

## BOOK REVIEW

*Cicero's Political Personae*. By JOANNA KENTY. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp x + 274. Hardback, \$100.00. ISBN: 9781108839464.

Matthew Fox once wrote that we all make our own Ciceros.<sup>1</sup> In this handsome and eminently readable book, Joanna Kenty has set out not to make her own Cicero but to expose the way that *Cicero* made his Ciceros in the years between his return from exile in 57 and his death in 43 BC. Kenty identifies eight separate *personae* adopted by Cicero during these years: the Attacker, the Friend, the Martyr, the Orator without Authority, the Champion of the Senate, the Popular Orator, the Voice of a Faction and the Spokesman of a Dynast. In each of the eight succinct chapters, one for each of the *personae*, Kenty describes the *persona*, its deployment across 3-6 speeches utilizing a roughly chronological approach and relates it to not only the complicated interpersonal relationships that dominated the Late Republic but also the practice of oratory during those tumultuous years. Kenty's analysis aims to expose and clarify the complicated "value system of the Republican political culture" (223), with Cicero's *personae* being one of his most important tools for navigating the fluid political and personal relationships that characterized the last two decades of his life. While Kenty admits that these *personae* were, overall, less than effective in achieving Cicero's aims, the study of his failures is as useful as studying his successes for understanding his motivations and how Cicero himself viewed the role of the orator in the Late Republic.

Chapter 1 looks at Cicero's most well-known *persona*, the Attacker. Kenty, however, focuses on Cicero's restraint when on the offensive, characterizing this *persona* as a purifier of public morality, one who has a duty to call a spade a spade but also who must hold back, even when responding to deeply personal attacks, from allowing his speech to devolve into the nonsensical ravings of a lunatic mind. This *persona* is on full display, according to Kenty, in Cicero's vituperation of Vatinius, Clodius, Piso and, of course, Antony in the *Second Philippic*. Crucially, Cicero only resorts to the attacker when he has been the victim of attack and he

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), I.

uses this *persona* to assault his opponents' credibility while using the same opportunity to demonstrate his complete mastery of the situation and his own emotions.

The second chapter, one of the strongest and most interesting, takes the opposite track from the first chapter and examines Cicero as Friend. Kenty is not interested in Cicero's actual friendships but rather the way that Cicero employs *amicitia* as a rhetorical trope. Cicero was certainly in need of friends in the 50s and Kenty highlights how Cicero uses his friendships with Pompey and Caesar to promote a *persona* of the friend chock full of gratitude for beneficences on his behalf. The uses of this *persona*, which Kenty calls "ritualistic" (57), are directly related to the scale of the deeds performed on Cicero's behalf; hence, the effusive praise of Caesar in *De Provinciis Consularibus*, while perhaps disingenuous, is a calculated move designed to win over Caesar's allies in the Senate, if not Caesar himself. After Pompey's death and Caesar's victory, Cicero's rhetoric of friendship becomes a way for him to dispense advice, for example, to Caesar in *Pro Marcello* and the next generation of statesmen in the *First Philippic*.

Chapter 3 turns inward, from public demonstrations of hostility or cordiality to the pain and suffering that resulted from Cicero's exile, which Cicero channeled into the *persona* of the Martyr. Oddly, this chapter is as much about Cato the Younger as it is Cicero. Kenty argues that it is Cato who is the best representation of the Martyr *persona*, with Cicero creating an alternative version of the Martyr that was still noble and heroic but predicated on excessive emotion and a concurrent claim for sincerity, as demonstrated in *De Domo Sua* and *Pro Sestio*. That is, until the *Philippics*, especially the *Second Philippic*, when Cicero adopted an extreme Catonian Martyr *persona* against Antony. Kenty slightly undermines her argument about Cicero's use of the Martyr *persona* in the *Philippics* by claiming that Cicero had serious doubts about being a martyr for the Republic (99) and in fact does not take on a Catonian *persona* at all because he believed martyrdom would have been ineffective, since Cato's opposition to Caesar hadn't stopped Caesar at all (100). This concluding section, however, does not detract from the quality of the discussion in the rest of the chapter.

Chapter 4 examines the instances when Cicero presents himself as an Orator without Authority. Kenty draws here on Cicero's presentation in *Pro Milone* and the Caesarian orations while drawing supporting evidence from the *Brutus* and the corpus of letters after the end of his exile in Brundisium. Cicero's use of "alternatives to *auctoritas*" was an attempt to "circumvent the perceived hostility of powerful figures" (104). Most interesting in this chapter is Kenty's discussion of

Cicero's use of humor as part of this *persona* and how he manipulates his periods of absence from the courts as a sign of strength, not weakness. Through humor-without-authority Cicero is not only attempting to disarm his audience but is also able to embed an intense sense of condescension (111), especially in the Caesarian orations. Cicero's periods away from the courts, particularly the one between Pharsalus and *Pro Marcello*, are, for Kenty, overtly political acts that reclaim *auctoritas* instead of demonstrating its loss.

With the fifth chapter Kenty moves to more familiar ground, Cicero as Champion of the Senate. Kenty focuses on Cicero's use of senatorial status to present himself as the moderator of conformity and legitimacy. This is the *persona* with which Cicero can most explicitly extol his own activities, especially as consul, and highlight his position as "a vessel for the senate's will, a metonym or representative for the collective" (135); Cicero's successes are thus also the senate's successes, as he argues in *De Haruspicum Responsis*. By adopting this *persona*, Cicero yokes himself to his own particular ideology of the senate, very much self-fashioned, and uses that association to denounce his opponents as outsiders or even, in the case of Piso and Gabinius in *In Pisonem* and *De Domo Sua*, as wannabe tyrants bent on destroying the senate's primacy, in effect, no better than Catiline (141). This *persona* allows him cover in the Caesarian speeches - since the Senate has made Caesar dictator, it must have been a just decision. In the *Philippics*, however, this *persona* becomes problematic, because it is predicated on Cicero's view of the senate as "a monolithic, harmonious entity symbolizing the traditional republic" (147), which it clearly was not by 44-43 BCE and had not been in some decades. This *persona* ultimately fails to achieve its goals, as it relied on self-made fictions and ignored the realities of the military situation.

The sixth and seventh chapters address Cicero's navigation between factions. Chapter 6 examines how Cicero presented himself as popular but never *popularis*. That is to say, Cicero claimed to be *populus*-approved, especially during his consulship (as exhibited in *De Domo Sua*, *Pro Sestio*, *In Pisonem*, and *Pro Plancio*) and in his recall from exile, where Kenty portrays a Cicero obsessed with the size of the crowds that welcomed him home as a sign of how beloved he was and how much the people approved of his career. Yet, according to Kenty, this did not prevent Cicero from considering the *populus* to be a degenerate group that no longer embodied, or even understood, the moral and ethical underpinnings of the *res publica* (161-162). Instead of claiming to be *popularis*, he assumes with the Popular Orator *persona* a "paternalistic" attitude towards the people, where the moral

high ground becomes the primary method of attracting popular approval. Keeping to the high ground allows Cicero to avoid charges of *levitas* while allowing him to level the same charge against his opponents and avoid any suspicion of demagoguery - it is not *he* who is aiming at demagoguery, but people like Clodius, Piso and Antony through their unapologetic and open courting of the mob (174-176).

The seventh chapter examines Cicero as the Voice of a Faction. Kenty first, and rightly, breaks down the distinctions between *optimates* and *populares*, referring to them as “rhetorical tropes” rather than actual factions (177), as a prelude to a discussion of Ciceronian invective in *De Domo Sua* and *Pro Sestio*. The invective in these speeches offers up a Cicero who is “the leader of a great crusade to restore law and order in the republic ... even with the use of force” (25). To do this, Cicero divides the state not into factions but rather a division of the people into those that belong to the “true” *populus* - those that support Cicero and the *res publica* - and a “false” *populus* - those who are seduced, particularly into violence, by demagogues like Clodius (185-189). One of the most interesting arguments Kenty makes is that Cicero’s use of partisan rhetoric was a way to rationalize political violence by assigning value judgment to the violence based on where his personal loyalties lay. While, in general, Cicero used political violence as a rhetorical tool to denigrate his opponents, he also used it to instill his allies, or those he wished to make his allies, a sense of moral legitimacy.

The last chapter takes a different track and describes a *persona* that Cicero did not adopt but went to great lengths to avoid: the Spokesman of a Dynast. Rather than highlight how Cicero used his oratory to heighten his association with Pompey and Caesar, Kenty demonstrates how Cicero walked a very narrow tightrope in asserting his independence while maintaining his friendships with both men. As compared to Clodius or Antony, who slavishly devoted themselves to serving other powerful men, Cicero, particularly in *Pro Balbo* and *Pro Marcello*, maintains a defensive posture that deflects any attempts to peg him as dependent on anyone else for his success and safety.

Overall, this is a vexing book. On the one hand, it is well-written, free from any noticeable errors, with appropriate notes, a solid bibliography and many interesting things to say about Ciceronian self-fashioning after his return from exile. On the other hand, the exposition and analysis of how the *personae* worked together leaves the reader wanting more. In some cases the analysis of a *persona* is limited to a single passage or merely the exordium of a speech, as with the Attacker *persona* in *In Vatinius* and *De Haruspicum Responsis* in Chapter 1, or the *persona* of

the Friend in *Pro Balbo* in Chapter 2, with little discussion of how, or if, the *persona* plays out in the rest of the speech under discussion. In the speeches where Kenty identifies more than one *persona* at work, there is little to no explanation of how the different *personae* relate to each other. For example, Kenty identifies four separate *personae* at work in *Pro Marcello* (Friend, Orator without Authority, Champion of the Senate and Spokesman of a Dynast) and the *Second Philippic* (Attacker, Friend, Martyr, Champion of the Senate), but each *persona* is treated as a separate *persona* employed for specific circumstances with no clear synthesis of how they work together to achieve Cicero's goals or even if they are designed to be appreciated by the audience as separate *personae* or whether they work together to create another, overarching *persona*. Kenty tantalizingly writes that "the order of operations, the sequence in which Cicero inhabits these *personae*, is crucial to the efficacy of the persuasive strategy of the oration" (112), but such analysis is not made explicit. There is also the question of whether these *personae* are unique to the *post reditum* period of Cicero's life. In Chapters 3 and 4 Kenty traces the development of the *personae* under discussion to speeches before his exile (the Catilinarians in Chapter 3, *Pro Roscio Amerino* in Chapter 4); if these *personae* were not unique to the *post reditum* speeches, one wonders whether we can trace the other *personae* through Cicero's entire corpus; and if we can, what effect this would have on our understanding of Ciceronian self-fashioning during the triumvirate and Caesar's domination. Additionally, only certain *personae*, particularly in Chapters 7 and 8, are supported by evidence drawn from philosophical or oratorical works or the corpus of the letters; the reasons behind this selective use of non-oratorical evidence are not clear.

The above critiques notwithstanding, however, if the purpose of scholarship is to stimulate further research, then Kenty has succeeded in spades. Each chapter works very well on its own, and her analysis of the five aspects of a *persona* in pages 17-23 is most intriguing and provides a framework for reexamining all interpersonal and rhetorical relationships in the Late Republic. Whether the reader is satisfied with her conclusions or wishes that she had written more, Kenty's engaging book deepens our understanding of Cicero's self-fashioning and invites all its readers to dive headlong into further study of Cicero's political and rhetorical *personae*. Ciceronians of all stripes would do well to read it.

JONATHAN P. ZARECKI

*UNC Greensboro*, [jpzareck@uncg.edu](mailto:jpzareck@uncg.edu)