

At Home with the Ciceronian Villain

This paper explores the homes of Ciceronian villains as described in the *Verrines*, *Against Piso*, and the *Philippics*. I argue that these texts are united by an interest in the invective potential of domestic spaces: they fashion the domiciles of Cicero's enemies into grotesque microcosms that neatly reflect the broader aims of the speeches and also stir up powerful emotions of disgust against the inhabitants of these houses.

Studies of Ciceronian oratory (for example, Craig 2004) have convincingly shown that the orator relies on a relatively confined set of invective tropes to develop the characterization of his opponents. No matter what his crimes, the Ciceronian villain tends to be, for example, drunk, inappropriately dressed, and constantly in the bad company. Far less attention, however, has been paid to how Cicero imagines the environments in which his opponents operate. In this paper I use the growing body of scholarship on the elite Roman house as a symbol of social status and a reflection of its owner's character (for example, Roller 2010 and Foubert 2016) to explore homes of Ciceronian villains.

I start with the *Verrines*, where at *Verrines* 2 5.27–28 Verres' house is described as a dark place stuffed with stolen objects of art. Here and elsewhere the *Verrines*, the house seems to consist only of the bedroom, which Verres uses both for his debaucheries and to carry out his official duties as governor of Sicily. The domestic space therefore becomes a reflection of his general unfitness for duty as well as evidence of his various crimes. It is only a venue for entertaining when Verres feasts with his criminal associates or pirates.

Whereas Verres' life centers around the bedroom, the houses of the former consuls Piso and Gabinius in *Against Piso* feature only banqueting facilities. These are the locations of wild,

drunken parties in Gabinius' case and disgusting feasts with rotten food and cheap wine in Piso's. In the *Verrines*, the overwhelming sensory impression was darkness, now it is filth and stench. Another important aspect of the houses in *Against Piso* is that they are inaccessible to those who are not close friends of either of the men: they are completely private residences, a strange occurrence for members of the Roman elites.

My final example, Antony's house in the *Philippics*, further develops the image of the dark, filthy dwelling place of the villain. At *Philippics* 2.105 Cicero describes the floors of Antony's house as swimming with wine and the walls dripping with drink. The language used finds its closest parallel in narratives of widespread slaughter. When combined with the various other ways in which Cicero accuses Antony of draining Rome, the description of the house becomes a way of further emphasizing his opponent's willingness to commit acts of violence.

In all three speeches, then, the houses are a close reflection of their owners. The descriptions support the invective programs of the speeches and serve to stir up disgust in the audience. An examination of the domestic spaces of Ciceronian invective gives us yet more evidence for the extent to which the genre relies on tropes. More significantly, however, it introduces us to a previously neglected aspect of Cicero: his potential as a writer of the grotesque and baroque. The houses of Ciceronian villains are richly imagined places of horror that drip with filth and gore. They are more akin to lairs than elite residences and thereby open up a space for a discussion of the shock value of invective.

Bibliography

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