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Performance-Based Research into Cicero's Oratory: Possibilities

Much can be gleaned about the performative aspects of Cicero's oratory from the theoretical discussions of delivery provided by the rhetorical treatises of Quintilian, Auctor ad Herennium and Cicero himself (E. Fantham, *Phoenix* 1982; G. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations*, 1999). This paper will consider what further insights, if any, can be gained through a more practical approach to the subject, that is, through modern reconstructions of his speeches. By examining the results of recent experimental performances in Latin of several passages from Cicero's orations, this paper will assess the advantages and limitations of this type of methodological approach.

On the one hand, it will be argued that such practical reconstructions have only a very limited value in terms of solving specific problems associated with oratorical delivery. The difficulties involved in reconstructing accurately the performative environment of ancient Rome, as well as the ancient orator's acquired habits of language and gesture, make it impossible to provide definitive answers to questions relating to such matters as Cicero's use of elision, vocal pitch and hand movement. These reconstructions can, however, prove useful in two rather different ways.

First, they can highlight gaps in the ancient rhetorical discussions that are easily overlooked by the more conventional, passive approach to these treatises. Practical reconstructions suggest, for example, that Quintilian's celebrated discussion of hand gestures (*Inst.* 11.3.85-121), although extensive, provides little information about the numerous smaller hand movements that his comments at 11.3.106-111 imply must have been used quite frequently. (Cf. U. Maier-Eichhorn, *Die Gestikulation in Quintilians Rhetorik*, 1989.)

Second, such reconstructions force us to consider issues of performative interpretation that are often not addressed by traditional literary-based critical approaches. The question of Cicero's interaction with his audience, for example, becomes crucial once we treat his oratory as a performance art, not just a written, textual artifact. Similarly the emotional dynamics of his perorations take on a special importance, once the performative aspect is introduced. (Specific examples will be considered in order to illustrate these points.) In such matters an appreciation of the impact of spoken Latin, as well as the theatrical element of Roman oratory, is crucial.