

Cicero's *Fam.* 4.4 and the Sincerity of the *Pro Marcello*

Since the Gronovian scholiast, critics have questioned the sincerity of Cicero's extraordinary speech *Pro Marcello*, in which Cicero gives thanks to Caesar for pardoning M. Claudius Marcellus in 46 BC. In this paper, I argue that a close reading of *Fam.* 4.4 contributes to the interpretation of the speech as a resistant response to Caesar's dictatorship, and thus shows Cicero as a harbinger of practices of covert criticism such as "doublespeak" that are usually associated with later imperial authors (cf. Bartsch [1994]).

Cicero's *Pro Marcello*, delivered around September of 46, is an unusual Ciceronian speech: although delivered at a meeting of the Senate, Cicero addresses the speech to Caesar as dictator and praises him fulsomely. Indeed, on the surface, parts of the speech look like abject boot-kissing. Given the extremely dejected state in which we find Cicero in his correspondence from 46, as well as his later hostility to Caesar, Cicero's sincerity in the *Pro Marcello* has long been questioned. The Gronovian scholiast reports that many think the speech is figured (*figurata oratio*)—meaning that what is said is not what is meant—but immediately rejects this notion (Stangl 419). The debate, however, has continued among modern scholars: Dyer (1990), taking the most radical position, reads the speech as a "clear summons to tyrannicide" (30), while Winterbottom (2002) maintains that despite Cicero's later "darker thoughts about Caesar," we should take the speech at "face value" (38). More recently, Tempest (2013) has investigated the "ethos of sincerity" that Cicero constructs in the speech, a reading that points to the complexity of the question.

In *Fam.* 4.4 to Servius Sulpicius Rufus, Cicero recounts the delivery of the *Pro Marcello*. Despite its relevance to the problem, however, the letter's rich and implicative texture remains

underappreciated. Gildenhard (2011) relegates the letter to a single footnote, stating only that it provides a “Ciceronian account of the affair” (226 n. 11), while Dugan (2013) touches on it but cursorily to provide background for the speech (212-13). Winterbottom (2002) is more judicious: although he notes the strangeness of the scene described in the letter, he states “it strikes no other note than pleasure at the turn of events” (29). But the whole of this carefully crafted letter ought to be taken into consideration when examining Cicero’s remarks on the speech at its conclusion.

In this paper, through an analysis of the character of Book 4 of Cicero’s *Ad Familiares* and a close reading of the letter itself, I show that *Fam.* 4.4 reveals developments of subversive speech associated with the Principate. The letters in *Ad Familiares* Book 4 are thematically unified in their focus on the plight of the Republic, and the fate of Marcellus stands as the central narrative of the book. In *Fam.* 4.4, Cicero begins by discussing his correspondent Sulpicius’ disingenuous explanation for sending nearly identical letters and twice claims that he himself is not dissembling (εἰρωνεύεσθαι, *Fam.* 4.4.1), and so establishes a context in which one might not say what one means. When he comes to relate the restitution of Marcellus and the revival of the Republic (*Fam.* 4.4.3-4), Cicero’s ironic description of the event and play upon seeing (*videre*), seeming (*videri*), and spectacle/appearance (*species*) distance the author from the words he writes and suggest that the *Pro Marcello* set a Roman precedent for *dissimulatio* before an autocrat.

In a coda, I consider Cicero’s letter and speech in light of the writings of two later authors, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, for whom an essential component of imperial politics is a division between appearance and reality. A similar phenomenon characterizes Cicero’s account of the delivery of the *Pro Marcello* in *Fam.* 4.4, wherein a staged spectacle gives the

appearance of Republican *libertas*. If we see the end of the Republic in Cicero, we should likewise see in him the beginning of the Empire.

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