

AN ANCIENT EXAMPLE OF LITERARY BLACKMAIL?

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Towards the end of his life and especially after his exile in 58-57 BC, Cicero's publication program accelerated. While he aimed to promote his own glory, he had to do so in an environment where writing about oneself attracted censure. This article explores some of the ways in which Cicero tries to overcome this limitation. These include writing about himself indirectly, defending artists in court, soliciting historians to include his role as consul in their works and even attempts at public literary blackmail, specifically towards his prolific contemporary, Marcus Terentius Varro.

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By the time of the composition of his *De finibus* in 45 BC, Cicero was very much aware that his publishing activity constituted a major achievement. Answering to the criticism that he focused too much on philosophy¹ and taking those to task who would discriminate against their own language, Cicero states in the prologue that those who would prefer him 'to write upon other subjects may fairly be indulgent to one who has written much already — in fact no one of our nation more — and who perhaps will write still more if his life be prolonged' (1.4.11).² We see the same sentiment expressed with rather more Ciceronian fire in letter 281, written to Atticus on 9 May of the same year. Answering to the criticism of his continued mourning for the death of his daughter,³ Cicero rages that 'these happy folk who take me to task cannot read as many pages as I have written'. Cicero's growing reputation as a writer is also clear from *Epistulae ad familiares* 251 (*Fam.* 5.14), written by L Luceius. Here Cicero's mind is described as 'a well-instructed one, ever creating something to delight others and shed lustre on yourself'. Writing much would naturally increase the chances of Cicero's name surviving the ages, a preoccupation for many writers, both ancient and modern. But Cicero had to write and publish in an environment where writing about oneself was generally avoided. Over the course of his vicissitudinous career, Cicero tried several different approaches to keep his name in written circulation: writing about himself

¹ Goodwin 2001:45 goes so far as to include 'an interest in philosophy' as a form of insult, which also included sexual impropriety, public drunkenness, and dancing.

² Translations and referencing follow the Loeb editions.

³ This issue is analyzed by Wilcox 2005, who explores the excuses Cicero makes for his antisocial behavior, one of which includes his focus on writing.

indirectly, defending writers in court, courting writers by letter, and even literary blackmail.

One of the most charming moments in literature — a moment that perhaps brings us closest to understanding publication aimed at ensuring the eternal glory of the writer — occurs at the beginning of the *De legibus*. The work commences with a fictional Atticus and Quintus Cicero Sr. roaming about the countryside around Arpinum. Upon seeing a grove and oak tree, Atticus asks whether it is the same oak as the one in Cicero’s poem in which he praises Gaius Marius, written in or before 59. The answer is instructive, as it shows that Cicero was by this time — like many ancient writers — keenly aware of the power of composition and publication to immortalize an author:

Quintus: That oak lives indeed, my dear Atticus, and will live forever; for it was planted by the imagination. No tree nourished by a farmer’s care can be so long-lived as one planted by a poet’s verses.

Atticus: How is that, Quintus? What sort of planting is it that poets do? It seems to me that while praising your brother you are putting in a word for yourself as well.⁴

Quintus: You may be right; but for all that, as long as Latin literature shall live, there will not fail to be an oak tree on this spot, called the ‘Marian Oak’, which, as Scaevola says of my brother’s “Marius”, will ‘through countless ages come to hoary old age’ (*Leg.* 1.1.1).

This is a particularly delightful exchange, not least because of its shameless and convoluted egocentricity. Cicero not only engineers a literary compliment aimed at himself via the characters of his brother and brother-in-law, but manages also to compliment them, first by their inclusion as characters in the work itself,⁵ and

⁴ Quintus Cicero Sr. had achieved some minor celebrity as a poet among his contemporaries.

⁵ As his philosophical oeuvre expands, we not only see more examples of the inclusion of himself and his intimates as characters in the works, but even biographical details of which he was rather proud, such as his discovery of Archimedes’ grave during his quaestorship in Sicily (*Tusc.* 5.23.64-66), as well as his governorship of Cilicia (*Div.* 1.28.58). Concerning the grave, Jaeger 2002:54-56 makes the case that Cicero not only hoped to create a more permanent memorial through writing, but also goes out of his way to emphasize his own role. Gurd 2007:70 gives as reasons for including living friends as characters the following: ‘First, it served immediate social purposes: the *Brutus* is a form of payment in kind, to Atticus for the *Liber annalis*, and to Brutus for the *De virtute*. Second, the display of benevolent debate helped model a private version of the republican solidarity no longer possible in public. Showing Romans argue complex questions allowed him to dramatize the ethics of friendship and mutual

then by referring to Quintus' own work as a writer. Finally he quotes yet another compliment to himself by a leading statesman,⁶ put in the mouth of his fictional brother! This indirectness stems from the habit among Cicero and his contemporaries of not writing directly about themselves for fear of censure. Allen (1954:126) points out that it 'was expected also that one would introduce with an apology remarks which had to be made about oneself' and continues that 'Cicero was, so far as we can judge, even more careful than his contemporaries in the matter of consistency with accepted mores (1954:128)'. Explaining Cicero's increasing references to himself over time, however, he concludes that Cicero 'would not have been guilty of so gross a *faux pas* as to express greater pride in his achievements than his contemporaries would have thought proper. The task of an orator is to establish rapport with his auditors, not to alienate them'.⁷ Quintus Sr. continues by stating that 'many objects in many places live on in men's thoughts for a longer time than nature could have kept in existence' and concludes with the opinion that when 'time and age shall have destroyed this tree, still there would be an oak tree on this spot which men will call the "Marian Oak"' (*Leg.* 1.1.2). Cicero would naturally have been delighted to know that all of them, including his 'Marian Oak', would survive the millennia, as this would serve as the ultimate vindication of his project to promote his own glory through publication.

This example demonstrates that composition and publication were powerful tools in the promotion of personal glory. However, Cicero did not initially focus on glorifying himself, but rather on coaxing others to do it for him. This is a preoccupation that is already apparent twelve years earlier, in the *Pro Archia* speech of 62. Cicero's main argument in this speech is that the poet Archias had

correction he would propose in the *Laelius* as a new republican ethics. Finally, this friendly debate also models *literary* relationships ... the very representation of debate implies and invites another form of literary activity, one that extends beyond solitary, inward looking study'.

⁶ These of course aim to bolster Cicero's authority. What follows this initial section is a systematic rejection of requests by Atticus and Quintus to write on pure philosophy, historiography, or jurisprudence. Dolganov 2008:24-25 argues that in doing so, Cicero is 'signaling the vocabulary that his audience needs to activate in order to understand his meaning. Considering that Cicero's subject is Roman constitutional law, and that any literary work by a senior statesman necessarily had political ramifications, his literary originality and intellectual independence translate into a statement of political authority'. Krebs 2009:92 adds that, with 'the help of these semantic layers, Cicero opens an associative latitude that allows for these various shifts'.

⁷ I would argue that Cicero nevertheless does push the boundaries of self-praise to further his glory. While it is impossible to generalize concerning primary purpose, I nevertheless disagree with Benario 1973:17 who, in his effort to rehabilitate Cicero from the criticism of scholars such as Syme 1939, overlooks the very many efforts at self-aggrandizement in the writings.

shed lustre on the Roman State through his literary activity and should therefore be conserved for the State that he may continue to do so. In one example, also concerning Gaius Marius, Cicero mentions an early work by Archias that had won the great general's approbation, despite him being considered insensible to such refinements (9.19). Cicero goes on to observe dryly that there is 'no man to whom the Muses are so distasteful that he will not be glad to entrust to poetry the eternal emblazonment of his achievements' (9.20). How much more so a man not at all insensible to such refinements!

Several instances of Archias' role in praising Roman statesmen follow, leading to a general digression on the role of poets in the immortalization of men, culminating in the opinion that, had the *Iliad* never existed, the same mound which covered Achilles' bones would also have overwhelmed his memory (10.24). All of this builds up to the actual point, which is that Cicero wishes to preserve his client for the Roman State, praising him for working on a poem in which he praises Cicero. In a moment of pure self-indulgence,⁸ in which the purpose of a public life, magnified in writing, becomes apparent, Cicero writes:

I will now proceed, gentlemen, to open to you my heart, and confess to you my own passion, if I may so describe it, for fame, a passion over-keen perhaps, but assuredly honourable. The measures which I, jointly with you, undertook in my consulship for the safety of the empire, the lives of our citizens, and the common weal of the state, have been taken by my client as the subject of a poem which he has begun; he read this to me, and the work struck me as at once so forcible and so interesting that I encouraged him to complete it. For magnanimity looks for no other recognition of its toils and dangers save praise and glory; once rob it of that, gentlemen, and in this brief and transitory pilgrimage of life what further incentive have we to high endeavour? If the soul were haunted by no presage of futurity, if the scope of her imaginings were bounded by the limits set to human existence, surely never then would she break herself by bitter toil, rack herself with sleepless solicitude, or struggle so often for very life itself. But deep in every noble heart dwells a power which plies night and day the goad of glory, and bids us see to it that the remembrance of our names should not pass away with life, but should endure coeval with all the ages of the future (11.28-29).

⁸ It is worth pointing out here that, whether or not it was Cicero's brother presiding over this tribunal, as is traditionally believed, Cicero's indulgence of this rather 'irregular' theme within a forensic speech probably derives from the confidence he had after subduing the Catilinarian conspiracy in the previous year, but before the danger to his position that his participation in the *Bona Dea* case of 62 caused, became apparent.

The idea, which Cicero embroiders on, is that immortality, though achievable through a variety of means, such as statues and portraits, is best achieved through writing,⁹ in which ‘we bequeath an effigy of our minds and characters, wrought and elaborated by supreme talent’ (12.30). Cicero won his case, but the work he hoped for has either been lost or remained unwritten,¹⁰ the latter being more likely, as suggested by letter 16, written to Atticus at the beginning of July the following year, in which Cicero complains that Archias had written nothing, before continuing in a rather peevish tone that he might be considering writing about one of the Caecilii Metelli instead.

This did not stop Cicero from continuing to elicit honourable mentions from others to catapult his achievements into posterity. Perhaps the most overt example occurs in *Epistulae ad familiares* 22 (*Fam.* 5.12),¹¹ written in April 55 to L Luceius. Having been forced to abandon politics by the first triumvirate, Cicero can be seen expending his energies on reclaiming his former glory by encouraging Luceius to include his consulship in the history¹² he was writing. The letter opens with an apology as to the contents, but Cicero nevertheless adds that ‘letters do not blush’.

⁹ We also see this sentiment expressed in *Sest.* 61.129 and *Tusc.* 1.15.34.

¹⁰ This did not stop Cicero from making up the shortfall through the composition of his self-congratulatory poem, *De consulatu suo*, written some time between 60 and 55, leading to widespread mocking by contemporaries and later writers. The line *cedant arma togae, concedat laurea laudi*, which Cicero was rather proud of, became proverbial for the dangers of self-praise. However, Allen 1954:121-122 makes several important observations concerning this issue. He begins by questioning the extent to which self-esteem was socially acceptable in Rome, and whether Cicero exceeded the bounds of propriety in self-laudation. He concludes that ‘it must be taken as a basic principle, however, that in the autobiographical remarks in all his works Cicero did not intend to be offensive and that he did wish to conform to the usual standard of manners’. He goes on to argue that Cicero’s ‘conception of *gloria* was influenced both by Hellenistic philosophy and by Roman society, and his concept of the significance of *gloria* deepened into nearly the modern notion of the desire for immortality as Cicero was matured by his various vicissitudes of fortune’.

¹¹ Hall 1998 offers a useful analysis of this letter, which Cicero himself refers to as ‘*valde bella*’ in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 83.4, pointing out its function as a formal request rather than as an example of unrestrained egotism. I would add that Cicero’s estimation of the letter had less to do with its artistic quality than his ability to navigate the complex social expectations of such a request, which we see repeated in the letter to Varro below.

¹² That Cicero did not write any history himself is significant. Dolganov 2008:28 states that Cicero did not write history in the 50’s as it did not offer him ‘sufficient political utility’. He goes on to explain that this may have been because ‘historiography was laden with literary conventions and political connotations more than any other genre, and did not provide a built-in means for discussing one’s own achievements. Cicero clearly found poetry and *commentarii* more congenial for self-commemoration’.

He continues:

I have a burning desire, of a strength you will hardly credit but ought not, I think, to blame, that my name should gain lustre and celebrity through your works. You have often promised me, it is true, that you will comply with my wish; but I ask you to forgive my impatience. The quality of your literary performances, eagerly as I have always awaited them, has surpassed my expectation. I am captivated and enkindled. I want to see my achievements enshrined in your compositions with the minimum of delay. The thought that posterity will talk of me and the hope, one might say, of immortality hurries me on, but so too does the desire to enjoy in my lifetime the support of your weighty testimony, the evidence of your good will, and the charm of your literary talent (22.1).

Cicero continues to be apologetic, pointing out the effrontery of the request, but then goes on to suggest the entire literary programme, most specifically suggesting that rather than weaving the Ciceronian episode into the larger narrative, the material would benefit from following Greek examples that would treat it separately. He goes on to say that if Lucecius' whole mind were directed upon a single theme and a single figure, he could already envisage the great gain in general richness and splendour. The additional glory to Cicero in such an arrangement goes without saying. Cicero even goes so far as to request Lucecius to 'waive the laws of history for this once. Do not scorn personal bias, if it urge you strongly in my favour ... Concede to the affection between us just a little more even than the truth will license'. This may seem strange to our own understanding of history, but given that Cicero was trying to rehabilitate his honour and political position after his exile in 58, a flattering historical portrayal would certainly fit such a programme. Murphy (1998:496) reaches a similar conclusion, explaining this instance as an exercise in self-promotion rather than an attempt to expand Latin literature.

After praising the attractiveness of the material, flattering Lucecius' talent, offering to help him in every detail, and reminding Lucecius of the mutually beneficial relationship that exists between famous men and their chroniclers, benefiting both in their search for glory,¹³ Cicero finally explains why he is pressing Lucecius so forcefully:

¹³ This argument would probably have annoyed Lucecius — a man who had failed to secure the consulship in 60 and had subsequently retired from politics.

Suppose, however, I am refused; that is to say, suppose something hinders you (for I feel it would be against nature for you to refuse any request of mine), I shall perhaps be driven to a course often censured by some, namely to write about myself — and yet I shall have many illustrious precedents. But I need not point out to you that this genre has certain disadvantages. An autobiographer must needs write over-modestly where praise is due and pass over anything that calls for censure. Moreover, his credit and authority are less, and many will blame him and say that heralds at athletic contests show more delicacy, in that after placing garlands on the heads of the winners and loudly proclaiming their names, they call in another herald when it is their turn to be crowned at the end of the games, in order to avoid announcing their own victory with their own lips. I am anxious to escape these drawbacks, as I shall, if you take my case. I beg you to do so (22.8-9).

No such work by Lucceius has come down to us, and since the matter is not mentioned again, we must assume that Cicero's request was delicately declined. Our knowledge of Cicero's lost poem *De consulatu suo*, written earlier in 60, as well as the lost *De temporibus suis*, written during roughly the same period as this request, seems to suggest that Cicero took matters into his own hands when disappointed by other writers.¹⁴ Whatever the truth of the matter, these examples confirm that Cicero was very active in pursuing publication to promote his own glory.

After being disappointed in his hopes by both Archias and Lucceius, Cicero changes his strategy, rather focusing on eliciting dedications and honourable mentions through reciprocal literary favours to other writers, including Brutus. The most detailed example of this strategy comes from several letters in which Cicero hesitates about dedicating his *Academica* to Marcus Terentius Varro, the famous and prolific writer and his contemporary. It is a fascinatingly detailed episode, showing the lengths to which Cicero would go to have a work dedicated to himself. That Cicero was keen to be in Varro's good books, as it were, is already apparent in letter 45 to Atticus, probably written in September 59. This letter opens with a request to Atticus that if Cicero praises any mutual friend, it is necessary that Atticus make the friend aware of this praise, before going on to suggest that Atticus write to Varro that Cicero was 'well content with him, not that this was so but that this might become so', before admitting that Varro was a strange person. Cicero even uses two partial literary quotes from Euripides as coded speech to suggest Varro's deviousness and arrogance.

¹⁴ This view is supported by Harrison 1990:455, who offers a useful analysis of the evidence for the content and purpose of the second work, which has been lost in its entirety.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that Varro was assiduously courted. In letter 53, written on 29 May 58, Cicero agrees to follow Atticus' suggestion to thank Varro for an undisclosed service during his exile — probably interceding with Pompey on Cicero's behalf, which is suggested in letters 60 and 63. Back in Rome and writing in October 57, it is clear that the relationship had developed, as Cicero describes Varro as a friend to both Atticus and himself in letter 74. In mid-May 54, Cicero asks Atticus in letter 88 to write to his home in Rome, telling them to give Cicero free access to use Atticus' library as if he himself were there,¹⁵ including Varro's books among the rest. Cicero was doing research for his *De republica* at the time, but mentioning Varro's books specifically suggests that access to these works may have been restricted. It also suggests that Cicero was probably familiarizing himself with Varro's works to facilitate their growing friendship. About six weeks later, Cicero replies in letter 89 that he intends to follow Atticus' suggestion by including Varro as a character in his *De republica*, provided there was a place to do so, but making several excuses explaining why this may not work. He does, however, suggest creating an occasion to address Varro directly in one of the prefaces,¹⁶ following Aristotle's example.

It seems, however, that Cicero held off on including Varro in any of his works for several years, as the issue comes up again in letters written nine years later. In letter 294, written on 21 May 45, we find a cryptic reference to Varro's work *De lingua Latina* in which Cicero tells Atticus to set his mind at rest on 'the matter'. Atticus' agitation may have derived from the fact that, two years after promising to dedicate the work to Cicero, Varro still had not finished it. This seems to be suggested by the contents of letter 320, written about a month later. After thanking Atticus for praising the written version of his speech *Pro Ligario*, Cicero once again makes the excuse that his former works did not really offer a place for Varro to be included. What follows reveals Cicero's solution to Atticus' much earlier suggestion:

Then, when I began these more erudite compositions, Varro had already announced his intention of making me a really fine, weighty dedication. Two years have gone by during which, slowcoach that he is, he has been running hard without advancing a foot. I for my part was making ready to

¹⁵ Concerning the lending of books, Starr 1987:216 describes the 'channels of circulation' as running 'from one friend to another, never between strangers. A Roman did not ask someone he did not already know to send a book, even about a subject in which both were interested'. Permission to loan also often included permission to copy. Starr 1987:217 goes on to point out that when 'one friend loaned a book to another, the recipient would make a copy at his own expense if he wished'.

¹⁶ This was not done.

pay him for his offering ‘in measure like, and better too’ — that is, if I could, for even Hesiod adds ‘if you can’. As things stand, I have pledged my work ‘On the Limits’, of which I have a tolerably good opinion, to Brutus, and you tell me that he is not averse. So let us transfer the Academical treatise, in which aristocratic but by no means learned personages talk above their own heads, to Varro. The standpoint is that of Antiochus, of which he highly approves. I’ll make it up to Catulus and Lucullus elsewhere, that is if you approve the idea; and would you kindly write back to me about it? (320.3).

This extract is interesting for several reasons. As Cicero and Atticus were quite comfortable sharing a joke or sensitive information in Greek, the preponderance of Greek in this letter is significant. Cicero’s irritation with Varro at this point is clear, although it is not bad-tempered. The *φιλολογότερα* is self-effacing, given indications elsewhere¹⁷ that Cicero was rather proud of his philosophical compositions. The tone in *magnam sane et gravem προσφώνησιν* is mock-serious, suggesting that Cicero considered this promised ‘weighty dedication’ from Varro to be not entirely sincere. This leads to the Hesiod quote,¹⁸ which is apt, as it concerns reciprocity in dealing with neighbours — the neighbours in this case sharing the compositional landscape. The implication is that Cicero intended to ‘extort’ the ‘weighty dedication’ from Varro by one-upmanship, dedicating the *Academica* to him and even including him as a character. Cicero decides to give him the part of Antiochus, the condescending phrase *quae iste valde probat* perhaps even suggesting that Cicero considered the position to be inferior.

This is followed by an update in letter 321, written the next day. Acting on another letter from Atticus, Cicero writes that he had taken the dialogue from highly aristocratic personages and transferred it to Varro,¹⁹ enquiring from Atticus

¹⁷ This is suggested in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 410.5.

¹⁸ Taken from the *Works and days*, 11.247-251, the section reads: *πῆμα κακὸς γείτων, ὅσόν τ’ ἀγαθὸς μέγ’ ὄνειρα ἔμμορέ τοι τιμῆς, ὅς τ’ ἔμμορε γείτονος ἐσθλοῦ οὐδ’ ἂν βοῦς ἀπόλοιτ’, εἰ μὴ γείτων κακὸς εἴη. εὖ μὲν μετρεῖσθαι παρὰ γείτονος, εὖ δ’ ἀποδοῦναι, αὐτῷ τῷ μέτρῳ, καὶ λώιον, αἶ κε δύνῃαι, ὡς ἂν χρηρίζων καὶ ἐς ὕστερον ἄρκιον εὖρης* (A bad neighbor is a woe, just as much as a good one is a great boon: whoever has a share in a fine neighbor has a share in good value; not even a cow would be lost, if the neighbor were not bad. Measure out well from your neighbor, and pay him back well, with the very same measure, and better if you can, so that if you are in need again you will find him reliable later too).

¹⁹ For a summary of the differences between the two partial versions of the *Academica* that have come down to us and the different characters in each version, cf. pp. 400-403 in the Loeb, Volume 29. Phillips 1986:233 offers an explanation for the survival of two versions, explaining that Cicero and Atticus probably ‘retained copies of the first version

whether Varro approved of the new plan. However, he then wants to know of whom Varro was jealous, inferring that Varro was miffed that he had dedicated the *De finibus* to Brutus. Murphy (1998:498) explains that when Cicero dedicated works outside of his family circle, such as to Varro, Trebatius, and Brutus, he chose men of ‘established literary or scholarly reputations whose readership must have been a great aid in introducing his books to intellectual circles.’ I would add that apart from the benefits to circulation, there were benefits to Cicero’s glory in having his books read by such eminent persons and their friends. Cicero was rather proud of this version and considered it the best thing written in the genre, even compared to the Greek works, and asks Atticus to be philosophical about the labour already expended by his copyists on the previous version, as he considered this one to be far superior.

Letter 322, written the next day, shows Cicero’s nervousness. He asks Atticus to reflect again and yet again on whether he is in favour of sending Varro what Cicero had written — though Atticus too had a stake in the matter now, as Cicero had included him in the dialogue as third speaker. Cicero’s indecision is clear when he writes that reflection is called for and that the names have already been included in the work, but that they could be altered. Cicero writes yet another letter (323) the next day, not yet having received a reply to the previous one. The entire matter is once more summarized:

I have transferred the entire Academic treatise to Varro. To begin with it was assigned to Catulus, Lucullus, and Hortensius. Then it seemed inappropriate, as their — I won't say illiteracy, but lack of expertise in such matters — was notorious; so as soon as I got to the farm I transferred these same discussions to Cato and Brutus. Then came your letter about Varro, who seemed just the right mouthpiece for Antiochus’ views. But would you let me know all the same (a) whether you favour my addressing something to him and (b) if so, whether this in particular? (323.1-2).

Cicero’s anxiety on this matter seems extraordinary, but needs to be taken at face value, given that so many letters have come down to us detailing his indecision. Yet another letter (325) written two days later on 28 June 45, discusses the matter again. Cicero begins by jokingly suggesting that he and Atticus purchase a property in the suburbs to be closer to each other (to speed up correspondence) and then continues:

in their libraries, and by means of these copies both versions eventually became known without either one surviving intact to the present day’.

Meanwhile I have taken your hint and finished off some neat little volumes addressed to Varro. Nonetheless I am awaiting your answer to my questions: (a) how you gathered that he coveted a dedication from me, when he himself, extremely prolific author as he is, has never taken the initiative, and (b) whom you gathered him to be jealous of; if it's not Brutus, much less can it be Hortensius or the speakers on the Republic. The point above all which I should really be glad if you would make clear to me is whether you hold to your opinion that I should address my work to him or whether you see no need (325.1).

At this point, it seems as if Atticus had become as indecisive as Cicero. The peevish tone in *homo πολυγρότατος numquam me lacessisset* suggests that Cicero was considering changing the dedication, only to change his mind again in letter 326, written the next day, in which he says that Atticus' opinion that Cicero may seem like a 'tuft hunter' does not sway him. Cicero explains further that, despite following the rule not to include living persons in his previous works, except in mute parts, he seizes on Atticus' suggestion to include Varro, as he seemed more suited to the content of the *Academica*. Countering Varro's apparent jealousy concerning his role compared to the roles given to others in previous works, Cicero explains that in his recent works he follows Aristotle's pattern, according to which the roles of others are subordinate to the author's own, but adding that Varro's role in the work had been written in such a way that it did not seem inferior to Cicero's.

This entire episode seems to sketch a picture of a remarkably touchy celebrity that Cicero was nevertheless intent on humouring — all for the sake of a dedication! But he ends the letter by asking once again whether Atticus thinks the *Academica* should be dedicated to Varro, as certain objections occur to him, a matter he again refers to in letter 329. The book seems almost finished, apart from correcting copyists' errors, about ten days later, when Cicero writes in letter 331 that he had his doubts about the dedication, but that it was now Atticus' responsibility and decision. He repeats the sentiment a day later in letter 332, adding that he is more worried about what Varro may think of it rather than about the general talk. But Atticus was apparently a little loath to take on this responsibility, as seems clear from the teasing which follows in Cicero's reply (333) the next day:

Now why, I wonder, do you shake in your shoes when I tell you that the book is to be given to Varro at your risk? If you have any misgivings even at this stage, let me know, for it's a really choice piece of work. I want Varro, especially as he desires it. But as you know, he's 'One to be fear'd. E'en blameless folk he'd blame'. So I often seem to see the countenance of

him, complaining that my case is more amply argued in this work than his, which you will certainly find to be untrue ... However I don't despair of Varro's approval, and since we have spent money on folio, I'm not sorry to stick to my plan. But I say yet again, it will be at your risk. Therefore if you feel any misgivings let us transfer to Brutus, as he too follows Antiochus. A fickle creature Academe, and true to character — chops and changes all the time! But pray, didn't you like my letter to Varro more than a little? Hang me if I spend so many pains on anything ever again. For that reason I did not dictate it even to Tiro, who is by way of taking down whole periods together, but syllable by syllable to Spintharus (333.3).

Even at this late stage, Cicero is ready to alter the plan, should there be anything which Atticus should deem in the slightest bit offensive. However, the money spent on presentation paper indicates Cicero's resolve to finally send the work on, together with the dedication letter. This is confirmed the next day in letter 334, which reveals that Atticus intended to present the work to Varro as soon as he arrived at his house. Cicero jokingly adds that the matter was done and that Atticus could now 'burn the boats', lamenting sardonically that Atticus did not seem to realize the danger he was in. We learn in letter 336, much to everyone's relief, that Atticus finally 'dared' to hand the work over, while Cicero wonders what Varro will think and when he would have time to read it through. As to the letter (254) accompanying the four books of the *Academica*, we see Cicero at his most circumspect, going out of his way to make Varro's excuses for him, providing possible reasons why Varro had not fulfilled his promise of dedicating a work to him:

To dun a man for a present, though promised, is in poor taste — even the crowd does not demand a show unless stirred up to it. Nonetheless my impatience for the fulfilment of your promise impels me — not to dun, but to remind you. And I am sending you four monitors not of the most bashful. I am sure you know how assertive this younger Academy can be; well, the quartet I am sending you has been summoned from its headquarters. I am afraid they may dun you, but I have charged them to request. To be sure, I have been waiting quite a while and holding back, so as not to address a piece to you before I received one and thus repay you as nearly as possible in your own coin. But since you are proceeding rather slowly (and that is to say, as I interpret, carefully), I could not refrain from advertising the bond of common pursuits and affection between us by such a form of composition as lay within my powers. Accordingly, I have staged a conversation between us at Cumae, Pomponius also being present. I have assigned the exposition of Antiochus' tenets (being under the impression

that you approve of them) to your role, that of Philo's to my own. I dare say you will be surprised when you read to find that you and I have discussed a subject which in fact we have never discussed; but you know the conventions of Dialogue (254.1).

The letter contains no Greek, perhaps suggesting that it was meant to be circulated more widely along with the work itself, since several other letters²⁰ to Varro do include Greek. That Cicero wished to publicize Varro's promise to him, thereby adding pressure to the fulfilment of a promise long overdue, is shown when he expresses the same circumspect sentiments in the introduction to the *Academica* itself:

Then Atticus said, 'Do pray drop those subjects, about which we can neither ask questions nor hear the answers without distress; inquire of [Varro] instead whether he himself has done anything new. For Varro's Muses have kept silent for a longer time than they used, but all the same my belief is that your friend is not taking a holiday but is hiding what he writes'. 'Oh no, certainly not', said Varro, 'for I think that to put in writing what one wants to be kept hidden is sheer recklessness; but I have got a big task in hand, and have had for a long time; I have begun on a work dedicated to our friend here himself' — meaning me — 'which is a big thing I can assure you, and which is getting a good deal of touching up and polishing at my hands'. At this I said, 'As to that work of yours, Varro, I have been waiting for it a long time now, but all the same I don't venture to demand it; for I have heard (since we cannot hide anything of that kind) from our friend Libo, an enthusiastic student as you know, that you are not leaving it off, but are giving it increased attention, and never lay it out of your hands' (1.2-3).

This may well be considered the most magnificent example of public literary blackmail in the ancient world. Perhaps fearing that Varro would change his mind, Cicero uses his own work to dedicate Varro's work to himself pre-emptively! One cannot help but feel what must have been Varro's irritation at being so publicly reminded of his debt. Gurd (2007:73) argues that this was an invitation to Varro to 'release' his work for collaborative review, but given all the evidence in the letters and contents of this particular letter and the introduction, I would argue that Cicero's primary motivation was to extort a long-overdue dedication. The last we hear on the matter seems to be in letter 416, written to Atticus several months later on 25 October 44, in which Cicero mentions in passing that he is expecting Varro's

²⁰ *Epistulae ad familiares* 176, 177, 178, and 180.

dialogue. However, we see Cicero still waiting for it on 5 November 44 in letter 420, when he mentions that he still has not received the work from him, laughing at a joke made about the situation by Atticus in letter 421 the next day. Varro's *De lingua Latina* was finally published in 43, before Cicero's death, but only books five to ten of the original twenty-five survive. It would be nice to think that this work, for which so much energy had been expended by Cicero, included a fulsome dedication to him, but all that remains is the *te* in the phrase '*in his ad te scribam*' at the beginning of book five.

It seems that Cicero did not get what he wanted, but this particular episode reveals to what extraordinary lengths Cicero would go to use publication to elicit literary favours that would promote his personal glory. It also shows the extraordinary importance of publication in a social context. An author had a responsibility not only to enhance his personal glory through publication, but also to contribute to the intellectual debate of his time. For this contribution an author could not depend solely on his own efforts. The broader social context had to endorse the results of his labour. In this way, Cicero had a social responsibility to publish so that his peers could become aware of and acknowledge his literary contributions, yet had to do so in surprisingly circumspect ways that would not be disapproved of.

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