

Curiuser and Curiuser . . . : Cato the Elder, Cicero, and Exemplary Discourse

Cato the Elder is both a standard figure of Roman exemplary discourse and one of its early literary practitioners. This paper explores Cato's literary engagement with the exemplary figure of M'. Curius Dentatus, a three time consul, censor and triumphator of the first half of the third century whose Sabine farm was near Cato's. I will argue that Cato's narrative of his very personal interactions with the exemplar of Curius 1) constituted both an exploration of what it means for an exemplum to become literary and to become national; and 2) provided a model for the reception and application of an exemplary life—that is, instructs the reader in the reception of Cato's own life. Cicero is perhaps the best “reader” of Cato, and the exemplary genealogy of Curius-Cato-Cicero is important in Cicero's own self-representation.

Curius is best known for three exemplary moments: his confiscation and sale of first the property and then the person of a reluctant military draftee (Var. *Men.* p. 140 Reise; Liv. *Per.* 14; V. Max. 6.3.4;); his refusal of an award of land after a military victory, with an attached *dictum* that someone who accepts more land than he needs or than his soldiers receive is not a very good Roman citizen (e.g. in V. Max. 4.3.5; Plin. *Nat.* 18.8; Plut. *Apophth. Curii*); and a similarly apophthegmatic rejection of a gift brought to him at his home by emissaries from the recently conquered Samnites: the emissaries find him eating turnips at his humble hearth, and he laughs off the quantity of gold they offer, saying he would prefer to command the rich than to be rich (Cic. *Sen.* 56, *Parad.* 6.48; V. Max. 4.3.5; Juv. 11.78-79; Flor. 1.18.22; Plut. *Cat. mai.* 2). He is a regular feature of Cicero's rhetorical lists of *summi viri*, national exemplars of antique virtue, appearing often in the company of his contemporary and consular colleague C. Fabricius Luscinus (*Cael.* 39, *Planc.* 60, *Sen.* 15) with whom he shares particular thematic and narrative links (Vigourt 2001; Berrendonner, 2001). He also appears along with Cato in lists of *summi viri*

who also happened to be *novi homines* (*Mur.* 17) and *municipales* (*Sul.* 23). This last provides a hint at the appeal Curius' model must have held for Cato. In a lost work, but with its broad strokes accessible through Plutarch and Cicero (*Plut. Cat. mai.* 2; *Cic. Sen.* 55, *Rep.* 3.40), Cato claims a personal and particular interaction with Curius, narrating his habitual visits to Curius' abandoned villa, his admiration of the parsimony and *continentia* evidenced by the building, and his application of Curius' example to his own farm and life. Though the power of Curius' example may seem very direct, Cato's interaction not with the man, but rather with an empty building, dramatizes one step away from the family-based exemplum, passed on by a father to his son, or from imitation of elder contemporaries (Chaplin 2000, 11-16). The monumentalizing of this personal interaction in literary form represents another step, and allows Cato's own experience to be generalized for broader consumption. Cato can be seen in other works (e.g. in the *ad Marcum Filium* and, very differently, in the *Origines*) to engage with the power of literature to both memorialize the transient and generalize the personal. I will suggest that this approach to exemplarity might be governed in part by Cato's status as a new man, a man for whom models were not to hand in family tradition: Curius serves as "ancestor" for Cato, and Cato is interested to make extra-familial models (not least his own) available to the state as a whole. Cicero's pattern of use of Cato and Curius as related exempla suggests that he claims his own place in this alternate "genealogy".

Works Cited

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