

Demosthenes, Tyranny, and Free Speech in Cicero's *Brutus* and *Orator*

1. Plutarch's Demosthenes and Cicero (*Vit. Dem.* 3.3-4)

Δημοσθένην γὰρ Κικέρωνα τὸν αὐτὸν ἔοικε πλάττων ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ δαίμων πολλὰς μὲν εἰς τὴν φύσιν ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὁμοιοτήτων, ὥσπερ τὸ φιλότιμον καὶ φιλελεύθερον ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ, πρὸς δὲ κινδύνους καὶ πολέμους ἄτολμον, πολλὰ δ' ἀναμείξει καὶ (4.) τῶν τυχηρῶν. δύο γὰρ ἑτέρους οὐκ ἂν εὐρεθῆναι δοκῶ ρήτορας ἐκ μὲν ἀδόξων καὶ μικρῶν ἰσχυροῦς καὶ μεγάλους γενομένους, προσκρούσαντας δὲ βασιλεῦσι καὶ τυράννοις, θυγατέρας δ' ἀποβαλόντας, ἐκπεσόντας δὲ τῶν πατρίδων, κατελθόντας δὲ μετὰ τιμῆς, ἀποδράντας δ' αἰθίς καὶ ληφθέντας ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, ἅμα δὲ παυσασμένη τῇ τῶν πολιτῶν ἐλευθερίᾳ τὸν βίον συγκαταστρέψαντας.

As for Demosthenes and Cicero, divine will would seem to have shaped them in the same way from the beginning, inserting many similarities in their natures, such as ambition, love of freedom in political affairs, and cowardice for dangers and wars, and also combining many similarities of fortune. In fact, I do not think two other orators could be found who became powerful and great from obscure and small circumstances; who collided with kings and tyrants; who lost daughters; who were driven out from their homelands and returned with honor; and who, after fleeing again and being captured by their enemies, brought their lives to an end together with the end of freedom in the state.

2. Cicero on the loss of freedom of speech in 46 BC

➤ *Fam.* 4.4: *atque hoc ipso melior est tua quam nostra condicio, quod tu, quid doleat, scribere audes, nos ne id quidem tuto possumus.* (And your condition is better than ours in this very thing: that you dare to write what pains you, and we cannot even do that safely.)

➤ *Fam.* 4.9: *dicere fortasse quae sentias non licet, tacere plane licet.* (Perhaps it is not permitted to say what one thinks, but it is obviously permitted to keep silent.)

➤ *Fam.* 13.68: *ego ad te de re p. summa quid sentiam non saepe scribam propter periculum eius modi litterarum; quid agatur autem scribam saepius.* (I will not often write to you what I think about the republic on account of the danger of this sort of letter; but I will write more frequently what is actually going on.)

➤ *Fam.* 9.18: *cum essem otiosus in Tusculano, propterea quod discipulos obviam miseram ut eadem me quam maxime conciliarent familiari suo, accepi tuas litteras plenissimas suavitatis; ex quibus intellexi probari tibi meum consilium, quod, ut Dionysius tyrannus, cum Syracusis pulsus esset, Corinthi dicitur ludum aperuisse, sic ego sublatis iudiciis, amisso regno forensi ludum quasi habere coeperim.*

When I was at leisure in my Tusculan villa, because I had sent my students to meet him so that they might at the same time reconcile their friend to me as much as possible, I received your very pleasant letter; from it I understand that my plan meets with your approval, that, just as Dionysius the tyrant, when he had been driven out from Syracuse, is said to have opened a school at Corinth, so I, now that the courts have been abolished and my kingdom in the forum lost, might begin to keep a sort of school.

3. Demosthenes' Greek Reception (Plutarch, *Vit. Dem.* 11)

Αἰσίωνα δὲ φησὶν Ἑρμιππος ἐπερωτηθέντα περὶ τῶν πάλαι ρητόρων καὶ τῶν καθ' αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἀκούων μὲν ἂν τις ἐθαύμασεν ἐκείνους εὐκόσμως καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς τῷ δήμῳ διαλεγόμενος, ἀναγνωκόμενοι δ' οἱ Δημοσθένους λόγοι πολὺ τῇ κατασκευῇ καὶ δυνάμει διαφέρουσι.

Hermippus says that Aesion, when asked about the orators of the past and those of his own time, said that anyone who heard the ancient orators would have marveled at how decorously and with what dignity they reasoned with the people, but that the speeches of Demosthenes, when read, excelled them by far in preparation and in force.

➤ Demetrius, *Eloc.* 36: Εἰσὶ δὲ τέτταρες οἱ ἀπλοὶ χαρακτήρες, ἰσχνός, μεγαλοπρεπής, γλαφυρός, δεινός... (There are four simple styles: the plain; the grand (μεγαλοπρεπής); the elegant; and the forceful (δεινός))

4. Demosthenes' weapons of words

➤ (310 Kohl = Apsines, *Ars rhetorica* 340): ὁ Φίλιππος ἔδωκεν αἴρεσιν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, πότερον βούλονται ὅπλοις ἢ λόγοις δικάζεσθαι: ὁ Δημοσθένης συνεβούλευσε λόγοις, καὶ αὐτὸς εἰπὼν ἡττήθη καὶ κρίνεται.

Philip gave the Athenians the choice to decide between their weapons and their words. Demosthenes advised on behalf of speech, and while speaking was defeated and accused.

- Cf. Propertius 3.21.27 (*studium linguae, Demosthenis arma*), Petronius *Sat. 5* (*ingentis quatiat Demosthenis arma*), *Gnom. Vat.* 219 (Ὁ αὐτὸς [Δημοσθένη] ἐρωτηθεὶς ποῖον μέγιστον ὄπλον εἶπε: “λόγος”.)

5. Democracy, Oratory, and Athens

- 26 ... *quasi lucent Athenae tuae, qua in urbe primum se orator extulit primumque etiam monumentis et litteris oratio est coepta mandari.*

It was there [in Athens] that the orator first made his appearance, and there first that oratory began to be consigned to written records.

- 45: *Haec igitur aetas prima Athenis oratorem prope perfectum tulit. nec enim in constituentibus rem publicam nec in bella gerentibus nec in impeditis ac regum dominatione devinctis nasci cupiditas dicendi solet. pacis est comes otique socia et iam bene constitutae civitatis quasi alumna quaedam eloquentia.*

This age [of Pericles], then, at Athens was the first to yield a nearly perfect orator, because the desire to speak well is not usually produced among those still establishing a republic nor those waging war nor those obstructed and shackled by the domination of kings. Eloquence is the companion of peace and ally of untroubled rest—the foster child, as it were, of an already well-established state.

- *Brutus 46: cum sublatis in Sicilia tyrannis res privatae longo intervallo iudiciis repeterentur, tum primum...artem et praecepta Siculos Coracem et Tisiam conscripsisse...*

After the tyrants in Sicily had been removed and private property was sought again by legal means after a long interval, then for the first time...the Sicilians Corax and Tisias wrote down their precepts...

6. Oratory After Demosthenes and Cicero

- *Brutus 37 (cf. 285): eruditissimus ille quidem horum omnium, sed non tam armis institutus quam palaestra. itaque delectabat magis Atheniensis quam inflammabat. processerat enim in solem et pulverem non ut e militari tabernaculo, sed ut e Theophrasti doctissimi hominis umbraculis. Hic primus inflexit orationem et eam mollem teneramque reddidit et suavis, sicut fuit, videri maluit quam gravis, sed suavitate ea, qua perfunderet animos, non qua perfringeret; [et] tantum ut memoriam concinnitatis suae, non, quemadmodum de Pericle scripsit Eupolis, cum delectatione aculeos etiam relinqueret in animis eorum, a quibus esset auditus.*

Though perhaps the most cultivated of all [the Attic orators], [Demetrius of Phaleron] was trained not so much for weapons as for the palaestra. He delighted the Athenians more than enflamed them, for he came forth into the sun and the dust, not as if from a soldier's tent, but from the shady groves of learned Theophrastus. This man first moderated oratory and made it delicate and soft, and he preferred that it seem smooth, just as he was, rather than forceful, but with the sort of smoothness that could inspire minds, not upset them. He left in the minds of those who heard him only the memory of his careful arrangements, not, as Eupolis wrote of Pericles, a sting combined with delight.

- *Brutus 331: Sed in te intuens, Brute, doleo, cuius in adolescentiam per medias laudes quasi quadrigis vehementem transversa incurrit misera fortuna rei publicae....*

But I grieve when I look on you, Brutus, whose youthful career, carried in triumph through the praise of all, has been thwarted by the onset of the republic's wretched fortune....

7. Cicero's weapons of words (*Brut.* 7-8): *Equidem angor animo non consili, non ingeni, non auctoritatis armis egere rem publicam...quaeque erant propria cum praestantis in re publica viri tum bene moratae et bene constitutae civitatis...hoc doleremus quod...arma sunt ea sumpta, quibus illi ipsi, qui didicerant eis uti gloriose, quem ad modum salutariter uterentur non reperiebant.*

It is indeed a torment for my mind that the republic lacks my weapons of advice, of talent, and of authority...weapons which are the particular characteristic both of a man distinguished in the republic and of a civilized and law-abiding state...I grieve at the fact that the sort of weapons have been taken up that those who have learned to use gloriously have not discovered how to use advantageously.

8. Greek and Roman parallel lives in the *Brutus* (42)

Si quidem uterque, cum civis egregius fuisset, populi ingrati pulsus iniuria se ad hostes contulit conatumque iracundiae suae morte sedavit. nam etsi aliter apud te est, Attice, de Coriolano, concede tamen ut huic generi mortis potius adsentiar. At ille ridens: tuo vero, inquit, arbitrato; quoniam quidem concessum est rhetoribus ementiri in historiis, ut aliquid dicere possint argutius.

“Both [Coriolanus and Themistocles], though great men in their respective states, were unjustly exiled by an ungrateful people, and, going over to the enemy, made an end to their plans of revenge by a voluntary death. I know, Atticus, that in your book the story of Coriolanus is related otherwise, but grant me the privilege of giving my assent rather to a death of this kind.”

At this Atticus smiled and said, “As you like, since the privilege is conceded to orators to distort history in order to give more point to their narrative.”

➤ Cf. Cicero’s insistence on the Xenophontean style of the autobiographies of Marcus Scaurus (112) and Quintus Catulus (132); comparison of an ancestor of Marcus Brutus to Lysurgus (130) and Gaius Servilius Glaucia to Hyperbolus the Athenian (224). Cato Maior’s speeches are compared to Lysias and his histories to Philistus and Thucydides (63-65). Finally, Antonius and Crassus are, in terms of chronology, similar to Demosthenes and Hyperides (138).

9. Cicero’s autobiography (taken from *Brutus* 304-316) and Demosthenes’ vita tradition

➤ **Toil and study**

- **Demosthenes:** Plutarch 8.3-4 (compare Plutarch 5.5): *δόξαν ἔσχεν ὡς οὐκ εὐφυῆς ὄν, ἀλλ’ ἐκ πόνου συγκεκμημένη δεινότητι καὶ δυνάμει χρώμενος...καὶ Πυθέας ἐπισκώπτων ἔλλυχνίων ἐφήσεν ὄξειν αὐτοῦ τὰ ἐνθυμήματα.*
- An opinion was held that [Demosthenes] was not naturally skilled, but that he acquired his acknowledged force and his power from hard work...and Pytheas, mocking him, said that his arguments smelled like lamp-wicks.
- **Cicero:** *Brutus* 312 (compare 304-305, 308): *deinceps inde multae, quas nos diligenter elaboratas et tamquam elucubratas adferebamus.*
There followed then [after the defense of Sextus Roscius] in quick succession many other cases which I brought into court, carefully worked out, smelling, as they say, like the midnight oil.

➤ **Famous teachers**

- **Demosthenes:** Isaeus (*Vit Dem* 5.6); Callias the Syracusan, Isocrates, and Alcidas (*Vit Dem* 5.7)
- **Cicero:** Molon of Rhodes (307); Demetrius the Syrian and Menippus of Stratonicia (315); Dionysius of Magnesia, Aeschylus of Cnidus, and Xenocles of Adramyttium (316)

➤ **Platonic philosophy**

- **Demosthenes:** Cicero, *Brutus* 121 (compare *Orator* 15 and *De Oratore* 1.89; *Vit Dem* 5.7): *lectitavisse Platonem studiose, audivisse etiam Demosthenes dicitur—idque apparet ex genere et granditate verborum.*
It is reported that Demosthenes read Plato diligently, even that he studied with him—and this too is apparent from the style and grandeur of his vocabulary.
- **Cicero:** Philo of Larissa (306), Antiochus of Ascalon (315)

➤ **Overcoming natural infirmities**

- **Demosthenes:** Plutarch 6.3.4 (compare Plutarch 11.1, Cicero *De Oratore* 1.260-261, *Div.* 2.96): *καίτοι τό γε πρῶτον ἐντυγχάνων τῷ δήμῳ θορύβοις περιέπιπτε καὶ κατεγέλᾶτο δι’ ἀήθειαν, τοῦ λόγου συγκεχύσθαι ταῖς περιόδους καὶ βεβασανίσθαι τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασι πικρῶς ἄγαν καὶ κατακόρως δοκοῦντος. ἦν δέ τις ὡς ἔοικε καὶ φωνῆς ἀσθένεια καὶ γλώττης ἀσάφεια καὶ πνεύματος κολοβότης, ἐπιταράττουσα τὸν νοῦν τῶν λεγομένων τῷ διασπᾶσθαι τὰς περιόδους.*
When he first addressed the people he encountered groans and was mocked for his inexperience, because his speech seemed confused by periods and strained by its overly harsh and violent arguments. He had also, as it seems, some weakness of voice and lack of clarity in his language and shortness of breath that disturbed the sense of his speech by breaking up his sentences.

- **Cicero** (313-314): *erat eo tempore in nobis summa gracilitas et infirmitas corporis, procerum et tenue collum: qui habitus et quae figura non procul abesse putatur a vitae periculo, si accedit labor et laterum magna contentio. eoque magis hoc eos quibus eram carus commovebat, quod omnia sine remissione, sine varietate, vi summa vocis et totius corporis contentione dicebam. [314] Itaque cum me et amici et medici hortarentur ut causas agere desisterem, quodvis potius periculum mihi adeundum quam a sperata dicendi gloria discedendum putavi*

At that time I was extremely slender with a weak body, and my neck was long and thin: the sort of state and bodily nature which is thought to be not far off from causing danger to one's life, if hard work and heavy exertion of the lungs befall it. For this reason those to whom I was dear were all the more disturbed, because I was delivering whole speeches without any remission, without variety, with the greatest force of my voice and the exertion of my whole body. And so my friends and physicians encouraged me to desist from pleading cases, but I determined that no matter the danger, it must be undertaken, rather than deviating from the desired glory of oratory.

10. Cicero as a teacher in *Orator* (148; cf. 41, 43, 112, 117, 140-147): *quis tamen se tam durum agrestemque praeberet qui hanc mihi non daret veniam, ut cum meae forenses artes et actiones publicae concidissent, non me aut desidia, quod facere non possum, aut maestitiae, cui resisto, potius quam litteris dederem?*

Who would be so harsh and unlearned that he would not grant me the favor, when my forensic practice and my public duties have fallen apart, not to give myself over to sloth, which I am unable to do, or to gloominess, which I resist, but rather to literature?

11. Cicero analyzes Demosthenes' speeches (*Orator* 111)

Multae sunt eius totae orationes subtiles, ut contra Leptinem; multae totae graves, ut quaedam Philippicae; multae variae, ut contra Aeschinem falsae legationis, ut contra eundem pro causa Ctesiphontis.

Many of [Demosthenes'] speeches are entirely simple—as is the one Against Leptines; many are entirely grand, as some of the Philippics; many are varied—the one against Aeschines on the False Embassy, and the one against the same man In Defense of Ctesiphon [aka On the Crown].

12. Cicero analyzes his own speeches (*Orator* 102-103)

Tota mihi causa pro Caecina de verbis interdicti fuit: res involutas definiendo explicavimus, mus, ius civile laudavimus, verba ambigua distinximus. Fuit ornandus in Manilia lege Pompeius: temperata oratione ornandi copiam persecuti sumus. Ius omne retinendae maiestatis Rabiri causa continebatur: ergo in ea omni genere amplificationis exarsimus. [103] At haec interdum temperanda et varianda sunt. Quod igitur in accusationis septem libris non reperitur gentis? Quod in Habiti? Quod in Corneli? Quod in plurimis nostris defensionibus? Quae exempla selegissem, nisi vel nota esse arbitrarer vel ipsi possent legere qui quaererent.

My speech On Behalf of Caecina was concerned wholly with the words of the legal order: I explained involved matters by the process of definition, I praised the civil law, I drew distinctions between ambiguous terms. In On Behalf of the Manilian Law the task was to glorify Pompeius; in the tempered and moderate style I drew on the full resources of rhetorical ornament. The whole principle of maintaining the dignity of the republic was at stake in the speech On Behalf of Rabirius on a Charge of Treason, therefore in this I blazed forth with every kind of rhetorical amplification. (103.) But these styles need to be modified at times and varied. Every style is used in the seven speeches against Verres, in On Behalf of Cluentius, in On Behalf of Cornelius, and for many of our clients.

13. Cicero compares himself to Demosthenes (*Orator* 105)

Sed tamen, quoniam et hunc tu oratorem cum eius studiosissimo Pammene, cum esses Athenis, totum diligentissime cognovisti nec eum dimittis e manibus et tamen nostra etiam lectitas, vides profecto illum multa perficere, nos multa conari, illum posse, nos velle quocumque modo causa postulet dicere.

But still, since when you were in Athens you investigated all of [Demosthenes] with the utmost attentiveness with his devoted admirer Pammenes and you do not let him out of your hands, yet you also read my speeches

frequently, you are certainly aware that where I try many things, he brings many things to perfection, that where I have the desire to speak in whatever way a case demands, he has the ability.

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