

Cicero's Sincerity: A Roman Audience Perspective

For Cicero, stirring the audience's emotions is the key to victory (*Orator* 69). But the audience, no matter how predisposed to follow the orator's lead, will not have their emotions kindled unless the orator himself provides the emotional spark (*De or.* 2.189). This demand upon the orator to show emotion raises two related questions about the expectations of the rhetorically educated elites who form Cicero's juries: 1) Do Cicero's audiences expect the emotionalism of the orator's performance to be sincere? 2) If so, in what sense?

Cicero's own statements about the need for the speaker to feel the emotions he performs are famously contested. In *De oratore* (2.189-192), the orator has Antonius stress that he never needs to feign emotional engagement; he is carried along by the power of his own words, and by the anxiety born of his duty as a *patronus*. Most recently, Jon Hall (2014:141-145 with lit.) has argued that Cicero has Antonius assert that he never has to fake his emotions precisely so that Cicero can counter a public perception that he is regularly becoming emotional on demand. Among earlier approaches, Wisse (1989: 264-265) argues that the speaker's sincerity will not even be theorized until Quintilian, that Cicero is simply maintaining the need for emotional argument, perhaps against proto-Atticists, and that he is also providing instruction for those who want to learn this style of argument. Wisse dismisses, perhaps too hastily, the later statement of Cicero the philosopher (*Tusc.* 4.55) that the orator should feign anger, but should never feel it. In short, Cicero's own writings give us small purchase to understand clearly the expectations of the Roman audience for the speaker's sincerity.

Still, our understanding is helped by an essential if fraught distinction that Antonius draws between orator and actor (*De or.* 2.193-194. See esp. Gunderson 2000: 111-148.). The actor has techniques that induce emotion as he plays fictional roles. The orator, as a Roman

public figure, is always playing himself; he is, in Antonius' phrase, not *actor alienae personae*, *sed auctor meae*. Thus his emotional displays and motivations must be consonant with the general public perception of his character. He will be judged sincere only if his emotional display stays within those bounds. This is part and parcel of the normative public role of the orator.

The display of emotion is itself also a part of that role. Unlike modern normative behaviors of public speaking, which are often not explicitly codified, and so more easily contested (What does it mean to be "Presidential"?), Cicero and his audience were exposed to formal training in public speaking that prescribe, and so codify, such emotional displays. Already in two practical rhetorical textbooks dating to Cicero's youth we find prescribed techniques for the orator to stoke and express emotions (*Inv.* 1.100-105 [*indignatio*]; 106-109 [*conquestio*]; *Rhet. Her.* 2.47 [*amplificatio*]; among the figures, esp. *Rhet. Her.* 4.55 [*exsuscitatio*]).

This audience expectation for emotional performance, which dates from the very beginning of Cicero's career, might be thought to call the sincerity of any such performance into question. But it may alternatively validate such emotional performance. It does so exactly because the orator is showing himself to be the sort of person that the normative role of public speaker requires him to be. This is not to say that the emotional performance is perfunctory or *pro forma*. In the emotional arena, unlike the arena of argument, there is absolutely no scope explicitly to admit that the speaker can express one thing while believing another (as at *Clu.* 139). The orator's emotional performance must *appear* heartfelt and appropriate for the circumstances, else it renders the speaker simply ridiculous (*De or.* 2.205; *Clu.* 58-59). But this is not the sincerity of 19th century Romanticism (for example), spontaneously revealing the author's inmost feelings (Rudd 1976: 145-181). Rather the speaker must only represent his emotional engagement in a way that is consonant with his *prevenient* public image, with the

impression he gives of himself in the speech, and with the expectations for public speaking which he shares with his jury. If he does so, the Roman audience credits the orator for his normative behavior in fulfilling their expectation for emotional argument. In this limited but essential sense, they find the orator sincere, whether he thinks he is faking or not.

Bibliography

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