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BECOMING 'CICERO'

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> Kitsch ... must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running on the grasss... Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch... Kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements... Kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death.
>
> Milan Kundera. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

> Much later, Caesar came upon one of his grandsons with a book by Cicero in his hands. When the stricken boy tried to hide it in his cloak, the emperor took it from him and read a large part of it, standing just as he was. Then, handing it back, he said: "An eloquent man, my child, an eloquent man, and a patriot."
>
> Plutarch. *Life of Cicero*

My title, "Becoming 'CICERO'," has a double sense, alluding to two interrelated processes. There is, first, the process of the rhetorical schools of Rome and the Romanized provinces, by which students fit themselves to the model of Cicero and sought, in a limited way, to "become" the orator, or at least an orator like him.[1] Second, and the subject that will be at the center of discussion below, there is the process by which Cicero himself became the cultural icon 'CICERO'—all upper case, because the icon is larger than life, and in inverted commas, because the icon bears only a partial and inconstant resemblance to the human being whom it represents. How did this process begin? How did Cicero enter the canon?

[1] On the use of Cicero in the schools of the early empire see esp. Michael Winterbottom, "Cicero and the Silver Age," in *Éloquence et rhétorique chez Cicéron*. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique, vol. 28 (Geneva 1981) 237-74, with further references. More generally helpful is Will Richter, "Das Cicerobild der römischen Kaiserzeit," in Gerhard Radke, ed., *Cicero: Ein Mensch seiner Zeit* (Berlin 1968) 161-97.

The question is worth asking, because the outcome was not obviously predictable from the final decade of Cicero's life, when the factions he supported in the state were on the defensive or in retreat and when his personal reputation for eloquence was under attack. A fully rounded answer to the question would open a broad window onto the cultural life of Rome from the triumviral period through the end of the next century, embracing (for example) the Cicero of the historians, the relations between the historians and the rhetorical schools, and the contrast between the rhetorical schools recalled by a Seneca and the very different sensibility of a Quintilian. All this of course goes beyond the scope of a modest paper like the present one, which examines only one corner of the field: the rhetorical schools of the Augustan age and the Cicero constructed by the *scholastici* who frequented them.

We can start, then, with a question asked by an obscure Roman declaimer named Capito some time in the reign of Augustus (Sen. *Contr.* 7. 2. 6): "Ciceronem quisquam occidere potuit qui audiit?"—"Could anyone who heard Cicero speak bear to kill him?" The question, when I first encountered it, stopped me in my tracks because of its sheer and compounded fatuousness: it is fatuous because it is asked with reference to Cicero's killers, who certainly *had* heard him speak; and it is fatuous because it is asked by a man who almost certainly could *not* himself have heard Cicero speak, for reasons of simple chronology. Since the question as a question is quite pointless—taken literally, it very plainly can only be answered "yes"—it seems that the true point of the question must lie elsewhere: it must be taken to serve as a kind of implied contrafactual condition, by which the speaker distinguishes *himself* from the killers—"*I* certainly couldn't have brought myself to kill Cicero," he means to say, "had *I* been in *their* shoes." Capito thus uses the question as a bit of claptrap to place himself on the side of the angels, and on the side of his audience.

Yet an aggressive member of the audience—the sort of heckler, perhaps, who sometimes haunted the declaimers' *auditoria*—might be tempted to ask: "But Capito, why *not* kill Cicero?" What, that is, are the values underlying Capito's sentimental question? Where does it locate

the redeeming worth of Cicero's life? The implied answer is clear enough, according to the terms of the question in its context, and it clearly enough reduces Cicero, by equating the value of his life with the aesthetic value of his speech: one is expected to forbear from killing Cicero because he was a damn fine orator. Here Capito's question begins to connect directly with the topic of this essay, the place that Cicero came to occupy in the canon. Cicero's claim to life—his claim to "immortality," as we shall see—rests on his speech, and on the good judgment of the connoisseurs of speech: in asking his question Capito was in effect saying, not just "*I* wouldn't have killed him," but "*I* wouldn't have killed him, because *I* am capable of recognizing immortal genius when I hear it." And this even though *he* has *not* heard it, even though (as it happens) *he* does not much imitate Cicero's speech in his own. All the more one begins to suspect that in asking his question Capito is appropriating a particular current conception of 'CICERO', so that he can wear it like a badge. Or to put it a bit differently: one begins to suspect that we are in the presence of classic kitsch, of self-referential sentiment that serves to reduce experience.

Now the canonization of any classic is inevitably a reductive process, constrained by a classic's very function: to help us form the orderly patterns that are useful for the business of living. Classics are the "exemplary visions [that we invoke] to make authoritative sense of the world, sorting our experience of the particular and the momentary into categories and hierarchies of value ... [which are] assumed to be permanent and universal."[2] Consequently, any author or text that is complex and interesting enough in the first place to be thought worthy of playing this authoritative cultural role must be subtly changed, shaped, tidied, and simplified, as one feature is exaggerated here, another pared away there, to stress the traits that are found useful for controlling the uncertainties and instabilities of the moment. For most of the Latin classics the beginnings of this process of simplification and appropriation are for all practical purposes lost from sight: this is true even of those authors who long have had the greatest cultural weight—a Vergil or Horace or Tacitus. In the case of Cicero, however, we have a chance at

[2] Christopher A. Stray and Robert A. Kaster, "Reinterpreting the Classics," *Annals of Scholarship* 10.1 (1993) 1.

least to glimpse the process at work in the generation or two after his death, as his epigoni created the 'CICERO' that suited them in the declamations remembered by Seneca.

Three texts provide the main testimony: all elaborate fictions surrounding Cicero's death. The first is *Controversiae* 7.2, "Popillius Ciceronis Interfector": as the statement of the theme tells us, "Cicero [had] defended Popillius on a charge of parricide; he was acquitted. When Cicero was proscribed, Popillius was sent by Antony to kill him, and he brought back his head to Antony. [Popillius] is accused of misconduct."[3] Beyond the fact that a certain Popillius apparently did kill Cicero, all of this is imaginary: Popillius had not been defended by Cicero on a charge of parricide, nor would he have been liable to a civil action *de moribus* even if all else were true.[4] The theme must already have been in common use during the first two decades of Augustus' reign, since Seneca excerpts the treatment of at least one declaimer who did not survive the end of the first century B.C.E.[5]

The other two texts are both *suasoriae*—exercises in which the speaker does not accuse or defend but seeks to give advice—and both concern Cicero's relation to Antony.[6] In *Suasoria* 6, "Cicero deliberates whether to beg Antony's pardon": the declaimer must urge Cicero one way or the other, and as Seneca reports, "almost no one ventured to exhort Cicero to beg pardon of Antony: they had too high an opinion of Cicero's spirit" (§12). Like *Controversiae* 7.2, this piece has a fictional premise; it too can certainly be dated no later than the first half of Augustus' reign, on the same ground. Seneca also does us the favor here of quoting liberally from treatments of Cicero's death by several contemporary historians, including Livy and Asinius Pollio: as we shall see, these quotations at least suggest that the sensibility at work in the

[3] Translations of Seneca are taken from Michael Winterbottom's Loeb edition (Cambridge, Mass., and London 1974) with occasional minor modifications

[4] Stanley F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Liverpool 1949) 124.

[5] Porcius Latro (*Contr.* 7. 2. 1, 8-10, 14), whose death is dated to 4 B.C.E. in Jerome's *Chronicle*; on his chronology see further my edition of Suet. *Gramm.* (Oxford 1995) 329-30.

[6] See also Quint. 3. 8. 46, Martial 5. 69.

declamations was not confined to the schools of rhetoric, and that the canonization of Cicero cut across the literary culture of the period.

Finally, *Suasoria* 7 takes Cicero's imaginary dealings with Antony one step further: now he no longer merely deliberates whether to beg Antony's pardon, he deliberates whether to accept Antony's offer of pardon in return for the destruction of his own writings. According to Seneca (*Suas.* 6. 14 f.), this variation on the theme was directly inspired by Asinius Pollio, who alleged that Cicero had promised, to deliver speeches denying his criticisms of Antony, were he allowed to live. The allegation was made in the published version of Pollio's speech defending one of the Aelii Lamiae: the date of this trial, and so the *terminus post quem* it would provide, are unknown;[7] and there is some reason to doubt that Seneca is correct in identifying the source of inspiration in the first place, since the similarity is not terribly close.[8] Be that as it may, the *suasoria* surely belongs to the same Augustan milieu as the other two texts.

Now two general features of these texts are especially curious and suggestive, and deserve some preliminary notice here. First, there is the fact that all three texts center on Cicero's death. This emphasis is in fact doubly odd. It is odd because there were surely other episodes in Cicero's long public career that could have served as interesting, challenging raw material for such exercises (one thinks, for example, of the political risks incurred by the defense of Sex. Roscius of Ameria, or the choices faced at the outbreak of civil war in 49 B.C.E.)—to say nothing of the limitless opportunities for creating fictional or semi-fictional

[7] Susan Treggiari, "Cicero, Horace, and Mutual Friends," *Phoenix* 27 (1973) 249-51, identifies the Aelius Lamia in question as Cicero's friend L. Aelius Lamia (pr. 42?) and conjectures that his trial occurred in December 43—not a very helpful *terminus* for our purposes in any case.

[8] It must be remembered that Seneca can be unreliable in such matters: cf., e.g., his defective sketch of declamation's history (*Contr.* 1 pr. 12 with Janet Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder* [Cambridge 1981] 104 ff.), or his claim that all teachers of *pulcherrimae disciplinae* before Rubellius Blandus were freedmen (*Contr.* 2 pr. 5 with Suet. *Gramm.* ed. Kaster, p. 292), or his claim that Asinius Pollio was the first Roman to recite his own compositions to an invited audience (*Contr.* 4 pr. 2 with Alexander Dalzell, "Asinius Pollio and the Early History of Public Recitation at Rome," *Hermathena* 86 [1955] 20-28).

scenarios in which 'CICERO' could be made to figure.[9] And it is odd because it is so very different from the case of Demosthenes, the other great orator whose life became fodder for declaimers: when Demosthenes is enlisted as a figure in declamatory themes—as he is dozens of times—it is his career as a forensic orator and statesman that provides the (real or fictional) context, not his death from poison.[10] This double oddity may suggest that something about Cicero's death itself is at some level crucial to the kind of appropriation that is occurring: I will return to this suggestion at the conclusion of this paper.

Then there is the second curious feature: it is only in these themes that the speakers give much evidence of actually having *read* Cicero. That is to say, the speech of the declaimers—in Seneca and elsewhere—is not notably Ciceronian in style, in the way that (say) the hexameter poetry of Statius or Silius Italicus is indelibly Vergilian.[11] Moreover, even where the declaimers give evidence of having read Cicero, through allusion or quotation, the range of texts exploited is quite narrow:

ad Brut.: *Suas.* 6. 1 (alludes to 8. 2?)

ad Fam.: *Suas.* 6. 4 and 6.8 (alludes to 10.1.1)

Cat. 1: *Suas.* 6. 3 (from §2)

Cat. 4: *Contr.* 7. 2. 10 (alludes to §3), *Suas.* 6. 12 (alludes to §3)

Verr.: *Contr.* 7. 2. 1 (alludes to 2 *Verr.* 5. 118), *Suas.* 6. 3 (alludes to 2 *Verr.* 5. 161)

Phil. 1: *Suas.* 6. 4 (alludes to §38)

[9] Two late antique handbooks in fact imagine such themes, drawn from earlier stages in Cicero's career: Sulp. Vict. *RLM* ed. Halm p. 314. 16 ("deliberat Cicero an post consulatum eat in provinciam"), Iul. Vict. *RLM* ed. Halm p. 380. 24 ("damnato Milone exclamavit M. Tullius Romam sedem bonis viris esse non posse et reus est laesae rei publicae"); but there is no trace of such themes in the sources of the earlier empire. In this respect the contrast with Demosthenes (next n.) is especially striking.

[10] The themes in which Demosthenes figures, often in rivalry with Aeschines or in opposition to Philipp, are catalogued by Richard Kohl, *De scholasticarum declamationum argumentis ex historia petitis* (Paderborn 1915) 66-82 (nos. 259-328), cf. 63-65 (nos. 245, 248-52, 256-57).

[11] See Winterbottom (above, n.1) 251-54, on both the declaimers recalled by Seneca and the *Declamationes minores* and *maiores* ascribed to Quintilian.

Phil. 2: *Contr.* 7. 2. 5 (quotes §64), 7. 2. 10 (alludes to §119), 7. 6. 13 (alludes to §5?), *Suas.* 6. 3 (alludes to §63 f.), 6. 4 (alludes to §64), 6. 5 (from §67), 6. 7 (alludes to §77), 6. 12 (alludes to §119), 7. 1 (alludes to §24)

post red. in sen.: *Contr.* 7. 2. 5 (alludes to §39?)

Lig.: *Suas.* 6. 13 (general allusion)

Marc.: *Suas.* 6. 4 (alludes to §25?)

Mil.: reading implied by Cestius' "response," *Contr.* 3 pr. 16 (see also Quint. 10. 5. 20); *Suas.* 6. 2 (from §§92, 105), 7. 3 (from §101)

Rosc. Amer.: *Contr.* 7. 2. 3 (quotes §72), *Suas.* 7. 2 (general allusion)

Rab. Perd.: 9. 2. 10 (alludes to §11 f. ?)

loc. ignot.: *Suas.* 7. 5[12]

As this compilation shows, the speeches that are quoted or alluded to more than once make for a very short reading list indeed—*pro Milone, pro Sex. Roscio Amerino,* one of the *Verrines*, the second *Philippic*, the fourth *Catilinarian*—and there are virtually no such echoes beyond *Controversiae* 7. 2 and *Suasoriae* 6-7. I take this to mean that insofar as Cicero the orator and stylist matters to what is going on in these declamations—and that aspect of Cicero is in fact quite central—the *idea* of Cicero the orator and stylist matters more to the declaimers than his oratorical style itself, just as Cicero dead or on the point of death matters more than a Cicero conceived in mid-career as advocate and politician. For what is "going on" is that Cicero is being heroized: he is becoming a culture hero, an icon more important as an abstract representation than the historical reality of the man and the sensible reality of his words. How does this happen, what is the icon made to represent, and why?

To sketch an answer we can look at four aspects of the phenomenon, under the headings "amplification," "competition," "sentimentalization," and "simplification." I should stress that I do not

[12] "cara est cuiquam salus quam aut dare aut eripere potest Antonius?": not found in extant texts, but cf. *Phil.* 2. 5, 60.

suggest that these are *stages* in some sequential process, such that one stage would have to reach completion before the next could begin: I do not know how one would go about demonstrating such a thing even if one believed it; and in fact I am inclined to suspect that all four aspects of the process were going on simultaneously, in ways intricately related and now untraceable. I offer these aspects here as little more than convenient analytical categories, or as gross and visible symptoms of the underlying cultural metabolism.

By "amplification," first, I mean the pronounced tendency to speak of Cicero in terms that draw him larger than life—that place him, in fact, beyond all human proportion. So for example we hear Seneca himself at the very start of his work, explaining that civil war and the general political unrest of the 40s B.C.E. kept him at home in Cordoba as an adolescent and prevented him from pursuing his education at Rome (*Contr.* 1 pr. 11): "otherwise," he says, "I might have got to know that genius (*ingenium*), the only possession of Rome to rival her empire." A certain kitschiness and sentimentality hang about that conceit—a counterfeit nostalgia for something that one never knew—which recalls Capito's question, "Could anyone who heard Cicero speak bear to kill him?" But it is of course the sheer extravagance of the conceit that is truly breathtaking, as Cicero's individual *ingenium* is equated with the value of the vast expanse of empire. The stress on *ingenium* is something to which we will return. For the moment, it is enough to note that this initial amplification of Cicero by Seneca himself is matched subsequently by a no less extravagant conceit favored by the declaimers, who frequently use metaphors of sacredness and immortality in a similar kind of amplification.

For example, in *Suasoria* 6. 4 the speaker assures Cicero, as he considers whether to beg Antony for life, that "if [you have regard to] the memory of your works, you will live for ever," *semper victurus es*. In *Suasoria* 7, which concerns the supposed offer of clemency in return for the destruction of his writings, there is a string of arguments based on the premise of immortality: "Antony has realized that so long as the products of Cicero's eloquence survive, Cicero cannot die" (§2); "that the body, which is frail and fleeting, should be saved, is the genius, which is eternal, to perish?" (§7); "he reprieves you from death, at the

cost of the death of the only part of you that is immortal," *quod in te solum inmortale est* (§8). Or again, in *Suasoria* 6, "Memory, undying guardian of human works, through which great men attain to eternal life, will hand you down to all future generations, sacrosanct," *sacratum* (§5): here the language of immortality is complemented by the language of sacredness, which in turn is found again in other passages. So at *Suasoria* 7.3 a quotation from the *pro Milone* is termed *sacra illa vox tua*, "that sacred utterance of yours." And at *Suasoria* 6.19—a passage from the history of Cremutius Cordus that summons up the scene in the Forum as Cicero's remains are exposed on the Rostra—we are told that "what most set men weeping and wailing was the sight of his right hand, tied by the side of his head: the hand that had been the servant of that god-like eloquence," *divinae eloquentiae ministra.*

Such language of course later becomes a commonplace in speaking of Cicero: Quintilian, for example, applies it to his great model several times, placing him thereby in the same company as Plato.[13] Its applications to Cicero by the declaimers in Seneca's text are among the earliest instances of the phenomenon (only a fragment of Cornelius Nepos stands any chance of being earlier);[14] and such language is used of Cicero *alone* by the declaimers in Seneca's text. Plainly he is being spoken of in language appropriate to a hero—a figure specially marked and set apart (the essence of being *sacer*), enduring and of special worth, a figure looked to as an embodiment of some crucial aspect of right order. Equally plainly, if one asks what aspect of right order he embodies to merit such praise, it is the exercise of transcendant *ingenium*, as manifested in his eloquence. It is therefore worth pointing out that when Cicero, in his own voice, uses such language, it is almost always with regard to *political* matters, to denote statesmen and affairs of state that he regards as being of transcendant value: it does not occur at all, for example, in the survey of earlier orators in the *Brutus*.[15] A shift seems to

[13] Quint. 1. 6. 18 *quae M. Tullius in Oratore diuine ut omnia exequitur*, 2. 16. 7 *diuina M. Tulli eloquentia*, 4. 1. 70 *diuina illa pro Ligario ironia*, 4. 3. 13 *ille diuinus orator*, 11. 1. 62 *diuine Cicero seruauit*; cf. 10.1.81 (on Plato), 10.1.83 (on Theophrastus, playing on his name after Cic. *Or.* 62).

[14] Winterbottom (above, n. 1) 242 n. 4.

[15] See Cic. *ad Fam.* 2. 15. 1, 5. 12. 1, 10. 9. 2, 10. 14. 2, 10. 28. 1, 11. 6a. 1, 12. 14. 4, 13. 16. 4; *ad Att.* 1. 19. 6, 7. 1. 4, 14. 14. 3, 15. 1. 5; *ad QFr.* 1. 1. 7, 1.

have occurred between Cicero himself and the men who are appropriating him as their cultural icon, a shift from the sphere of public action to the concerns of individual talent.

Turning from "amplification" to "competition" we see first that the figure of a Cicero thus "amplified" serves as a kind of cultural yardstick—not surprisingly, since that is a central function of a canon. Thus Seneca comments on the account of Cicero's death offered by the crossgrained Asinius Pollio (*Suas.* 6. 25): "I can swear to you that there is nothing in his history more eloquent than the passage I have cited, so that I think Pollio on that occasion did not praise Cicero [something Pollio in fact nowhere did] but competed with him." When Seneca here invokes the idea of rivalry—*certasse cum Cicerone videatur*—he reminds us of the service that a canon performs in the conduct of certain kinds of competition: men seeking to establish a pecking order of cultural status through (in this case) the exercise of eloquence use Cicero as the standard against which they measure themselves and others—and, often, as a stick with which they can thrash each other more or less publicly.

The phenomenon is nicely illustrated by an anecdote that Seneca relates in the preface to his third book of *Controversiae* (§§14-16). Seneca here claims to be reporting the comments of Cassius Severus, one of the most noted forensic orators of Augustan Rome, who is trying to explain why he does not much engage in or like declamation.[16] After pointing to several considerations—the fact that no one has equal talent in all areas, that his own talent for practical oratory is not suited to the artificiality of declamation—Severus concludes:

1.3 3; *ad Brut.* 5. 1, 23. 4, 7; *Arch.* 16, *Balb.* 40, *Flacc.* 30, *Har. Resp.* 2, *Leg. Agr.* 2.90, *Leg. Man.* 10, 33, 36, *Marc.* 2, 26, *Mil.* 21, 91, 99, *Mur.* 61, 75, *Phil.* 2. 33, 39, 3. 3, 14, 4. 3, 4, 5. 23, 9. 10, 10. 7, 11, 13. 19, 43, 44, 14. 33, 38, *Planc.* 77, *Post Red. ad Pop.* 1, 7, 15, *Post Red. in Sen.* 1, 3, 25, 28, *Prov. Cons.* 32, 38, *Rab. Post.* 42, *Sest.* 50, 85, 86 (contrast: *Post Red. ad Pop.* 5 *tam divino atque incredibili genere dicendi*; *Post Red. in Sen.* 1 *tam divinum atque incredibile genus orationis*). Note that in *De oratore* Cicero causes his interlocutors to apply the language of "divinity" to eloquence (e.g., 1. 40 *Ser. Galbam ... divinum hominem in dicendo*); but when he uses such language of Crassus, speaking in his own voice (3. 4-6), it is with reference to the *res publica*.

[16] On Cassius Severus see Michael Winterbottom, "Quintilian and the *Vir bonus*," *JRS* 54 (1964) 90-97.

> I should take more pains in my defence ... if I did not know that Asinius Pollio, Messalla Corvinus and Passienus (now our leading orator) are rated as declaimers below Cestius or Latro.[17] Do you think this is the fault of the speakers—or of their hearers? *They* are not worse speakers; the audience is judging by worse standards... They prefer their Cestius to the eloquent men I have just mentioned—and they would prefer him to Cicero if they did not fear a stoning. In fact, they *do* prefer him to Cicero, in the one way open to them: they learn Cestius' declamations by heart while not reading Cicero's speeches—except the ones to which Cestius has written replies.
>
> I recall going into his school when he was going to recite a speech against Milo. Cestius, with his usual admiration for his own works, said: "If I were a gladiator, I should be Fusius. If I were a mime, I should be Bathyllus. If I were a racehorse, I should be Melissio." I couldn't contain my rage. I shouted: "If you were a sewer, you'd be the Great Sewer." Universal roars of laughter. The school-men looked at me to discover who this bull-necked lout was. Cestius, who had taken on himself to reply to Cicero, could find nothing to reply to *me*...

The episode is shaped by conflicting appropriations of the classic. Despite their differences, Cestius and Severus clearly both treat Cicero as CICERO, the upper-case icon, and it is their contrasting uses of this icon that help make their differences visible. For Cestius, Cicero is the object of explicit rivalry, the cultural father who must be displaced. When Cestius recites an *In Milonem* to "respond" to Cicero's *Pro Milone,* he in effect seeks to elevate himself to Cicero's level:[18] the implied syllogism apparently runs "If Cicero is larger than life, and if I reply to him successfully, then I too am larger than life." (Also apparently implied is the minor premise "Since this is my school, I can define what constitutes a 'succesful' reply.") Conversely, in telling this story Severus stresses the supreme standing of Cicero—one who (like himself) was *not* a mere *scholasticus*—all with the aim of venting his indignant contempt for the *scholastici* and putting them in their place. Can you believe it (he says in effect), those morons actually prefer Cestius to Cicero—they ought to be stoned! Can you believe it (he says in so many words), Cestius presumed to reply to Cicero, but could not even reply to me: Severus does not have to add "What a pipsqueak!" for us to hear that judgment. Here the classic is deployed as part of the tactics in a cultural skirmish: Cestius tries to elevate himself above the level of the common *scholasticus*, and Severus tries to cut Cestius and the other *scholastici* down to size. In this competitive context, the different appropriations of the classic have little to do with the classic itself—Cicero himself is little more than a foil in all this—and a great deal to do with the different agenda of those doing the appropriating.

[17] On Cestius Pius and Porcius Latro, then two of the most distinguished professors of rhetoric at Rome, see Suet. *Gramm.* ed. Kaster, pp. 327-31.

[18] Quint. 10. 5. 20 provides testimony independent of the hostile anecdote.

There is, however, one other use to which Cicero is put that has the effect of blunting competition—not by criticizing competition as such, but by stressing the general cultural trough into which *all* latter-day Lilliputians have fallen. Here Cicero serves as a benchmark to measure the distance between past greatness and the present. So Seneca advises his sons (*Contr.* 1 pr. 6 f.):

> ... an imitator never comes up to the level of his model. This is the way it is; the copy always falls short of the reality. Moreover, you can by this means judge how sharply intellectual standards are falling every day, how far some grudge on nature's part has sent eloquence into a decline. Everything that Roman oratory has to set alongside or even above the haughty Greeks reached its peak in Cicero's day: all the geniuses who have brought brilliance to our subject were born then. Since, things have got worse every day. Perhaps this is due to the luxury of the age... perhaps, as this glorious art became less prized, competitiveness transferred itself wholly to sordid businesses that bring great prestige and profit; perhaps it is just Fate, whose grim law is universal and everlasting—things that get to the top sink back to the bottom, faster than they rose.

Note that the reasons given for the decline—the bogeymen of luxury, trivial pursuit of base distinctions, and vague "fate"—are the merest

clichés: taken together, they amount to a respectable Roman way of giving a shrug of the shoulders; they are certainly not explicitly political, attributing decline of eloquence to the loss of *libertas*. That would be a subject more difficult to confront than the strawman of luxury.

Relegating greatness to the past is a way to deflect attention from the present, where things can be taken to be as they are because—well, that is just the way they are. And as this kind of distance is established, sentimentality and kitsch rush in to fill the gap between prior greatness and present unease. The classic is enveloped in the glow of nostalgia for a past which those waxing nostalgic could not have experienced for themselves; and this false nostalgia generates large gestures of easy and unearned sentiment.

This sentimentalization, or "kitsch-ification," of Cicero is of course exemplified by the question with which we began, "Could anyone who heard Cicero speak bear to kill him?," which transforms the nasty reality of Cicero's murder into a cozy and self-regarding gesture, as the speaker simultaneously winks at his audience and pats himself on the back. It is exemplified, too, in another passage we have already seen, in which Cremutius Cordus goes over the top in evoking the grisly spectacle on the Rostra: "what most set men weeping and wailing was the sight of his right hand, tied by the side of his head: the hand that had been the servant of that god-like eloquence" (*Suas.* 6. 19). It is exemplified when the declaimer Marcellus Aeserninus, seeking a *color*, casts Antony and Cicero as figures in a historical romance (*Contr.* 7. 2. 10):

> Antony was wondering: "What punishment shall I invent for Cicero? Shall I have him killed? But he has long since fortified his mind against fear of that. He knows [and here Antony is made to allude to *Cat.* 4. 3 and *Phil.* 2. 119] that "death is not premature for an ex-consul or wretched for a wise man." Let us have something new, that he neither expects nor fears. [Here one imagines a dramatic pause.] He does not resent offering his neck for an enemy to sever—but he will resent offering it to a client. Let someone call Popillius, so that Cicero may learn how much profit there was for him in defending the guilty."

And this sentimentalization is exemplified in the melodramatic script that the historian Aufudius Bassus composed for Cicero's last moments (*Suas.* 6. 18): "Cicero drew aside the curtain a little, and seeing the armed men said: '*I* am stopping here; approach, soldier, and if you can do *this* properly, cut off my head.' Then, as the soldier trembled and hesitated: 'What if I had been the first victim to whom you came?'" The script of course is capped with an epigram worthy of—a declaimer.

This aestheticizing of Cicero's murder depends for its effect upon a sharing of easy sentiment, which is in turn made possible only by a simplification of Cicero, a reduction of him to something everyone can agree on, instead of the multifaceted and uneven and awkward person that he was. And what is it that can everyone agree on? That Cicero was the embodiment of verbal *ingenium*, that he *was* his oratory, nothing less and nothing more, in so far as the oratory conveyed the *ingenium* that was his essence. Or as Seneca observed, in commenting on *Suasoria* 7 (§10): "I know of no-one who declaimed the other side in this *suasoria* [the side, that is, that would urge Cicero to burn his writings to save his life]; everybody worried about Cicero's books—no one about Cicero himself."[19]

After reading the declamations, one sees Seneca's point—though one is also tempted to ask what other concern *scholastici* could be expected to have. Certainly the strongest single thread that runs through these declamations is the schoolmen's understanding of Cicero's *ingenium* in exclusively literary terms—his writings and style—and the complete identification of his writings and style with his life. Consider the following, found in *Suasoria* 7 alone:

> 7.1: Q. Haterius equates Cicero's past life with his writings: "[Antonius] says he gives you your life — having found a way to suppress even the fact that you had lived";
>
> 7.2: Cestius Pius terms Cicero's writings his *melior pars*;
>
> 7.8: Argentarius says "He reprieves you from death—at the cost of the death of the only part of you that is immortal. What

[19] Seneca goes on to suggest that Cicero, unlike the declaimers, would at least have thought the other side worth considering (*...cum adeo illa pars non sit mala ut Cicero, si haec condicio lata ei fuisset, deliberaturus non fuerit*).

> sort of bargain is that? ... He does not want *you* to live—he wants you to outlive your genius... Can you tolerate Cicero burying what is best in him before he is buried himself?";
>
> 7.8: the elder Arellius Fuscus offers an even stronger statement of the "classic" Cicero—identifying the "real" Cicero with his writings, deriving his personal "immortality" from those writings, and imagining the eternal effect of those writings—before assuring Cicero that his life is the "cheapest part" of him, *vilissima pars:* "the *real* Cicero"—*verus Cicero*—is constituted by the writings, the Cicero "who Antonius thinks cannot be proscribed save *by* Cicero."

From the perspective of the the first century's end, Quintilian remarked that "'Cicero' is now considered the name, not of a human being, but of eloquence," *non hominis sed eloquentiae* (1. 10. 112). The transformation in fact seems to have been largely complete 100 years earlier: already in the declamations recalled by Seneca, Cicero the *homo* has all but been replaced by Cicero the icon of *eloquentia*. That Cicero should be thus reduced to his *ingenium*, and that this essential *ingenium* should further be identified solely as verbal *ingenium*, is not surprising: for verbal *ingenium* is of course the chief attribute of the declaimers themselves. Probably not for the first time, and certainly not for the last, the classic takes on the properties of a mirror: the celebrant casts his gaze upon the icon reverently, and sees himself.

One may wonder, however—and this is a point I suggest only hesitantly, by way of conclusion—whether this mirroring also helps to explain one curious feature of these exercises mentioned above. Unlike his counterpart Demosthenes, who enters the school exercises as a vigorous orator in mid-career, the Cicero of the declamations is a Cicero on the point of death. He is not the effective advocate or sometimes effective statesman of life; he is a brilliant yet utterly impotent orator, an orator unable to work his will upon a political world in which speech has been shoved to the margins. Did the declaimers—brilliant yet utterly impotent orators, orators unable to work their will upon a political world in which speech had been shoved to the margins—did the declaimers gropingly, unintentionally perhaps, but revealingly choose as their icon

a Cicero who represented their own condition more faithfully than they might care to say?*

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