

The Father, the Son, and the Requester: Marcus and Politeness in Ciceronian Letters

Cicero's son Marcus left for Athens in the Spring of 45 BCE ostensibly to study oratory and philosophy. He later joined Brutus's army sometime between late 44 and early 43 when Brutus stayed in Athens after the Ides. From Marcus's departure in 45 to Cicero's death in December 43, the father and son never saw each other in person again, yet Marcus makes quite a few appearances in the Ciceronian correspondence during that period. By analyzing the appearances of Marcus in four Ciceronian letters in 44 and 43 (*Fam* 12.16; *Ad Brut.* 2.3; 2.4; 2.5), I argue that both Cicero and his correspondents deployed the topic of Marcus to aid their political negotiations. The portrayal of Marcus abroad thus became a form of political capital for Cicero after the Ides.

My analysis is based on Jon Hall's framework of "redressive politeness" outlined in his monograph (2009) on the politeness strategies in Ciceronian letters. As Hall explains, "redressive politeness" is used to ease the tension and awkwardness associated with face-threatening acts such as making and refusing requests. Building on Hall's discussion, I will show that the topic of Marcus abroad also served as a "redressive politeness" strategy for the Ciceronian correspondents making or declining a request. For example, when Marcus was in Brutus's camp in 43, Brutus requested money and military reinforcement from Cicero in *Ad Brut.* 2.3 along with a lavish praise of Marcus. When Cicero replied and declined Brutus's requests (*Ad Brut.* 2.4), Cicero simultaneously recognized Brutus's care of Marcus as a way to mitigate the fissure caused by this refusal. When it was Cicero's turn to make a request of Brutus (*Ad Brut.* 2.5), namely to execute Mark Antony's brother Gaius, Cicero again deployed the topic of Marcus and praised Brutus as Marcus's role model. These three letters thus show

that both Cicero and Brutus used the topic of Marcus as a politeness strategy in their political negotiations.

We can also see the use of Marcus as a politeness strategy in *Fam.* 12.16 when we synthesize Hall's politeness framework with Sarah Stroup's (2010) model of "society of patron" engaging in textual exchanges. When Gaius Trebonius was on his way to assume the governorship of Asia in May 44, he wrote *Fam.* 12.16 to Cicero after stopping in Athens and meeting with Marcus. Trebonius spent the first two-thirds of his letter describing and praising Marcus's performance in Athens while extending an invitation for Marcus to visit Asia. Peter White (2010) has pointed out that in this letter the topic of Marcus served as "a token of friendship between Trebonius and Cicero" in the precarious political circumstances after the Ides. Yet the topic of Marcus bears another layer of significance when Stroup's "society of patron" is considered. Trebonius also mentioned in the letter that he was attaching his verse rendition of Cicero's witticism. Furthermore, Trebonius requested Cicero to include him in any potential writings about the Ides and to cast him in future philosophical dialogues. In other words, by juxtaposing his praise of Marcus and his requests of Cicero, Trebonius used the topic of Marcus to facilitate his textual exchange with Cicero, which was significant for both Trebonius's political and intellectual profile.

In short, analyzing the topic of Marcus in these four letters not only expands our understanding of the politeness strategies in Ciceronian letters, but also shows an approach of investigating Marcus's study abroad beyond trying to reconstruct his experience in Athens. This new approach will in turn invite us to re-evaluate the meaning and significance of study abroad in Ancient Rome as well as today.

Bibliography

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