

## BOOK REVIEW

*Cicero's Political Personae*. By JOANNA KENTY. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. x + 274. Hardback, \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-108-83946-4.

Joanna Kenty's *Cicero's Political Personae*, a book that centers our understanding of Cicero's rhetorical ingenuity in his later career speeches around the crafting of distinct oratorical political personae, is a successful, engaging piece of scholarship on Cicero's later speeches, sure to enrich any literary study of Cicero's post-exile period. Convinced of the success of its author's intended aims, in this review I shall briefly summarize its main argument, point to but a few of its merits, and end with a few questions in the spirit of constructive scholarly inquiry.

Kenty's study follows in the now decades' long interest in Cicero's speeches as sparkling case studies in what Stephen Greenblatt called "self-fashioning" in his groundbreaking 1980 *Renaissance Self-fashioning*. As Cicero's speeches repeatedly reference Cicero's own ascent through the *cursus honorum* to the consulship itself through narratives he himself devised and which he himself popularized through the ages by the publication of his speeches, the interest is expected and warranted. Building on the work of scholars like Catherine Steel, John Dugan and Henriette van der Blom, Kenty is particularly interested in the ways in which the construction of a performative, public persona (through his speeches) can help Cicero achieve his desired literary and political ends. Where previous studies were particularly interested in Cicero's speeches up until his exile in 58 BCE and his theoretical (and sometimes epistolary) prose works up until his death, Kenty centers her study on Cicero's later, less-studied oratory, including the climactic challenge against Antony in the *Philippics*.

The results of this study are exciting and innovative. In particular, Kenty's interest in Cicero's rhetorical strategies in the later speeches results in a new paradigm for their study: distinct rhetorical *political personae* Kenty argues underlie the main action of Cicero's speeches. These political personae, Kenty says, are "oratorical roles he routinely adopted to achieve political ends" (3). At another point, she says these political personae exhibit "Cicero's rhetorical positioning of himself as a protagonist in eight types of political narrative" (10). Kenty then identifies eight political personae Cicero uses in his later speeches to achieve political

aims: “the attacker, the friend, the martyr, the authority figure, the senator, the popular orator, the voice of a faction, and the spokesman of the great man” (4). Her book contains analysis of select speeches according to this eightfold division.

As a brief note on quality: these case studies according to this eightfold division are rigorous, thorough, largely convincing, thought-provoking and well-researched. Each page is brimming with insightful commentary, new directions in analysis and clear command of the relevant scholarship. I have every confidence it will be a compelling companion to scholars and students of these speeches.

I end with two constructive comments I had as I finished Kenty’s book. Both have to do with Kenty’s theoretical foundations for her study, as these raised many fruitful questions.

The first is that this reader, at least, would have enjoyed seeing more as regards the background assumptions and argumentation for Kenty’s adoption of the model for the “persona” she introduces. Cicero himself advanced a four-dimensional theory of the personae in *De officiis* 1.107 (which Kenty references), but Kenty adopts instead a five-dimensional model (where persona represents an intricate layering of *social role, identity, character, affect, and relationships*). Kenty, to my mind, seems to assert each of these elements as relevant to a comprehensive persona theory pertinent to literary study rather than argue clearly for each. Similarly, though Kenty mentions Erving Goffman and Marcel Mauss early in her discussion of construction of personae, I saw a missed opportunity in connecting this study with conceptions of persona and identity in psychology (even among classic figures such as Jung and Erikson). Accordingly, though the five-dimensional persona model Kenty adopts seemed very interesting, it also felt underdeveloped. Perhaps this could be a fruitful path for further research in this area.

Upon finishing Kenty’s book, I was also struck by what I saw as very fruitful connections to another area of scholarship largely untouched by Classics scholars: strategic studies. When Kenty describes the structure and application of Cicero’s political personae—at various points calling them Cicero’s “rhetorical strategies”—it made me think about how these personae do in fact represent Cicero’s *strategic* thinking in delivering speeches in highly complicated political environments to achieve specific political ends. The language of strategy may further clarify Cicero’s use of these distinct eight political personae. Drawing on Lawrence Freedman’s influential general theory in his 2013 *Strategy: A History*, Cicero’s strategic thinking (and rhetorical choice of one persona over another) would usually derive from whether (i) he aims to deceive or be deceptive so as to gain the political upper hand, (ii) he advocates a judicious use of violence to

project power or (iii) he aims to build a coalition (often to preemptively avoid the use of violence). I saw much here for thinking about how these personae in fact suit explicitly *strategic* purposes.

In sum, Kenty's book points to new directions in analysis of Cicero's oratory, introduces and exhibits important tools in Cicero's rhetorical toolbox and offers itself up as a trusty companion to several speeches besides. I think it will be important reading for any scholar or student of Cicero's rhetoric.

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