

Transtemporal *otium* in Cicero's Dialogues

The primacy of *otium* in Cicero's dialogues is first apparent in the phrase *otium cum dignitate* in the opening words of *De Oratore* and can be felt strongly in many of the dialogues that follow. Recent scholarship (Leach 142, Dugan 149ff.) has concentrated on the role of Cicero's own *otium* as a tool structuring Cicero's project of self-fashioning, finding a contrast both between the enforced *otium* of Cicero in the 50s/40s and the dignified *otium* of many of his interlocutors, and between Cicero's *otium* of the present and *negotium* of the past. In this paper I would like to reconsider Cicero's representation of his own *otium*, seeing in it not a disjunction from, but a continuation of the *otium* of the dignified figures of the republic's past, not a substitution of philosophy for politics, but a political strategy intended to create a transtemporal space in which the ethics of the past might be fully accessed and rearticulated as a relevant factor in the present political scene.

Cicero makes repeated reference to the enforced *otium* that accompanied his return from exile on several occasions within his dialogues and letters (e.g., *Brutus* 7-9, *Acad.* 1.1, *Tusc. Disp.* 1.1, *Div.* 2.1, *Fam.* 4.14.1, *Fam.* 5.21.2). He generally complains about this *otium*, but he also says that he is attempting to make it a productive time of leisure by turning to the writing of *complures libros* (*Div.* 2.1). At the same time, Cicero regularly introduces the interlocutors of his dialogues in times and places of leisure, usually during a holiday (e.g., *Rep.*, *Nat. Deor.*, *Fin.*) and/or at a country villa (e.g., *Tusc. Disp.*, *Leg.*). In the prologue of *De Orat.* Cicero claims that, in contrast to himself, figures such as Crassus and Antonius enjoyed either *negotium sine periculo* or *otium cum dignitate*, two states denied to him by the increasing instability of republican politics. In fact, though, the decade following the 'conversation' of *De Orat.* witnessed the untimely deaths of many of the speakers and tumultuous civil strife and war (cf. *De Orat.* 3.7-12). In this sense, the *otium* of the interlocutors (one accompanied by *dignitas*) is not so different from Cicero's own.

Upon examination, Cicero's overt claims about *otium* prove incomplete. In context Cicero's own *otium* is not as ineffective as he portrays it, nor is the leisure of the interlocutors as idealized as he overtly claims. In fact, Cicero uses the opportunities for remembering afforded him by *otium* to access and identify with the *otium* of statesmen who had exemplified traditional republican values. *Otium* becomes a transtemporal space in which Cicero and a Crassus, Scipio, or Cato can coexist, where the identification of their experiences can confer the *dignitas* of one upon the leisure of all, and where they can coalesce into a collective of the *patres* (cf. Arendt 200-202), the *locus* of true republican authority that stands opposed to the sort of individual power embodied by Julius Caesar. Thus may Cicero rehabilitate his enforced *otium* and reinvent it as a tool for challenging the very individuals who forced it upon him.

Bibliography

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