

Cicero as Schoolmaster: Declamation and the Criticism of Oratory in the *Second Philippic*

In this paper I argue that reading Cicero's striking criticism of Antony's oratorical ineptitude in the *Second Philippic* in light of Cicero's turn to declamation after the Civil War and his fictive presentation of the speech's delivery uncovers a subtext that acknowledges the ironic disjunction between the fictional world of Cicero's speech and the real threat of violence that deterred its delivery.

Cicero's *Philippics* were a notable source of inspiration for declamation (cf. *Sen. Suas.* 6-7), but is it possible to see declamation reflected in the *Second Philippic*, itself a fictitious speech? The ramifications of Cicero's recourse to rhetorical criticism and teaching of declamation under Caesar's dictatorship on his subsequent works have not been adequately investigated. One way to approach this topic is through Cicero's prominent criticism of Antony's oratory in the *Second Philippic*. Merrill (1975), Achard (1981), Steel (2006), Wisse (2013), and Mahy (2013) have all discussed Cicero's criticism of Antony's oratory, and Steel in particular offers some suggestive thoughts on the complexity of Cicero's criticisms ([2006] 59-60). Nevertheless, no study has yet fully unpacked the irony of Cicero's rhetoric in light of its historical and cultural contexts.

The background to my reading comes from Cicero's letters: in these he discusses his practice and teaching of declamation during Caesar's dictatorship and after his assassination (*Fam.* 9.16, 9.18, 7.33, *Att.* 14.12), but also laments that declamation was only an exercise and not the real thing (*Fam.* 7.33.1). Cicero's letters also provide background for the *Second Philippic*: Cicero did not attend the September 19 meeting of the Senate out of fear for his safety (*Fam.* 10.2.1, 12.2.1, 12.25.2-4). Nevertheless, Cicero presents the *Second Philippic* as being delivered as a response to Antony's tirade against Cicero at this meeting, and even suggests that

it constitutes an oratorical fight (*Phil.* 2.2). The events of recent years, however, had demonstrated that the fights between elite Romans had now devolved into actual warfare. Accordingly, it is certainly also ironic that in Cicero's extant speeches the *Second Philippic* contains the greatest amount of criticism of an opponent's oratorical abilities, since no actual oratorical showdown took place between Cicero and Antony. At several points throughout the speech Cicero acts the part of a schoolmaster, viciously taking Antony the hopeless pupil to task for his rhetorical blunders. After concluding his review of Antony's speech from September 19, Cicero reflects on Antony's preparations for it under the guidance of the prominent rhetorician Sextus Clodius, who at a symposium as *symposiarch* was given license to insult Antony (*Phil.* 2.42). Cicero's own role is parallel to Clodius': for fun, in the artificial atmosphere of a symposium, Clodius, a teacher of rhetoric, got the opportunity to rule over Antony and his companions and speak as he wished against them; similarly, Cicero in a fictive speech, a declamation, is able to say what he wants without immediately feeling the repercussions of his words.

The conceit of the fictional delivery of the *Second Philippic*, the circumstances of which are significantly different from those of the *actio secunda* of the *Verrines*, suggests that oratory is not an adequate response to Antony and the threat of tyrannical violence that he presents. Indeed, in the speech Cicero reflects on the inadequacy of the metaphorical violence of oratory in the face of a real threat of bloodshed. Oratorical invective accordingly becomes more fit for the schoolroom than for the venues of political activity. The *Second Philippic* then is not so much a triumphant defense of Cicero's own career à la Demosthenes' *De Corona* (by which it is said to have been inspired: Wooten [1983] 53-7), but a poignant testament to the limits of eloquence: the wounds that words and swords can inflict are fundamentally different.

Bibliography

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