Hyperbole and Persuasion in Cicero's *pro Marcello*

Cicero's speech before Caesar in the senate thanking the conqueror for restoring the Pompeian Marcellus in 46 BCE has engendered breathtakingly diverse scholarly readings. Among the most salient of these, the speech has been seen as an abandonment of principle so egregious that Cicero's authorship should be questioned (the old and unpersuasive argument of F.A. Wolf), as an attempt to mold Caesar's political posture in unprecedented circumstances through a combination of praise and threat wrapped within an encomium (e.g.,Cipriani 1977, Dobesch 1985), as an extreme example of *oratio figurata*, viz., an invitation to the senatorial audience to commit tyrannicide (so Dyer 1990, Gagliardi 1997), as an attempt to praise Caesar in a way that defuses that hostile impulse (Marchese 2008), and even as what it claims to be, a speech of thanks (Winterbottom 2002, Craig 2008). An important 2011 essay by Joy Connolly, "Fantastical Realism in Cicero's Postwar Panegyric," boldly dismisses the long scholarly debate between Cicero's motives of accommodation and resistance by noting that the orator's intentions are unknowable. Instead, adducing Quintilian's treatment of hyperbole (*Ins*t. *Orat*. 8.6.67-76) as properly used to treat something that exceeds the natural limit and so cannot be described exactly, Connolly argues that the very fact of Cicero's hyberbolic praise of Caesar, which no one in the audience can take at face value, establishes a space of unreality ("fantasy") in which the uncertainties of the new situation, for Caesarians and Pompeians alike, may be realistically confronted. In this space of unreality, the need to adapt can advance in an area buffered from the emotional extremes engendered by the imperative to modify the deeply felt attitudes and values that had given rise to the civil war.

This paper will confront the methodological challenge of Connolly's rhetorical analysis that explicitly dismisses authorial intention, and thus excludes itself from rhetorical

criticism as students of Ciceronian persuasion commonly understand that term. It will argue that this dismissal is unnecessary, and that Connolly's important insight into the power of hyperbole can and should be incorporated in a more traditional approach to the speech. The key is in Quintilian's admonition at *Inst. Orat.* 8.6.75 that hyperbole can properly be used to express what is otherwise indescribable. Thus it is akin to figured speech, but does not imply an intention to exploit the gap between utterance and meaning in any deceptive way. As a figure recognizable at once by Caesar and by his senatorial audience, it allows a space for argumentation that will transparently not be taken at face value by anyone in the audience. Thus, unlike methodologically traditional readings that make the speech into lessons in governance addressed to Caesar or a figured invitation to tyrannicide addressed to the senate, the deployment of hyperbole allows for a rich reading of the speech within the traditional rhetorical critical framework; it allows for consideration of the orator's persuasive intent that advances on earlier readings by including as targets of that intent every major subset of Cicero's audience.

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