

## Octavianus Maior: Cicero's Rhetorical Strategy Concerning Octavian in *Philippics* 3-5

Cicero's positive characterization of Octavian's status as a *puer* in *Philippics* 3-5 stands in stark contrast to the vituperative depiction of Antony's age in *Philippic* 2 (McConnell 2023, Zarecki 2023). The sharp contrasts between age and political acumen in *Philippics* 2 with regards to Antony and, especially, in *Philippics* 3-5 concerning Octavian, reveal a critical axis in Cicero's political strategy: how could he promote himself as the appropriate senior statesman for righting the ship of state while also acknowledging that his ultimate success depended almost entirely on the actions of the teenaged Octavian. In this paper, I argue that Cicero created a rhetorical solution that both wiped away his past political failures and proved his *bona fides* as a right man for the job.

Cicero had long desired a chance to become that moral leader he had described in both *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis* (van der Blom 2003). Cicero's solution in *Philippics* 3-5 was to resurrect the memory of Pompey Magnus and overlay this rhetorical Pompey onto Octavian. Cicero's use of Pompey in *Philippics* 3 and 5 to assuage fears about Octavian's youth is well-known (e.g. *Phil.* 5.42-52; Manuwald 2007: 699-701). But using Pompey at all was a strange move; not only did Pompey lose the war with Caesar in spectacular fashion but, as Kathryn Welch (2002: 8) has argued, during Caesar's dictatorship Pompey's memory and name carried almost political value. But where Welch considers the Pompey of the *Philippics*, particularly in *Philippic* 5, to be an attempt by Cicero to restore Magnus' son Sextus as a viable member of the Cicero-led Senate faction opposing Antony, any reuse or rehabilitation of Magnus' memory, I argue, was subordinate to Cicero's primary purpose of restoring his own status as the *pater patriae* who had once saved the state from ruin. Whereas Cicero had often complained that Pompey, to the *res*

*publica*'s detriment, hadn't listened to him during the civil war and had not made his plans clear to Cicero (e.g. *Att.* 7.10, 7.12.2, 7.13.1, and especially 8.3.3), It is not so much Octavian that won't make the mistakes that Pompey had made as a young man, but rather it is that Cicero will not make the mistake that he had made in the civil war. This time, Cicero has backed the right horse. But in order to prove his *bona fides* as the right man for the job, Cicero needed to properly situate Octavian as someone as capable as Pompey, as he does by repeatedly praising Octavian in terms identical to the praise he had earlier heaped on Pompey, but without Pompey's fatal flaw, an inability to listen to Cicero in matters of politics that was a constant refrain of frustration and regret during and after the civil war.

By presenting the young Octavian as a new and improved Pompey, a Pompey who had the *auctoritas* and military genius of the deceased Magnus but who, in contrast to the historical Magnus, was willing to bend his ear to Cicero's counsel and defer to him in political matters, Cicero would finally be able to be the Laelius he had long wished to be (*Fam.* 5.7.3) by legitimizing the precocious young Caesar as the hammer to crush Antony on Cicero's political anvil, with the added benefit that Cicero could provide himself with a palliative for his own concerns about both the weakness of his position and Octavian's intentions.

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