

How to Teach a Ciceronian Speech in the 1st Century AD

Imagine that you are a young Roman recently promoted from the elementary tutelage of the *grammaticus* to the more advanced school of the *rhetor*. Up until this point you have spent your time in the classroom reading the likes of Vergil and Horace, sometimes more as treasure troves of grammatical curiosities than as literature. Now your teacher stands before you with a speech written by Marcus Tullius Cicero. You have heard the name before, but you have never yet read one of his speeches. What will your experience be like? What will the teacher talk about? What will you learn—and why?

We are in a remarkably good position to answer these questions, for we are lucky enough to have three sources that comment on one Ciceronian speech, the *Pro Milone*: Asconius, the scholia Bobiensia, and Quintilian. Asconius, a first-century Roman scholar, has left us a fully-intact commentary on the speech. The scholia Bobiensia are preserved on a palimpsest and perhaps date from the 4th century, but without question they contain much from the first and second centuries, and so they too can be used as a witness to the early Imperial classroom. Finally, the *Pro Milone* is one of Quintilian's favorite speeches, and he uses it constantly to illustrate his precepts in the *Institutio Oratoria*. We can extract all of his statements on the speech and re-order them almost into the form of a running commentary. By reading and carefully comparing these three sources, we can in essence reconstruct a composite image of how a skilled teacher might have presented a Ciceronian speech to a first-century schoolroom.

The student experience was much different from what we see in, for example, Servius's commentary on Vergil. Gone—or almost gone—are basic explanations of word choice and meaning, those staples of the grammarian's diet. Instead, more sophisticated analysis of the form and function of the speech is the main fare. The emphasis is on rhetoric and argumentation

throughout. How does Cicero persuade the jury? What are his strategy and tactics? This is all buttressed as necessary by explanations of historical allusions, mostly to help the students understand the speech itself, but also to help stock the budding orator's mind with a storehouse of ready anecdotes and *exempla* that he could use in his own future compositions.

The interpretation and exegesis on display in the commentaries will be found quite sophisticated. All three teachers are agreed, for example, that Cicero's client is guilty as sin, and his defense is founded on deception and outright lies—and this makes it all the more impressive! Even when dealt a bad hand, Cicero is shown to play his cards to maximum effect. The literary interpretation can be sensitive and insightful as well. Quintilian, for example, has a remarkably sophisticated analysis of why Cicero mentions Milo having to change his shoes and wait for his wife to complete her *toilette* before setting out for a journey. We will even see the teacher standing at the head of the class and modeling the delivery of the speech with his own theatrical display, now casting his eyes downward in mock fear, now staring forth proudly and boldly; a confidential whisper here, a confident roar there, all while his pupils look on with rapt attention

The teachers' pervasive emphasis on rhetoric and argumentation makes sense in the educational context: these students are being trained to become orators themselves, and they are reading Cicero's speeches as models to be studied, memorized, and imitated. First-century students would have made their first acquaintance with the Arpinate at the feet of the *rhetor*, and their first impressions of the man will thus have been of the "rhetorical figure" as presented in the classroom—and first impressions can last a lifetime. My paper thus makes a contribution not only to our understanding of Roman education but also to the study of Cicero's reception in the early Empire. It may even give modern-day teachers some ideas for their own classrooms.