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Research Proposal: Anchoring Devices in Ancient Rhetoric

As my contribution to the OIKOS Anchoring Innovation project, I plan to undertake two articles on Cicero's uses of *oratio figurata*. I have addressed the controversy over *oratio figurata* in the Caesarian orations in my dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 2014) and in two articles, "Congenital Virtue: *Mos Maiorum* in Cicero's Orations" (*Classical Journal* 2016) and "Messalla Corvinus: Ciceronian Orator, Augustan Statesman" (*Rhetorica*, forthcoming 2018). The interpretation of the Caesarian orations as examples of *oratio figurata* has long been a subject of controversy in the scholarly literature (see e.g. Rambaud 1984, Dyer 1990, Winterbottom 2002, Craig 2008, Connolly 2016), but the question of Cicero's intentions remains fundamentally insoluble. While I remain fascinated by the Caesarian orations, I propose instead to turn my attention to earlier uses of *oratio figurata* in the corpus. One article will be literary in focus and will deal with the letter to Lucceius (*Fam*. 5.12), which I believe has satirical value which has long been overlooked. In a longer article project, I will take a more historical approach and focus on Cicero's treatments of Pompey, a great man whose power lacked the institutional basis of Caesar's dictatorship, and who therefore needed the advocacy of a Cicero to legitimize and normalize his political status. Eduard Meyer's 1918 thesis, that Pompey was the true forerunner of Augustus' monarchic power (cf. Hurlet 2006, Vervaet 2010), speaks to the importance and novelty of Pompey's position in the republic. However, this position would not have been possible without Cicero's use of anchoring rhetoric.

The political acumen which Pompey conspicuously lacked (Blom 2016) was provided instead by the ambitious orator and new man, Cicero. In the 60s BCE, Cicero's efforts to act as an advisor to Pompey (*Fam.* 5.7), and to connect Pompey's extraordinary

commands to republican traditions (*Leg. Man.*) exemplify the potential rhetorical power of anchoring devices. In the 50s, however, Pompey's position was in jeopardy after the calamitous tribunate of Clodius, most notably when Pompey was confined to his house by fear of assassination (*Dom.* 67). Cicero, upon his return from exile, came to Pompey's rescue rhetorically: he proposed that Pompey be given an extraordinary command over the grain supply and defended the great man, even though many contemporaries saw Pompey as culpable for Cicero's exile in the first place (*Dom*. 27-30, e.g.). Cicero's further efforts to legitimize and defend Pompey, especially in *Pro Balbo*, provide further evidence of their symbiotic relationship. In the crisis of 53-52 BCE, Cicero's attempts to cast Pompey as a traditional republican politician paid off: such staunch traditionalists as Cato and Bibulus elevated Pompey to a sole consulship and chose to support him as the solution to the republic's difficulties (Ramsay, Zarecki). Cicero had made Pompey's political role seem normal and safe. It was by no means inevitable that the senate should side with Pompey in the civil wars – or rather it would not have been inevitable, but for the rhetoric of Cicero, which had made such a choice rhetorically defensible.

I do not plan to argue that Cicero's speeches in praise of Pompey were insincere, or that it was unsafe for him to speak otherwise, although this might sometimes have been a possibility (in the *Pro Milone*, for example). Rather, Cicero's treatments of Pompey are "figured" primarily in the sense of Quintilian's third definition: they are ornate and suave in style, embellished elegantly with epideictic and panegyric techniques (Breij). These are the same techniques which have been labeled as possible examples of *oratio figurata* in the Caesarian orations. I will argue that Cicero's treatments of Pompey anticipate his treatments of Caesar, and explore possible reasons why scholars have not been so quick to assign subversive or hidden meaning to the treatments of Pompey. We can also read the speeches about Pompey as "figured" in the

sense of [Dionysius]' second *schema*: Cicero praises some qualities and actions of Pompey, but not others, according to which qualities he wishes to emphasize and cultivate in the great man, and which he wishes to suppress or occlude.

This analysis of Cicero's political rhetoric offers manifold opportunities for broader humanistic inquiry and cross-cultural connections. In America, we refer to certain politicians as using "dog-whistle" rhetoric: they appeal to racist or nativist prejudices by covert, coded messages. This is a clear modern example of *oratio figurata*, in the sense of saying one thing to communicate another, and seems to be one component of a widespread reaction against globalism, progressivism, and expectations of "political correctness." We all have a human tendency to choose political heroes and then to rationalize our support once we have committed ourselves, and to some extent, this is what Cicero is doing with Pompey: he has committed himself to defending their *amicitia*, and uses his rhetorical resources not only to rationalize and legitimize his choice, but also to win others over to the same opinion. Last year, I wrote a brief piece analyzing the script of a speech by Donald Trump using the tools of classical rhetoric in order to demonstrate the continuity in political rhetoric from antiquity to today. These connections could be the springboard for collaboration with the Reception of Antiquity division of the project, or for the project's outreach efforts to companies and other institutions. In addition, there are obvious connections between what I am proposing and Jacqueline Klooster's project on interpreting the civil wars and Pompey's role after the fact: Cicero's efforts to anchor Pompey in various ways inform the later works of Plutarch, Lucan, and other writers. The related project on "Constraints and Tradition" housed at Radboud includes a project on the language of praise, for which Cicero's treatments of Pompey also offer an instructive forerunner and model. I look forward

not only to participating in the Anchoring Devices in Ancient Rhetoric subdivision but to engaging with these Anchoring Innovations project more broadly.

In terms of my own scholarship, these two articles will advance my research profile on Cicero substantially. I am currently revising a book manuscript on *Cicero's Political Personae*, in which I combine philological methods of close reading with critical consideration of the political and historical context of Cicero's activities. Armed with this expertise, I will be able to plan the scope and structure of my two articles for this project fairly quickly, and expect to produce the article on the letter to Lucceius in the first six months at most, allowing twelve months for the article on Pompey and Cicero. My methods are those of persuasive process criticism, influenced particularly by Craig, Dugan, and Gildenhard; I often say that I am a scholar of oratory, but not of rhetoric, since I study the orations as literature and as documents of intellectual history, rather than as exemplars of rhetorical theory. The opportunity to come to Radboud and to engage with scholars of rhetoric would broaden my methodological perspective and bring new depth to my studies in Cicero. The chance to engage with the European community of scholars in Ciceronian studies would also be invaluable at this early stage in my career as a scholar.

An article on the use of humor and irony in the letter to Lucceius and a reevaluation of Cicero's key role in promoting Pompey the Great will fit well with the goals of the Anchoring Innovation project's division in discourse and rhetoric. This would be a really exciting opportunity for me to carry out further work in my research area in a new community of scholars, and it has come along at just the right time in my career. I am also excited about the broader possibilities for collaboration on new ways to use our knowledge of Ciceronian rhetoric to inform and enrich our engagement with modern politics. I continue to be surprised – and sometimes alarmed – at how much

Cicero has in common with modern politicians. While he is a master of his craft, his techniques have been adopted and used continually, consciously or unconsciously, as politicians seek to persuade their audiences to see things from their perspective. The study of Ciceronian rhetoric is a useful tool that allows us to see political strategies clearly and to approach them with a more critical lens in our own time. For that reason, it is a tool worth sharing and propagating in the broader community beyond classical studies.

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