder was too dispassionate (*Att.* 15.1a.2; cf. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* III.ii)

Atticists' plain style (Lysias)

Principle of appropriateness (*decorum*), following lead of Demosthenes, whose equivalent was Cicero himself (cf. *Brutus* of 46 BC)

De Oratore, Orator: proper training for an orator, with broad education based on Greek culture

Cicero emulated L. Licinius Crassus, to whom he was entrusted as an 'apprentice'. Crassus as censor in 92 opposed rhetorical schools teaching in Latin alone: Greek tradition

139 known forensic speeches, though many more (since civil actions were not published, except *Pro Caecina*): won 74 cases, lost 16, 49 unknown.

58 speeches survive in whole or part

Most famous are the *Verrines* (70), the *Catilinarians* (63) and the *Philippics* (44-3)

Invective of *In Pisonem*, which was studied in rhetorical schools

Wit of *Pro Murena* and *Pro Caelio*

Deception: Cicero boasted how he 'threw dust in the eyes of the jury' in *Pro Cluentio*, a famous speech in antiquity

(2) Philosophy

Cicero recommends study of philosophy in his rhetorical works: eloquence needs to be combined with wisdom; training in argument

Because of his public career Cicero rejected Epicureanism

Studied dialectic with Stoic philosopher Diodotus, who lived in his house when he was young

But preference for New Academy, sceptical phase of Plato's school (certain knowledge is not to be had, probability an intellectually respectable basis for practical life)

Academic tradition of arguing both sides of a question, which gave excellent practice in speaking

Cicero eclectic: favoured Stoic views on divine providence and fundamental morality, but rejected view that oratory should be unemotional

Cicero forced to quit politics at different points, wrote treatises on rhetoric and two works of political philosophy, *De re publica (On the State)* and *De Legibus (On the Laws)*

Dream of Scipio (Myth of Er at end of Plato's *Republic*): Scipio Africanus and Scipio Aemilianus, Platonic view of the universe, foreshadowing *Aeneid* Book 6: 'The starry spheres far surpassed the earth in size. Indeed the earth itself now seemed so small to me that I was disappointed with our empire, no bigger than a spot, as it were, on the surface' (16)

Duty to serve country, but human glory transient, aim at heaven and reward of immortality through the mind ('the mind is the true man'), which is immortal

In 46 *Paradoxes of the Stoics* defends extreme Stoic doctrine: virtue is the only good, all bad deeds are equally wicked. Praise of Cato, then in Africa

In the following years he produced a dozen works, covering the three branches of ancient philosophy, including

Hortensius, an exhortation to study philosophy, now lost ('That book changed my character and directed my prayers to you, Lord', Augustine)

Logic: only the *Academica*, sceptical standpoint of the New Academy

Natural philosophy: *On the Nature of the Gods*, *On Divination* and *On Fate*

Moral philosophy: *On Ends* (the goal of life), *Tusculan Disputations* and *On Moral Obligations* (the Stoic view of happiness and duty)

No certain truth, hence Cicero finds different views more convincing according to the argumentation used

Not an original thinker and did not claim to be

Purpose of reproducing Greek philosophy in Latin, to rival Greece

Cicero writes to Atticus: 'They are only copies and involve little effort; only the words are mine, of which I have a copious store'.

Not a mere translator, but occupied with problems of technical philosophical vocabulary. Cicero introduced neologisms such as *qualitas*, *moralis*, and *beatitudo*. Fewer compound words in Latin, which has no definite article; use of periphrasis ('We do not need to translate word for word, as unstylish translators do')

(3) Letters

Over 900 survive

Some private and not intended for publication: personal and cultural topics

Some clearly written for publication, with views of important political events

The most candid letters written to Atticus

Note of caution: the letters of course express Cicero's own views, though over seventy letters are addressed to him. Dominance of Cicero as a prose writer.

The letter became a literary-rhetorical form in the Hellenistic age: in the rhetorical schools pupils learned to compose letters, including imaginary letters from mythical or historical personages.

Variety of style and content: three kinds of Cicero letter, the serious, the informative and the gossip

Themes:

Book 13 of Cicero's letters to his friends contains 79 letters of recommendation, all different

Book 4 mainly of letters of condolence (*consolationes*), including the famous one from Servius Sulpicius after the death of his daughter Tullia (5)

Some letters were clearly expected to be published: e.g. several people made copies of a letter to Caesar, to put on record his view of the political situation (*Att.* 8.9.1)

Careful composition, e.g. letters to Lentulus Spinther (the long ninth letter)

But also the spontaneous letters to Atticus, clearly never intended to be published and probably not widely known until Nero (but cf. in 34 BC Cornelius Nepos, *Life of Atticus* 16)

Picture of sophisticated society, e.g. marriages and divorces, bereavement, patronage, dinner parties

(4) Poetry

According to Plutarch (*Cic.* 2) Cicero was considered the best poet of his time, and his poetry was neglected only because better ones had emerged, including Catullus and Lucretius

What to make of his most famous line?

O fortunatam natam me consule Romam

O Rome most blest, established in my consulship!

Alliteration and assonance, features of older poetry

Conclusion

Cicero the statesman: consul, Catiline's revolt, provincial governor

But more important as literary figure, the model of Latin prose

Bibliography

The bibliography on Cicero is, inevitably, vast. His works are translated in the Loeb and Penguin (and other) series. Modern works include:

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