

2017

## The Marriage of Cicero: Matrimonial Metaphor in the Second Philippic

Elijah J. Mears

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), and the [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mears, Elijah J. (2017) "The Marriage of Cicero: Matrimonial Metaphor in the Second Philippic," *Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 6 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/papersandpubs/vol6/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (CURCA) at Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Papers & Publications: Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

---

# The Marriage of Cicero: Matrimonial Metaphor in the Second Philippic

## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks to Dr. Jonathan Zarecki, who believed in me as a scholar even when I did not, and to Dr. Christopher Craig, whose bit of bibliographical advice was of immeasurable help.

## The Marriage of Cicero: Matrimonial Metaphor in the *Second Philippic*

Elijah J. Mears

*University of North Carolina  
at Greensboro*

Of the many things for which Cicero could have counted himself famous—his philosophy, his oratory, his defeat of Catiline in the year 63—perhaps, at least in the modern day, he could be said to be most famous for his reputation for self-aggrandizement. As Seneca recounts, expounding upon his own virtues was something which Cicero was wont to do “not without cause, but without end.”<sup>1</sup> This is certainly true in the work of Cicero about which this essay is concerned, the *Second Philippic*, which is both a thorough assassination of the character of Mark Antony and, in many ways, more about Cicero and his own character than anything else. As is discussed below, Tom Stevenson and Jonathan Zarecki have thoroughly explored the premise that Cicero uses attacks on Antony’s character throughout the *Second Philippic* to bolster the audience’s perception of his own, but something more is at play here. The many examples Cicero gives of debauchery and immorality throughout Antony’s marital and sexual history should be taken to suggest a quintessentially virtuous marriage by contrast, one which Cicero uses to cement his claim to be, for one brief moment, the first man in Rome once more. The marriage, of course, is Cicero’s marriage to the Republic.

This essay begins by focusing on the most dramatic of the aforementioned references to Antony’s lack of virtue, sections 44 and 45 of the *Second Philippic*, in which Cicero mentions one of Antony’s youthful escapades. He notes that Antony was a bankrupt as a youth and that, in an attempt to gain some modicum of financial solvency, he began to prostitute himself, becoming no better than a common whore, a *scortum*—the famous passage in which Antony trades his manly toga for a womanly one. He goes on to say that Antony was rescued from this practice by the intervention of the younger Curio, who, in Cicero’s words, “led [Antony] from [his] harlot’s profiteering and, as though he had given [him] a matron’s cloak, placed [him] into a stable and fixed marriage.” In fact, Cicero tells us that “no boy was ever bought for the reason of lust who was so in the power of his master as [Antony] in Curio’s.” This is merely the most dramatic among a litany of offenses against the Roman masculine ideal which Antony seems to have perpetrated: not only does he become a common whore promptly “wifed” by Curio, throughout the speech he also becomes Helen of Troy,<sup>2</sup> he cavorts with an infamous actress (2.58, 61), and he becomes little more than his

**ELIJAH J. MEARS** is an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, majoring in Classical Languages & Literature and minoring in Archaeology. He is active within the Classics community at his school, serving as Vice President of the UNCG Classical Society; he also serves on the boards of the UNCG College Democrats and UNCG Hillel. His primary research interests include the late Roman republic, ancient sexuality, the Jewish diaspora in the Roman world, and Cicero’s oratory. He will be applying to various graduate programs in the fall of 2017 in preparation to continue his work at that level and beyond, with an eventual ambition of receiving a doctoral degree in Classical Philology and entering the faculty of a university Classics department.

<sup>1</sup> Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 5.1. All translations my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Phil.* 2.55. Subsequent references to this volume will be provided parenthetically in the text.

wife Fulvia's love slave (2.77). One might even make the assumption that Antony, who has, if one believes Cicero, debased himself to the fullest possible extent in terms of Roman sexual mores, is himself little better than a woman.

Such a list of marital vices perpetrated by Antony naturally would have invited comparison to Cicero's own marital exploits. In fact, a significant portion of this argument rests on the idea that Cicero's attempts to tear down Antony are also attempts to bolster his own reputation.<sup>3</sup> Several scholars have already done this groundwork: among others, Zarecki argues that Cicero "becomes a foil for Antony, exhibiting—or at least valuing—all the traits which Antony does not possess,"<sup>4</sup> and Stevenson says that Cicero sets up a "fundamental antithesis" between himself and Antony, to the point that he calls the contrasts he presents "deliberate and programmatic."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, given the way in which Cicero berates Antony as a sex slave, a philanderer, a woman, and a passive homosexual, such dramatic marital and sexual impropriety points to some exemplary, quintessentially virtuous behavior on Cicero's part in his own marital history.

It would be tempting to point to Cicero's marriage to Terentia as a commendable example of the Roman marital ideal and thus suitable for this rhetorical purpose. This, however, is unlikely. At the time of the *Second Philippic's* composition, autumn of 44 BCE, Cicero and Terentia had been divorced for several years, and Cicero had even been briefly remarried and divorced again in the intervening time. Beyond this, even during their marriage, Terentia never seems to have been the meek and idealized Roman wife. She was, instead, as Jo-Marie Claassen says, a "capable and formidable woman."<sup>6</sup> One might thus rightly question the wisdom of evoking a powerful woman like Terentia in a speech in which Cicero also evoked the domineering Fulvia, and did so primarily to emasculate Antony.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the marriage between Cicero

and Terentia seems to have failed at least in part due to Cicero's neuroticism and suspicion, as well as the long-term effects of repeated, prolonged familial stress related to Cicero's exile and the civil war.<sup>8</sup> Given all of these reasons, it seems unlikely that Cicero would have intended his audience to think of Terentia as a wife to stand in contrast to Antony's shameful transgressions against the Roman ideal.

It would be similarly unwise to think that Cicero meant to evoke his brief marriage to the strikingly young Publilia, roughly the same age as his daughter. First, we know that this "ill-assorted marriage lasted only a few weeks."<sup>9</sup> Second, even Cicero, in writing to a friend, says "I should have taken up no new course of action [i.e. the marriage] at so miserable a time, except that on my return to Rome I found my private affairs in no better shape than public affairs."<sup>10</sup> Third, Publilia was strikingly young, and, while Roman marriage was more accustomed to age gaps than modern customs are, an age gap of that magnitude would still have attracted "unfavourable comment."<sup>11</sup> When combined with the inherent association between Cicero's divorce of Publilia and the death of his beloved daughter Tullia, this points to this union as something that Cicero would have hardly wanted his audience to think of at all, let alone as the virtuous contra-Antonian marriage posited here.

This, then, brings us to the question of why Cicero would intend his audience to think of him as married to the Republic and whether it seems likely that he intended this comparison. In response to the former, Cicero was, of course, the *paterfamilias* of his own family—what remained of it, at least—at this time, but there is another group over whom he held the title *pater*: the *patria*, and, by extension, those who inhabited it, the Roman people.<sup>12</sup> As we can see from its definition in Lewis & Short, the word *patria* can really be thought of as properly being a substantive adjective masquerading as a noun, and in fact comes to us from the adjective

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson 96.

<sup>4</sup> Zarecki 147.

<sup>5</sup> Stevenson 103, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Claassen 212.

<sup>7</sup> Myers 344.

<sup>8</sup> Claassen 220, 227, 228.

<sup>9</sup> Rawson 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Fam.* 4.14.

<sup>11</sup> Treggiari, Cicero 124.

<sup>12</sup> Kenty 430-431.

*patrius*, and so the *terra patria* is, literally, the “land belonging to one’s father.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, inherent in the idea of a *pater patriae* is the idea that those inhabiting the *patria* must be under their father’s *patria potestas*, just as any children. This is not merely a phenomenon that existed in Cicero’s head: the Senate itself openly acknowledged this. In speaking in the *Second Philippic* about the aftermath of the Catilinarian conspiracy, for which Cicero was lauded as *pater* or *parens patriae*, he says that his handling of the conspiracy “pleased a packed Senate such that there was no one who did not thank [him] as though [he] were their parent” (2.12). Cicero indeed seems to have had a very valid claim to be the *paterfamilias* of the entire Roman nation.

Cicero was not, however, the only individual who could make such a claim. Antony, against whom Cicero inveighs, was the consul for the year of 44. This put Antony also into the role of “a sort of *paterfamilias* for the state.”<sup>14</sup> The Romans viewed themselves as a *familia* and so the consuls, functioning as sort of a “king for a year” chosen from among the *patres conscripti* of the Senate, were the *patresfamilias*.<sup>15</sup> After the death of Caesar, given the turmoil around Dolabella’s appointment as suffect consul, Antony could probably be safely thought of as the only consul of significant political substance for the year. Moreover, as consul, he had the same right of determining the will of the gods for the state as the *paterfamilias* did for the *familia*; and, most importantly, his *imperium* was as limitless as *patria potestas*, with neither clear restrictions nor clear delineations as to its use.<sup>16</sup> This, of course, presented a problem for Cicero in attempting to cast himself as the helmsman of the state—the *rector rei publicae*—which made it all-important to assert his claim in a way that overruled and superseded Antony’s. Much of this was accomplished through standard rhetoric: part of Antony’s claim lay in his status as a successor to Caesar, so Cicero painted Antony as a bad Caesarian.<sup>17</sup> Part of Antony’s claim must rest on

his ability to be a just and level-headed leader, so Cicero painted Antony as a tyrant. According to Cicero, he embezzled funds from the Temple of Ops (2.93), forged handwritten acts of Caesar (2.97-100), returned to Rome with an armed bodyguard, and flagrantly disregarded the rule of law (2.108-109). To the Roman mind, such tyranny would naturally have evoked as its opposite the archetype of the good father, and “it cannot have escaped anyone’s notice that Cicero had a claim to the position of *pater patriae*.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, if Cicero wants to demonstrate that his claim to be the good father is superior to Antony’s, he must show what an unfit father Antony is, and he must do what he can to cement the fact that he is indeed the father. Cicero thus consistently uses Antony’s connections to women to undermine the consul’s *dignitas* and *auctoritas*, especially his connections to the actress Cytheris and his third wife, Fulvia.<sup>19</sup> In particular, he portrays Antony as subservient to Fulvia, enslaved by his unmanly love for her; in fact, Fulvia almost seems to be more of the man than Antony is.<sup>20</sup> Having destroyed Antony’s virility in this fashion, Cicero goes on to offer himself as “the epitome of dignity and authority through a patriarchal metaphor that plays on the Roman women’s biological role of furthering the state through procreation.”<sup>21</sup> In the soaring finale of the *Second Philippic*, Cicero declares that he “would even offer up his corpse gladly, if by his death the freedom of the state might be realized, such that the hardship of the Roman people might at long last bring to birth that with which it has so long been in labor” (2.119).

This is, perhaps, a curious metaphor. Until this point, Cicero has exclusively associated the feminine with Antony, and therefore as negative. Here, however, the feminine transforms briefly into a positive attribute, and birth becomes a political act which Cicero associates inherently with himself through the hardship of the Roman people and, consequently, the Republic. There are a few possibilities, of course, for why Cicero would suddenly make this change. By

<sup>13</sup> Lewis & Short, s.v. “patria.”

<sup>14</sup> Lacey 132.

<sup>15</sup> Lacey 125, 130-131.

<sup>16</sup> Lacey 131.

<sup>17</sup> Craig 151, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson 102.

<sup>19</sup> Myers 341, 342.

<sup>20</sup> Myers 344, 345.

<sup>21</sup> Myers 347-48.

far the most likely option is that he meant to claim himself as the father of this rejuvenation with which the Republic is laboring. Nancy Myers says that here “[a]s *paterfamilias*, Cicero claims political and social responsibility for the republic’s rebirth. By assigning himself the male position in the social procreative processes of the private sphere, Cicero underscores his *dignitas* and *auctoritas* in his willingness for self-sacrifice for the good of the state.”<sup>22</sup> Notably, this metaphor is echoed in the infamous line from Cicero’s poem *On His Consulship*, “Oh fortunate Rome, born while I was consul!” It is this paper’s contention, then, that this passage in the *Second Philippic* suggests that Cicero wants his audience to think of him as wedded to the Republic. For the Romans, childbirth was intimately linked with marriage, or at least with the sort of virtuous Roman marriage which Cicero is here attempting to present.<sup>23</sup> After all, if Cicero is married to the Republic, that certainly does more for his claim to the helmsmanship of the state than anything Antony could possibly put forward.

And so this argument reaches its last question: having established that it is entirely within the realm of possibility for Cicero to have consciously asserted himself as married to the Republic within the *Second Philippic*, and having established that he would have had many reasons for doing such a thing, did he actually mean to? The answer must be a resounding *maybe*. While there exists an astonishingly large corpus of Cicero’s personal letters, none of them present any sort of author’s commentary on the *Second Philippic* which might bear forth a definitive answer one way or the other. Unless Cicero were to rise from the dead to inform us of what he meant, we will never know for certain. While the existence of the similar metaphor in *On His Consulship* noted above is encouraging, it is far from conclusive. So, unable to speak definitively of Cicero’s intent, one must let the written page speak for itself. Cicero’s unceasing lambasting of Antony’s behavior naturally invites comparison to Cicero’s own actions. In a work which seems clearly designed to augment Cicero’s status as a father of the Roman people and, therefore,

<sup>22</sup> Myers 348.

<sup>23</sup> Treggiari, *Marriage* 8.

the rightful leader of post-Caesarian Rome, the one combined with the other points clearly to the idea of a marriage between Cicero and the Republic. There is even the passage in which the Republic gives birth – a very motherly thing to do. Yet, if this were such a painfully obvious bit of self-presentation, then I should neither need to make an argument for it nor convince anyone of it. On the other hand, if there is any single partner to whom Cicero could claim complete fidelity across the entire course of his adult life, who could it be if not the Republic?

What Cicero has written does suggest that this metaphor exists within the *Second Philippic* and that Cicero intended it. Cicero defended the Republic across the whole of his career – against Catiline, against Clodius, against Antony. It is during this last defense of the Republic that the *Second Philippic* was written: Rome’s greatest hour of need. With Caesar dead, Cicero would abandon the relative political obscurity he had embraced after the civil war in order to defend the state against the likes of Mark Antony: a drunk, a pervert, and a brute, little better than Catiline. Here, for a brief moment, the consular has his last opportunity to shine, a swan song in which he might once more, however briefly, retake the helm of the *patria* and try to save that thing, the “people’s thing,” for which he cared so deeply. Ultimately, that story is of course a tragedy for the Ciceronians among us—Cicero ended his life hunted down by Antony’s goons and betrayed by Octavian, a young man in whom he had placed so much hope. He was a man beleaguered by accusations of inconstancy at every turn across a career rife with opportunism and waffling. His adoration of the Roman system of government is one of the few places where we find a Cicero as steady and constant as a rock. It is here, in defense of it, that the sometimes-cowardly Cicero finally finds his courage, the political courage he displays throughout the *Philippics*. While one might disagree with the contention that Cicero married the Republic, it is beyond argument that he loved it.

---

### Bibliography

Claassen, Jo-Marie. 1996. “Documents of a

- Crumbling Marriage: The Case of Cicero and Terentia." *Phoenix* 50.3/4: 208-32.
- Craig, Christopher P. 1993. *Form as Argument in Cicero's Speeches: A Study of Dilemma*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Kenty, Joanna. 2016. "Congenital Virtue: *Mos Maiorum* in Cicero's Orations." *The Classical Journal*. 111.4: 429-62.
- Lacey, W. K. 1986. "Patria Potestas." In *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*. Edited by Beryl Rawson, 121-40. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
- Lewis, C. and C. Short. *A Latin Dictionary, s.v. "Patrius."*
- Myers, Nancy. 2003. "Cicero's (S)Trumpet: Roman Women and the *Second Philippic*." *Rhetoric Review* 22.4:337-52.
- Rawson, Elizabeth. 1975. *Cicero: A Portrait*. London: Allen Lane.
- Stevenson, Tom. 2008. "Tyrants, Kings and Fathers in the 'Philippics'" In *Cicero's Philippics: History, Rhetoric and Ideology*, 95-113. Edited by Tom Stevenson and Marcus Wilson. Vol. 37 & 38. Auckland: Polygraphia.
- Treggiari, Susan. 1991. *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- . 2007. *Terentia, Tullia and Publilia: The Women of Cicero's Family*. London: Routledge.
- Zarecki, Jonathan. 2014. *Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Dr. Jonathan Zarecki, who believed in me as a scholar even when I did not, and to Dr. Christopher Craig, whose bit of bibliographical advice was of immeasurable help.

### Faculty mentor

Jonathan Zarecki