

The Power of Prayer Compels You: Cicero's Rhetorical Use of Prayer in the *Post Reditum ad Populum* Speech

This paper will consider the rhetorical form and function of the *exordium* in Cicero's speech to the people (*Red. pop.*) after his return from exile in 57 BCE. Critics have frequently attacked the robust eighteen lines of periodic text introducing this speech of thanks, condemning its unwieldy syntax and seeming lack of sense (e.g. Long 1856; Markland 1745). While this judgment of the sentence's style may be justified, I argue that a more fruitful discussion may emerge by limiting the analysis to its content, specifically Cicero's use of religious language in this rhetorical situation by alluding to and invoking the prayer he made to Jupiter before his departure from Rome in March of 58 BCE. By considering the social and political importance of this particular prayer in light of ancient and modern theories of epideictic oratory, I will show how Cicero utilizes the religious language at the beginning of the speech in order to establish two things: a recognizable community to which both he and the audience belong, and an authoritative position within that community.

When Cicero departed from Rome in 58 BCE he suffered a significant loss of *auctoritas* and *dignitas*. Many scholars (Dyck 2004; Lintott 2008; May 1988; Nicholson 1992) recognize that a critical consequence of exile for Cicero was an identity crisis which resulted in anxiety of how to reconstruct his public *persona*, and that one of his primary objectives after his return to Rome was to reassert his consular status, and thus reappropriate the authority he had lost. However, to my knowledge only one scholar has discussed how the religious language used in the *exordium* to the *Red. pop.* speech aims to accomplish this objective.

Andrew Dyck (2004) has argued that the prayer Cicero invokes at the beginning of this speech was meant to evoke the *devotio ducis* ritual in order to cast his departure in 58 in a heroic

light. The *devotio ducis* was a scapegoat ritual by which a Roman general would dedicate his life and the lives of the enemy troops to the gods in order to win the battle and preserve the lives of the Roman soldiers. Dyck's interpretation is sound and well argued, but it limits the analysis to an archaic and rarely employed ritual. My argument aims to highlight a contemporary and highly public ritual as a point of comparison for Cicero's prayer language. While Dyck's argument hinges on the phrase *me fortunisque meas...devovi*, he ignores the fact that the *devotio ducis* ritual invokes a retinue of gods, the most important of which are those of the underworld, the Di Manes (Livy 8.9.6-8). Cicero's invocation makes no mention of these gods, but he does emphasize that he prayed to Jupiter Optimus Maximus.

By examining the features of vows for safety (*pro salute*), of the *devotio* ritual, and finally of imperial vows dedicated by the Arval Brethren, I will argue that Cicero's prayer language in this speech alludes to the very specific ritual carried out by the newly inaugurated consuls as they took up office at the beginning of the year. By doing so Cicero accomplishes both of his goals in refashioning his public *persona* after returning from exile. First, he successfully establishes himself as a member of the community by addressing the state's main protective deity. Ultimately, however, he reasserts his consular authority by invoking the god to whom each newly elected consul made a vow of service and protection while using language reminiscent of that vow itself.

Bibliography

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