

The *Pro Sestio* and the Purposes of Cicero's Political Self-Fashioning

This paper will I) briefly review current scholarly understandings of political self-fashioning in Cicero's speeches with special reference to the work of Stephanie Kurczyk; II) focus on Cicero's self-fashioning in *pro Sestio* to assert that such self-fashioning is, *pace* Kurczyk, completely co-extensive with the orator's proximate persuasive goals in a judicial speech; III) moving from this conclusion, assert a general principle for the judgment of passages of broader political self-fashioning in Ciceronian judicial oratory.

I) One of the most substantial recent contributions to the current scholarly understanding of Ciceronian self-fashioning is Stephanie Kurczyk's (2006) full and insightful discussion based on autobiographical passages in all genres of Cicero's literary production except epistolography. In the thirty-three orations where Kurczyk finds autobiographical passages, she can situate the purposes of Cicero's utterance on a continuum between the extremes of the egoist for whom the client's needs are secondary (Mommsen's venerable and vicious view), and the opposite view for which she quotes Rahn (as she could have quoted others), that Cicero's discussion of himself after his consulship is a rhetorical weapon in the service of his client and is adapted to the needs of the case (Kurczyk, 193-94). Kurczyk's continuum is a useful tool, and I will apply it very briefly to situate other recent books on Ciceronian self-fashioning, including the seminal study of Narducci (1997), the influential work of Dugan on *pro Archia* and on the *Rhetorica* (2005), and the concise treatment of Steel (2005), who effectively uses self-fashioning as an organizing theme to discuss Cicero's entire literary corpus.

II) Granting the power of Kurczyk's continuum to classify works on self-fashioning, it still harbors an analytical danger. As Wisse (2012) has pointed out, the speeches arguably contain instances in which the opposite poles of this continuum are in practical terms not opposite at all; in fact, they may be exactly co-extensive. With the help of a handout, I will use Cicero's political self-fashioning in *pro Sestio* (56 bce), generally well analyzed by Kurczyk, to illustrate the validity

of Wisse's critique. Kurczyk sees in this speech a relatively pure example of political self-fashioning in which the presentation of the *patronus* eclipses his client. This separation of Cicero's self-presentation from the strict needs of his case, which she sees beginning in *pro Sulla* in 62, finds its extreme example in *pro Sestio*, before returning to a balance between larger political self-fashioning and the immediate needs of the case in *pro Plancio* in 54. Relying on Riggsby and Kaster, I will argue instead that, despite the famous focus on Cicero so well described 25 years ago by James May (whom Kurczyk often quotes), nothing in *pro Sestio* privileges the orator's own self-fashioning over the immediate persuasion of a jury who must decide a charge of *vis*.

III) Starting from this example, I will assert more generally the importance of genre in judging the relative importance of Cicero's larger political self-fashioning in a speech. Political self-fashioning in an oration in the senate (*Prov. Cons.* or *Pis.*, for example) is less constrained than in a published *judicial* speech. In judicial oratory, depicting the effort to persuade the jury as secondary to any goal of broader political self-fashioning diminishes the self-presentation of the *patronus* as *patronus*. And Cicero is not in the business of self-diminution. This is not at all to say that those who see in the speeches passages that clearly serve the orator's political self-fashioning are wrong. It is only to say that, where judicial oratory is concerned, Rahn and his successors are in a more fundamental sense right.

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