

Adding Flattery to Insult: Caesar and the Underworld in Cicero's *Pro Marcello* and the *Letters to Atticus*

Recent scholarship has seen a revival of interest in Cicero's Caesarian speeches and the question of whether the orator's extensive flattery of Caesar should be considered sincere (see especially Kenty 2020, 53–81). *Pro Marcello*, a speech given in the senate to thank Caesar for pardoning his political opponent M. Marcellus, has been a particular focus of attention (e.g., Dugan 2013, Tempest 2013; see also Dyer 1990, Gotoff 1993, and Tedeschi 2005 for important earlier work on the speech). At the same time, scholars have called for a greater emphasis on reading Cicero's late speeches alongside his letters to get a fuller picture of the orator's thought process and political opinions in this delicate period (e.g., Gibson 2017). In this talk, I explore a hitherto unnoticed connection between *Pro Marcello* and Cicero's letters that further complicates our assessment of the sincerity of the speech. In *Marcell.* 17, Cicero tells the senators that Caesar is so keen on forgiveness and reconciliation that he would even raise the dead from both sides of the civil war if he could. This strange image, I argue, becomes an in-joke when read alongside the *Letters to Atticus*.

In the letters, Cicero makes several references to the fact that his friend likes to refer to Caesar's entourage as a *nekyia*, a collection of ghosts called up from the underworld (*Att.* 9.5, 9.6, 9.18). Caesar here becomes a perverted Odysseus who presides over a threatening multitude. Cicero himself confirms Atticus' impression when he details what happened when Caesar visited him at his villa (*Att.* 9.18). It was all as ghostly and threatening as the insult had predicted. In *Pro Marcello*, this anti-Caesarian trope transforms into praise of the dictator. Cicero is of course aware of his correspondence about Caesar and the underworld. When read against the background of the letters, *Marcell.* 17 works on two levels: it celebrates Caesar, but, to someone

with knowledge of Cicero's and Atticus' exchanges, it signals that nothing good can come of the dictator raising the dead. We therefore get a subtle act of subversion embedded in the encomium. The fact that this is lost on anyone except Cicero is a testament to the dangerous political climate of the time.

### Bibliography

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