

Cicero's Lists of Tyrants and Tyrannicides

This paper reevaluates the rhetorical uses to which Cicero puts the so-called *adfectatores regni*, Sp. Cassius Viscellinus, Sp. Maelius, and M. Manlius Capitolinus. Since Mommsen (1871), it has been a commonplace of scholarship that these three men were—or, at least, were described as being—killed for their tyrannical aspirations and that Cicero and others molded their stories as weapons against the *populares* politicians of the Late Republic (Chassignet 2001; Flower 2006; Pina Polo 2006). Cicero did not, however, use the *adfectatores* equally: Maelius appears nine times, Cassius eight, Manlius only five. Their disparate prevalence, and the fact that they rarely appear alone, leads Neel (2015) to consider the *adfectatores* not a group but “part of a larger pool of negative examples.” In this paper, I reexamine the *adfectatores* in Cicero to show that they constituted a group and, more importantly, how the times Cicero breaks up the group expose his ingenuity in sculpting *exempla* and different passages’ diverging goals.

Because Cicero was not a historian, his historical allusions always have contemporary aims. His juxtaposition of other names with the *adfectatores*, far from weakening the category’s coherence, was its purpose, i.e., the assimilation of others to the *adfectatores* (e.g., *Rep.* 2.49, *Phil.* 2.87). The first reason Cicero did not always cite the *adfectatores* as a group is that he was happy to seize on any connection between the present and a detail of one of these stories. The abolition of the title *dictator*, for instance, lets Cicero segue to Manlius’ *gens* voting to retire his *praenomen* Marcus, which in turn lets him raise the specter of tyrannicide with which he then threatens Antony (*Phil.* 1.32, 1.35). The other *adfectatores* could not share this stage because they lacked the same hook to the present.

The most salient divergence between the *adfectoros*, though, was their manner of death. While Cassius fell to his father or a treason charge (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.68-80; Liv. 2.41) and Manlius was hurled from the Tarpeian Rock (Liv. 6.14-20), Maelius died at the hands of Servilius Ahala (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 12.2.7-8, 12.4.2; Liv. 4.13-16). This makes Maelius the better precedent for righteous tyrannicide and explains his greater prominence, but we cannot simply read Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus' narratives into Cicero and assume the *exempla* were stable, for Cicero changes details as needed to make them fit his needs. Sometimes his Ahala is Cincinnatus' *magister equitum* (*Cat.* 1.3-4, *Sen.* 56), but he can as easily be a private citizen to better resemble Milo in his trial for killing Clodius (*Mil.* 8, 72, 83).

That Ahala comes to rival Maelius' own importance points to the other reason for the *adfectoros*' disparate prevalence: different rhetorical goals called for different lists. Lists of slain malefactors could employ the *adfectoros* equally and assimilate them to contemporary or older villains (e.g., *Dom.* 101-02; Roller 2018), while lists of those who slew malefactors centered Maelius or, better still, Ahala, who appears ten times without the explicit inclusion of Maelius (e.g., *Cat.* 1.3-4, *Mil.* 8, 83). Ahala was also useful for a third sort of list, that of benefactors scorned. Here, Ahala might be combined with heroes like Camillus, recent figures like Opimius, or even, implicitly, Cicero himself (*Rep.* 1.6, *Sest.* 143, *Dom.* 86). That the *adfectoros regni* and Ahala appear in different groupings shows their malleability, which was much of why their *exempla* proved so useful.

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