

## Cicero as a Critic of Oratorical Performance

This paper will examine Cicero's comments in *Brutus* on the oratorical delivery of contemporary speakers in Rome. This aspect of his treatise has largely been overlooked by modern scholars, who have tended to focus instead on its remarks regarding literary style (*elocutio*), and, in the case of J.-M. David, on the strident style of performance employed by orators pursuing the so-called *genus popolare dicendi*. As I hope to show, Cicero's comments show him to be an astute critic of live oratorical performance, whose criteria of assessment extend some way beyond the rhetorical handbooks' traditional treatments of voice and gesture. His insights help us to appreciate not only the challenges of performing in the Roman forum, but also the variety of ways in which orators adapted to them.

Although a concern with voice and gesture forms one basic axis around which Cicero's observations revolve, the historical focus of *Brutus* means that these elements are illustrated by specific examples rather than through generalizing principles such as we find in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Consequently we encounter a much more detailed level of analysis. With regards to voice, for example, Cicero informs us that L. Cotta (tr. 103) deliberately cultivated a rather countrified (*subrusticus*) manner of pronunciation (*Brut.* 137), while the triumvir M. Crassus was incapable of integrating a variety of tone into his speeches (*Brut.* 233). C. Fimbria was similarly monotonous, but delivered everything at the top of his voice (*Brut.* 233), etc.

Cicero, however, goes beyond simply the quality of the orator's voice. He places considerable significance on the fluency of a speaker's words and thoughts – an aspect of delivery rarely addressed by the rhetorical handbooks. (See e.g. T. Torquatus at *Brut.* 245; L. Philippus at *Brut.* 173; also Q. Sertorius at *Brut.* 180; etc.) Indeed Cicero claims that the elder Curio made up for the deficiencies in his use of gesture by the fluency of his words (*Brut.* 220: *expeditam ac profluentem quodam modo celeritatem*). And he draws attention to

the important (but usually neglected) interface between memory and *pronuntiatio*, with his observation that M. Antonius was always carefully prepared for his speeches, yet gave the impression of a lack of pre-meditation (*Brut.* 139). His art thus lay in concealing his art.

In the matter of gesture, Cicero memorably recounts the failings of the elder Curio and Sextus Titius (*Brut.* 216 and 225); but no less important is his praise of the charm inherent in the gesturing and delivery of various orators. (See e.g. *Brut.* 177 on Caesar Strabo; *Brut.* 203 on Sulpicius Rufus; *Brut.* 235 on Cn. Lentulus.) And, more revealingly, he claims that the projection of a certain sophistication compensated for the oratorical failings of P. Lentulus Sura, Cn. Lentulus and C. Piso (*Brut.* 234, 235, 239). To a degree, such observations show an interest in facial appearance (*vultus*), an aspect of delivery discussed in some rhetorical handbooks. But more significantly these comments reveal the astute eye with which Cicero observed his oratorical peers as he assessed their strengths and weaknesses. The final irony is that none returned the favor; we know in fact scarcely anything about such aspects in the performances given by Cicero himself.