

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

In the years following Pompey's defeat, Cicero had no illusions about what Caesar's dictatorship portended for his oratorical career. Letters written in this period speak frequently about the loss of freedom of speech, perhaps most starkly in *Fam.* 4.9, where Cicero simply says: "Perhaps it is not permitted to say what one thinks, but it is obviously permitted to keep silent" (*dicere fortasse quae sentias non licet, tacere plane licet*). Elsewhere he makes it clear that this silence has been imposed not just on speech, but also on letters and literary compositions (*Fam.* 4.4, 9.6, 13.68).

This preoccupation with the tyrannical silencing of free speech also pervades the two major rhetorical works Cicero composed in 46, *Brutus* and *Orator*. As Gowing 2000 and Dugan 2005 have shown, anxiety over this enforced silence permeates *Brutus* from beginning to end: Cicero opens with Hortensius grieving over a forum empty of oratorical speech (6) and closes by connecting this emptiness with the loss of republican government (331-333). The same anxiety can be found, albeit less explicitly, in *Orator* (as Dugan 2005 also notes), whose retreat into the technicalities of oratorical style and prose rhythm echoes Cicero's admission, in a letter from July 46, that the loss of oratorical freedom has left him no choice but to set himself up as a schoolmaster (*Fam.* 9.18).

In this paper, I will show that this perceived loss of free speech compels Cicero to express his political frustrations in *Brutus* and *Orator* covertly, and that he does so through his use of the figure of Demosthenes. Cicero's constant praise of Demosthenes in these works is well known (e.g., *Br.* 35, 120; *Or.* 6, 22-23), as is the way he assimilates his career to the Greek orator's (e.g., *Or.* 105). In the past, scholars have explained Demosthenes' prominence in these works as a weapon in Cicero's attack on the Atticists (e.g., Douglas 1956, Laughton 1961,

Wooten 1983, Wisse 1995), and indeed Cicero himself encourages such an interpretation, most pointedly at *Br.* 285-291, where he reproves the Atticists for taking Lysias and Hyperides as their models at the expense of Demosthenes.

Yet Demosthenes was not just Greece's most famous orator; he was also one of its most famous opponents to tyranny, and, as I will demonstrate, this political element of his *Nachleben* lies beneath the surface of his invocation in Cicero's ostensible squabble over oratorical style. In fact, Cicero portrays Demosthenes not only as the *best* exemplar of the flourishing of Greek oratory under democracy (*Br.* 26-48), but also as its *final* exemplar: his failure to stop Philip and Alexander is marked as the moment when the politically vigorous oratory of democracy began its decline into the focus on epideictic associated with tyrannical rule (*Br.* 37). In Cicero's formulation, then, Demosthenes is a tragic figure, whose overwhelming oratorical genius was not enough to halt the forces of autocracy, but whose speeches that attempted to do so should be praised nonetheless (as Cicero does at *Or.* 110-111).

This is, of course, as Hinds 1998 has noted, precisely how Cicero saw himself in this period, and *Brutus* is designed to present him as both the pinnacle and the end of Roman eloquence. Modesty, and the fear of openly criticizing Caesar's rule, prevent Cicero from saying such things about himself directly, and Demosthenes becomes a figure upon whom he can project his own career. Yet though it is only implicit, the comparison he draws between the fall of his republic and the Athenian democracy that ended with Demosthenes allows Cicero to get a pointed political message across: Caesar has put an end to Roman oratory, just as Philip, Alexander, and their successors did to the Greeks. Two years later, with Caesar dead and free speech (apparently) restored, Cicero would return to this comparison more openly in his speeches against Antony. Yet the web of associations he drew on to make such an outspoken

connection was, I will conclude, already established in the very works in which he claimed to be muted.

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