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## Philosophical *Decorum* and the Literarization of Rhetoric in Cicero's *Orator*

Cicero's career as a rhetorician spans nearly forty years, and closely parallels the various stages of the Republican downfall: Cicero wrote his first rhetorical essay, the *De inuentione*, during the first civil war (ca. 84 BCE), his *De oratore* in 55 BCE, when Pompey's power started to decline, and the *Orator*, allegedly his last rhetorical treatise<sup>1</sup>, during Caesar's dictatorship, in 46 BCE. This is, of course, no mere coincidence, since rhetoric is not a simply technical matter, remote from politics and social life, but a political tool as well. Every time he wrote a rhetorical treatise, Cicero tried to answer the theoretical questions he was confronted with, but was also addressing the political challenges of his time. In its own, scholarly way, the *De inuentione* – as *inchoatum et rude* as it may be, according to Cicero himself<sup>2</sup> – tries to prove the usefulness of rhetoric in a time of violence<sup>3</sup>. A mature work, the dialogue *De oratore* is, of course, chiefly concerned with the art of rhetoric, and Cicero aims at producing a comprehensive treatise on the topic<sup>4</sup>. But the *De oratore* is also an answer to the weakening of the Republican institutions during the fifties: by using the great orators of the previous generation as characters<sup>5</sup>, Cicero tries to reactivate traditional Republican models and behaviors, using rhetorical theory as a defense against the growing appetites of the contending political leaders. The *De oratore*, therefore, must be read as part of a larger intellectual and political project which includes the *De Republica* (54-52 BCE) and the *De legibus* (ca. 52 BCE). A few years later, Caesar's dictatorship had confirmed Cicero's worst fears, and the three rhetorical treatises he wrote during the year 46 BCE – the *Brutus*, the *Orator* and the *De optimo genere*<sup>6</sup> – were directly influenced by the drastic changes which had affected political and oratorical practices after the civil war. As the *Brutus* clearly shows, these treatises were conceived as rhetorical meditations on the disappearance of free speech, and were meant to be theoretical responses to the attacks the Republic suffered<sup>7</sup>.

As political turmoil and civil unrest grew more and more violent during the years 49-44 BCE<sup>8</sup>, Cicero's understanding of rhetoric, of its goals and nature, evolved greatly. In his *De oratore*, Cicero favored a practical approach: rejecting the typical approaches to rhetorical theory and their categories<sup>9</sup>, his goal was to build up a new set of precepts and rules based upon his own oratorical experience. Rhetoric, in the *De oratore* is, therefore, not purely theoretical, but mirrors the *auctoritas* of Rome's greatest orators (*ei quibus summa dicendi laus a nostris hominibus concessa est*; *De orat.* I, 23). In 55 BCE, Cicero elaborates a rhetoric which is an *artificium ex eloquentia natum* (*De orat.* I, 146). Unsurprisingly, the orator Marcus Antonius, one of the main characters of the dialogue, clearly states that he will deal only with *usus*, practical experience (*trademus ea dumtaxat, quae nos usus docuit*; *De orat.* II,

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<sup>1</sup> See the article *Orator* in [MARINONE 2004<sup>2</sup>].

<sup>2</sup> *De orat.* I, 5.

<sup>3</sup> [GIUFFRIDA 1963], [LÉVY 1995], [KASTELY 2002].

<sup>4</sup> *De orat.* I, 4 sq.

<sup>5</sup> On the literary construction of the *De oratore*, see [JONES 1939], p. 317 and 320; [LEVINE 1958], p. 146-151, [HALL 1996], p. 95-120; [FANTHAM 2004], p. 49-77.

<sup>6</sup> On the general orientation of these treatises, see [HENDRICKSON 1926], [FANTHAM 1989], p. 230-241, [NARDUCCI 2002], [NARDUCCI 2002b].

<sup>7</sup> See *Brut.* 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Brut.* 321-322.

<sup>9</sup> See *De orat.* II, 75-85.

87). Nine years later, Cicero has put aside this practical approach and asserts right away the purely technical and theoretical nature of his new treatise. The *Orator* will deal with the “ideal orator” (*summus orator*), and not with the actual practicing one:

*Atque ego in summo oratore fingendo talem informabo qualis fortasse nemo fuit. Non enim quaero quis fuerit, sed quid sit illud quo nihil possit esse praestantius*<sup>10</sup> (*Orat.* 7).

The point of view is, therefore, radically different. Whereas rhetorical theory in the *De oratore* was the result of experience and was based on practical examples, the *Orator* will present an abstract model, removed from the usual forensic and political tensions of the Republic, from its traditions and peculiarities. Cicero's method is now philosophical, as the reference to the Platonic theory of ideas makes clear:

*Vt igitur in formis et figuris est aliquid perfectum et excellens, cuius ad cogitatum speciem imitando referuntur ea quae sub oculos ipsa non cadunt, sic perfectae eloquentiae speciem animo uidemus, effigiem auribus quaerimus. Has rerum formas appellat ἰδέα ille non intellegendi solum sed etiam dicendi grauissimus auctor et magister Plato*<sup>11</sup> (*Orator* 9-10).

As an immediate consequence of this new rhetorical stance, the *Orator* is written in a more dogmatic tone than the *De oratore*<sup>12</sup>. An urbane dialogue, presenting opposing or even contradictory views, would of course be inadequate to convey a picture of the ideal orator. The method which had prevailed in the treatise of 55 BCE is now replaced by a straight monologue, which no longer leaves room for contradiction or variance. Moreover, Cicero now openly uses philosophical concepts, whereas he had always avoided technicalities in the *De oratore*. Even if it played an essential role in the doctrine which was being exposed, philosophy had been somehow kept in the theoretical background of the dialogue<sup>13</sup>. It is now entirely integrated into the rhetorical doctrine, since it underlies the whole methodology of the treatise (*sine philosophia non posse effici quem quaerimus eloquentem*; *Orat.* 14) and provides some of its essential tools, as we will see.

The goal of this paper is to call attention to a theoretical paradox, and to show that the philosophical approach favored by Cicero in the *Orator* finally turns rhetoric into a literary tool<sup>14</sup>. Responding to the weakening of political oratory during Caesar's dictatorship, Cicero chose to put forward a new understanding of rhetoric, an idealistic one, based on philosophical concepts and not on practical experience since the forum was now empty<sup>15</sup>. This formalization was also meant as a response to the harsh criticism Cicero had suffered from C. Licinius Calvus and his followers, the “Atticists”, who defended a stylistically restrained eloquence and accused Cicero of being “Asianist”: defining the “ideal orator” would give

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<sup>10</sup> “Consequently, in delineating the perfect orator I shall be portraying such a one as perhaps has never existed. Indeed I am not inquiring who was the perfect orator, but what is that unsurpassable ideal.” Unless otherwise specified, all translations are taken from the *Loeb Classical Library*.

<sup>11</sup> “Accordingly, as there is something perfect and surpassing in the case of sculpture and painting –an intellectual ideal by reference to which the artist represents those objects which do not themselves appear to the eye–, so with our minds we conceive the ideal of perfect eloquence, but with our ears we catch only the copy. These patterns of things are called ἰδέαι or ideas by Plato, that eminent master and teacher both of style and of thought.”

<sup>12</sup> [MICHEL 1960], p. 659; [NARDUCCI 2002b], p. 429-430.

<sup>13</sup> On the presence of philosophy in the *De oratore*, see [MICHEL 1960], p. 80-149, 327-362; [GÖRLER 1974], p. 27-45; [GÖRLER 1988], p. 215-235; [SCHÜTRUMPF 1988], p. 237-258.

<sup>14</sup> On the stylistic bias of the *Orator*, see [DUGAN 2005], p. 266-284.

<sup>15</sup> *Brut.* 6, 331-333.

Cicero the opportunity to refute the Atticist theory of style<sup>16</sup>. With this new rhetorical approach and its abstract ideal, Cicero was explicitly going back to the ancient tradition of philosophical rhetoric, of which he claimed to be the last representative (*Orat.* 11-19). But despite Cicero's efforts, the very use of philosophy in this treatise would not result in a revival of philosophical rhetoric, as Plato would have understood it, but in the strengthening of a purely utilitarian approach of the rhetorical technique. Instead of producing a treatise aimed at ethical progress and political education, Cicero paved the way to the purely technical –and politically gratuitous– practice of *declamatio* as it was to flourish under the principate<sup>17</sup>. The *Orator* and its proclaimed philosophical rhetoric presented its readers a theory soon to be turned into a literary –and mainly stylistic– tool, devoid of ethical and political implications.

To analyze this paradox, I will focus on the concept of *decorum*, which appears here for the first time in Cicero's rhetorical treatises. A philosophical concept imported into the realms of rhetoric, *decorum* is the central point of the treatise since it is used by Cicero as the organizing principle of the doctrine, a principle which allows him to create a link between rhetorical functions, style and orator in a more cogent way than ever before<sup>18</sup>. The use of this concept in rhetorical theory perfectly exemplifies the philosophical strategy adopted by Cicero as well as the consequences of this new theoretical approach. *Decorum*, seen as a conjunction of ethics and aesthetics<sup>19</sup>, will become the perfect tool for a literary understanding of rhetoric.

### ***Decorum*, a rhetorical or philosophical concept?**

Chiefly concerned with stylistic and metrical questions<sup>20</sup> –Cicero had to face his Atticist opponents on their own field–, the *Orator*, nonetheless, deals at length with the usual topics of rhetoric: genres, tasks of the orator (*officia oratoris*) corresponding to various oratorical functions, parts of speech, and levels of style. Its treatment of the oratorical functions – *docere*, *delectare* and *flectere*, *Orat.* 69-70 – is one of the most innovative parts of the treatise, since it creates, for the first time in the history of rhetoric, a clear architecture linking these various functions to the different topics the orator has to deal with, and, finally, to the different styles he can use:

*Erit igitur eloquens [...] is qui in foro causisque ciuilibus ita dicet, ut probet ut delectet ut flectat. Probare necessitatis est, delectare suauitatis, flectere uictoriae [...]. Sed quot officia oratoris tot sunt genera dicendi: subtile in probando, modicum in delectando, uehemens in flectendo*<sup>21</sup> (*Orat.* 69).

According to this definition, the ideal orator will be able to use, with equal felicity, each of the three oratorical functions and each of the three styles. If we take a look at the *De oratore*, we quickly see how different this formulation is from the previous ciceronian theory. First, the *De oratore* made no such equivalence between function and style: invention and the three

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<sup>16</sup> For a reading of the *Orator* centered on this question, see [CALBOLI 1975], [BOWERSOCK 1979], [WISSE 1995], [NARDUCCI 2002], p. 408-412.

<sup>17</sup> On the various uses of *declamatio* under the principate, see [BONNER 1969].

<sup>18</sup> [CALBOLI MONTEFUSCO 1994].

<sup>19</sup> See [DUGAN 2005], p. 129-131.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>21</sup> "The man of eloquence [...] will be one who is able to speak in court or in deliberative bodies so as to prove, to please and to sway. To prove is the first necessity, to please is charm, to sway is victory [...]. For these three functions of the orator there are three styles, the plain style for proof, the middle style for pleasure, the vigorous style for persuasion." See also *De opt. gen.* 3. The *Orator* uses the same kind of definition in § 100 and 101.

functions (*docere*, *conciliare* and *mouere*<sup>22</sup>) were never linked to the various levels of style. Moreover, the functions used in the treatise of 55 BCE were presented as a means of persuasion, not as the criteria of excellence, as L. Calboli-Montefusco rightly stresses<sup>23</sup>. But the link established by Cicero between function and style adds another difficulty for the potential orator: he will not achieve excellence unless he is able to use the simple, middle and grand style whenever they are needed. This stylistic rule is what makes the *Orator* stand alone compared to Cicero's other treatises. When he dealt with the different styles in the *De oratore*, Cicero set as a principle that excellence could be reached within each of the three styles<sup>24</sup>. An orator was considered excellent when he attained perfection in his own style. He could favor only the grand, the middle or the simple style, and still be regarded as eloquent:

*<oratio> summas habet dissimilitudines, non sic, ut alii uituperandi sint, sed ut ei, quos constet esse laudandos, in dispari tamen genere laudentur*<sup>25</sup> (*De orat.* III, 26).

The *Orator* uses the same tripartite taxonomy, but does not leave any room for a stylistic excellence confined within each of the three styles. An orator who uses a single, definite style cannot be deemed eloquent, and the idea of an excellence *in dispari genere* is not even mentioned. Peculiarity is now a flaw, since there is only one genre of good orators, those who are able to use all the styles available. As the *De optimo genere oratorum* clearly states, there is only one kind of good orator:

*Ea igitur omnia in quo summa erunt, erit perfectissimus orator; in quo media, mediocris; in quo minima, deterrimus. Et appellabuntur omnes oratores, ut pictores appellatur etiam mali, nec generibus inter sese, sed facultatibus different*<sup>26</sup> (*De opt. gen.* 6).

To differ by excelling in one style is no longer an idiosyncrasy, but simply a lack of capacity. Excellence now requires stylistic versatility above all –which Cicero deemed impossible in his earlier treatises–, and resides in the capacity to choose the right style to serve the right function at the right moment:

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<sup>22</sup> The *De oratore* and the *Orator* do not use the same taxonomy when they deal with rhetorical functions: *conciliare* (*De orat.*) and *delectare* (*Orat.*) do not designate the same mechanisms. See [CALBOLI MONTEFUSCO 1994].

<sup>23</sup> “the first [triad] tells us how the orator can achieve persuasion [...], the second one tells us which tasks the orator has to perform to be considered *optimus orator*”; [CALBOLI MONTEFUSCO 1994], p. 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that these styles (named *figurae* in the *De oratore*) were only subdivisions of the *dicendi uirtutes* (see *De orat.* II, 144; II, 37, 210-212), the four virtues of style adapted by Cicero from Theophrastus's ἀρεταί τῆς λέξεως, as Cicero clearly states in *Orator* 79. They do not play the role of organizing principles that Cicero gives them in the *Orator*. On Theophrastus four virtues of style, see below.

<sup>25</sup> “Oratory comprises extreme dissimilarities, not in the sense that some speakers deserve praise and others blame, but that the ones admittedly deserving praise nevertheless achieve it in a variety of styles.”

<sup>26</sup> “The man who is supreme in all these departments will be the most perfect orator; one who attains moderate success will be mediocre; he who has the least success will be the worst speaker. Still they will all be called orators, as painters are called painters, though they may be inferior, and will differ in ability, not in kind.” On the datation of the *De optimo genere oratorum* and the status of this unpublished text, see [HENDRICKSON 1926], [MARINONE 2004<sup>2</sup>] *ad loc.*

*Magni igitur iudicii, summae etiam facultatis esse debet moderator ille et quasi temperator huius tripertitae uarietatis. Nam et iudicabit quid cuique opus sit et poterit quocumque modo postulabit causa dicere*<sup>27</sup> (*Orat.* 70).

As *moderator* and *temperator*, the orator's main task is now to evaluate what best suits each rhetorical situation. Therefore, the most important rhetorical faculty will be the capacity to perceive the *decorum*, the "suitable", a capacity which, according to Cicero, depends on wisdom:

*Sed est eloquentiae sicut reliquarum rerum fundamentum sapientia. Vt enim in uita sic in oratione nihil est difficilius quam quid deceat uidere. Πρόεπον appellant hoc Graeci, nos dicamus sane decorum*<sup>28</sup> (*Orat.* 70).

The neologism *decorum* is often seen as Cicero's last and succesful attempt to translate the Greek stylistic notion of πρόεπον. If we suscribed to this analysis, we would have to consider *decorum* as a reformulation of the idea previously expressed by the adjectives *aptus*, *congruens* and *consentaneus*, and by the adverbs *apte*, *congruenter* or *decore*<sup>29</sup>. But *decorum* is not an equivalent of those earlier ciceronian notions: it is given a much wider meaning, and carries philosophical implications that were absent from previous ciceronian theory.

*Decorum*, in the first place, is not described as a rhetorical notion, but as a guiding principle by which both *uita* et *oratio* must abide. The question of *decorum* concerns poets, philosophers and orators altogether:

*Itaque hunc locum longe et late patentem philosophi solent in officiis tractare –non cum de recto ipso disputant, nam id quidem unum est– grammatici in poetis, eloquentes in omni et genere et parte causarum*<sup>30</sup> (*Orat.* 72 ).

The fact that *decorum* has implications other than rhetorical is repeatedly stressed by Cicero, who clearly states that the treatment of this topic in the *Orator* is a short and incomplete one<sup>31</sup>. In *Orat.* 73, he alludes to the need of a more thorough analysis, for which another "big book" would be necessary (*magnum uolumen aliud desiderat*). Cicero's goal, therefore, is obvious: constantly refering to the philosophical meanings of the concept he uses for the first time, he carries on his project of treating rhetoric from a philosophical point of view. Moreover, the reference to a treatment of *decorum* as part of the theory of duties (*officia*) is a clear allusion to Panaetius's doctrine as expounded in the Περί καθήκοντος<sup>32</sup>, and as Cicero explained it in his philosophical treatise *De officiis* (now our only source on Panaetius's treatise<sup>33</sup>), two years after he wrote the *Orator*, in 44 BCE. *Decorum*, in this treatise, is used once again as a

<sup>27</sup> "Now the man who controls and combines these three varied styles will need rare judgment and great endowment; for he will decide what is needed at any point, and will be able to speak in any way which the case requires."

<sup>28</sup> "For after all the foundation of eloquence, as of everything else, is wisdom. In an oration, as in life, nothing is harder than to determine what is appropriate. The Greeks call it πρόεπον; let us call it *decorum*."

<sup>29</sup> See *De oratore* I, 154; III, 31, 38, 53, 83, 203, 210. This approach is favored by [CICU 2000], p. 137-139.

<sup>30</sup> "The philosophers are accustomed to consider this extensive subject under the head of duties –not when they discuss absolute perfection, for that is one and unchanging; the literary critics consider it in connection with poetry; orators are dealing with it in every kind of speech, and in every part thereof."

<sup>31</sup> *Orat.* 70: *de quo [...] multa praeclare praecipiuntur*, *Orat.* 72: *locus longe et late patens*, *Orat.* 73: *Magnus est locus hic, Brute [...] et magnum uolumen aliud desiderat*.

<sup>32</sup> Since the ethical virtue of τὸ πρόεπον does not appear either in the teachings of other schools or in earlier stoic doctrine, it must be assumed that Panaetius created it. See [DYCK 1996], p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> On the Περί καθήκοντος as the source of Cicero's *De officiis*, see [GILL 1988], p. 169.

translation of τὸ πρέπον, but this πρέπον now clearly bears an ethical sense<sup>34</sup>. It is analyzed as the fourth component of *honestum*, which concerns the suitability of speeches and actions<sup>35</sup>. Using the example of poetic characters for the second time, Cicero defines the *decorum* as the adequation of an individual's behaviour to his *persona* –his moral character and “personality”<sup>36</sup>:

*Haec ita intellegi, possumus existimare ex eo decoro, quod poetae sequuntur [...]. Sed tum seruire illud poetas, quod deceat, dicimus, cum id quod quaque persona dignum est, et fit et dicitur*<sup>37</sup> (*De off.* I, 97).

The *decorum* described in Cicero's *De officiis* is therefore a principle of coherence between the ethical agent and his actions<sup>38</sup>, a means to reach a state of general appropriateness, the rational *conuenientia* by the virtue of which one can make the choices and accomplish the actions which correspond to his own nature<sup>39</sup>.

The concept of *decorum*, as Cicero uses it in the *Orator*, goes far beyond a mere principle of stylistic coherence and correctness, since it is defined as the rhetorical application of a wider philosophical concept. By importing this philosophical notion into his treatise, Cicero changes the whole meaning of rhetorical “suitability”, known as the *quod decet* principle in earlier Ciceronian theory. When he first elaborated a theory of the “suitable” in the *De oratore*, Cicero kept his analysis within the strict limits of style. The suitable intervened only as the last of the four virtues of style and consisted in *apte congruenterque dicere*<sup>40</sup>, which meant adapting the style to the topic, the audience, the circumstances and the orator himself<sup>41</sup>. In this way, Cicero favoured a rhetorical understanding of the notion of πρέπον, as inherited both from the Isocratean and Aristotelian traditions. According to Isocrates, τὸ πρεπόντως ἔχειν (to be adequate) was a guiding stylistic principle and a necessary aspect of the attention the orator had to pay to καιρός<sup>42</sup>. It simply meant that style had to fit the circumstances and the matter at hand:

Τοὺς μὲν γὰρ λόγους οὐχ οἷόν τε καλῶς ἔχειν ἢν μὴ τῶν καιρῶν καὶ τοῦ πρεπόντως καὶ τοῦ καινῶς ἔχειν μετάσχωσιν<sup>43</sup> (*Soph.* 13).

Aristotle still had a purely stylistic understanding of the notion but, building on the Isocratean definition, widened it nevertheless. Τὸ πρέπον became a correspondence between the style, the topic, the orator's ἦθος and the emotions he was supposed to feel during his speech. Style, to be appropriate, had to be ethical, to evoke pathos, and to fit the subject<sup>44</sup>:

<sup>34</sup> *De off.* I, 93.

<sup>35</sup> *De off.* I, 93-151.

<sup>36</sup> The modern category of “personality” is somehow problematic in this context, and is used here for lack of a better word. See [GILL 1988], [GILL 1990], [ENGBERG-PEDERSEN 1990].

<sup>37</sup> “That this is the common acceptance of propriety we may infer from that propriety which poets aim to secure. [...] Now, we say that the poets observe propriety, when every word or action is in accord with each individual character.”

<sup>38</sup> See [DYCK 1996], p. 240, [GILL 1993], [GOLDSCHMIDT 2006<sup>3</sup>], p. 127.

<sup>39</sup> [GOLDSCHMIDT 2006<sup>3</sup>], p. 129-132.

<sup>40</sup> *De orat.* III, 37(see citation below).

<sup>41</sup> *De orat.* III, 210-211(see citation below).

<sup>42</sup> See *Hel.* 11; *Soph.* 12, 16; *Panath.* 34; *Paneg.* 9; *Antidos.* 10, 184; *Phil.* 110. For an analysis of Isocrates's understanding of καιρός, see [TRÉDÉ 1992], p. 263-267; [RUMMEL 1979], p. 27; [POULAKOS 2001], p. 61-62.

<sup>43</sup> “A discourse is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment”

<sup>44</sup> On this stylistic rule, see [WOERTHER 2005], [WOERTHER 2007], p. 249-254.

Τὸ δὲ πρέπον ἔξει ἢ λέξις, ἐὰν ἡ παθητικὴ τε καὶ ἠθικὴ καὶ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πράγμασιν ἀνάλογον<sup>45</sup> (*Rhet.* 1408 a 10-11).

The same understanding of πρέπον as a purely stylistic quality is found again in the Theophrastean doctrine of the four ἀρεταὶ λέξεως (virtues of style), as Cicero, our only source, uses it in the *Orator* when he deals, once again, with the virtues of style and defines the plain style<sup>46</sup>:

*Sermo purus erit et Latinus, dilucide planeque dicetur, quid deceat circumspicietur. Vnum aberit quod quartum numerat Theophrastus in orationis laudibus: ornatum illud suaue et affluens*<sup>47</sup> (*Orat.* 79).

This passage closely parallels<sup>48</sup> Cicero's approach in the *De oratore*, where he states:

*Quinam igitur dicendi est modus melior, nam de actione post uidero, quam ut Latine, ut plane, ut ornate, ut ad id, quodcumque agetur, apte congruenterque dicamus*<sup>49</sup> (*De orat.* III, 37).

As I mentioned earlier, this *uirtus dicendi* plays an important role in the *De oratore* as a principle of stylistic coherence. Expressed in its general and abstract meaning by the syntagm *quod decet*<sup>50</sup>, it prescribes the adaptation of style to the topic, the circumstances and the public (*apte dicere*) and to the orator's character and supposed feelings (*congruenter dicere*). It is therefore a reformulation of the stylistic πρέπον inherited from both Isocratean and Aristotelian traditions, and a strict equivalent of the *quod decet* mentioned in *Orat.* 79<sup>51</sup>.

The principle of the "suitable" takes, therefore, two different shapes in the *Orator*, and appears as two different concepts: *quod decet* (*Orat.* 79) and *decorum* (*Orat.* 69). The first acceptation corresponds to the stylistic πρέπον and to the earlier formalizations of this stylistic virtue in Ciceronian theory. The second one, *decorum*, must then be given another meaning, which takes into account its philosophical echoes. Two main differences are

<sup>45</sup> "The lexis will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character and is proportional to the subject matter" (transl. G. Kennedy).

<sup>46</sup> On the accurateness of Cicero's testimony on Theophrastean doctrine, see [FORTENBAUGH 2005]. On Theophrastus's four virtues of style and their influence on later rhetorical tradition, see Theophrastus's frgt. 684 in [FORTENBAUGH et al. 1992], [INNES 1984], p. 255-257 and [CHIRON 2001], p. 146-154. W. Fortenbaugh, the editor of Theophrastus's fragments, states that "in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to say that the four qualities mentioned in our text are the sum of those recognized by Theophrastus as virtues of style. The Stoics will have added brevity as a fifth, and later rhetoricians will have extended the list still further." ([FORTENBAUGH 2005], p. 267). Cicero's testimony nevertheless contradicts Simplicius (Frgt. 683 Fort. = Simplicius, *In Aristotelis categorias* CAG t. 8, 10, 20-11, 2) who has a totally different understanding of the ἀρεταὶ λέξεως: see [CHIRON 2001], p. 149-150, [FORTENBAUGH 2005], p. 244-250.

<sup>47</sup> "The language will be pure Latin, plain and clear; propriety will always be the chief aim. Only one quality will be lacking, which Theophrastus mentions fourth among the qualities of style –the charm and richness of figurative ornament."

<sup>48</sup> Although the lexical similarities are striking, it must be noted that the order of the stylistic virtues is different in the two accounts ([FORTENBAUGH 2005], p. 271). Moreover, in the *De oratore*, Cicero tries to establish a hierarchy between two groups of virtues (*latine* and *plane* vs. *ornate* and *apte congruenterque*), a distinction of his own, which is absent from Theophrastean doctrine as stated in *Orat.* 79. On these differences, which do not affect our argument, see [INNES 1984], p. 256-257, [CHIRON 2001], p. 150 n. 194, [FORTENBAUGH 2005], p. 271

<sup>49</sup> "Now what better style of expression can there be –I will consider delivery later– than that our language should be correct, lucid, ornate and suitably appropriate to the particular matter under consideration?"

<sup>50</sup> *De orat.* I, 120, 130, 132; III, 210.

<sup>51</sup> The adverb *decore* is also used in the same sense (only once, in *De orat.* I, 144), but with great caution (*ad rerum dignitatem apte et quasi decore*): it is attributed to the allegedly infamous "rhetoricians".



immediately visible. First, as a rhetorical elaboration of a philosophical concept, *decorum* is not restricted to style, but is supposed to regulate the oratorical performance as a whole: the *elocutio*, the *actio* and the choice of the various means of persuasion (*docere*, *delectare* or *flectere*) all depend on the observance of *decorum*. In a way, the *quod decet* could be understood as the stylistic version of the wider principle of *decorum*. But –and this is the second difference between the two concepts– such an understanding is largely unsatisfactory, since the references used to apply the *quod decet* and *decorum* principles are not exactly the same. If we use the close parallel between *Orator* 79 and the doctrine presented in the *De oratore*, we can conclude that the *quod decet* depends on a set of four different parameters, subject, audience, orator's *persona* and circumstances:

*Nam et causae capitis alium quendam uerborum sonum requirunt, alium rerum priuatarum atque paruarum [...]. Refert etiam qui audiant, senatus an populus an iudices [...]; ipsique oratores qua sint aetate, honore, auctoritate, debet uideri; tempus, pacis an belli, festinationis an otii*<sup>52</sup> (*De orat.* III, 211).

But as the reader further explores the stylistic doctrines of the *De oratore* and the *Orator*, he soon realizes that the only criterion of suitability effectively taken into account is the subject matter treated by the discourse in question. The *quod decet* principle prescribes a variation of style and has the orator select one of the three available *figurae*, the grand, the middle or the plain one according to the criteria listed in *De orat.* III, 210-221. But, according to Crassus in the *De oratore*, the only way to take the *quod decet* into account is to adapt the *figura* to the matter at hand:

*Itaque hoc loco nihil sane est quod praecipere posse uideatur, nisi ut figuram orationis plenioris et tenuioris et item illius mediocris ad id, quod agemus, accommodatam deligamus*<sup>53</sup> (*De orat.* III, 212).

That is not to say that the other criteria (the orator's *persona*, the audience and the circumstances) are not valid, but that rhetorical theory cannot give efficient precepts regarding their use (*nihil praecipere posse uidetur*). From a theoretical point of view, the stylistic *quod decet* relies only on the adequation of the style to the topic. It therefore presents the reader with a much simplified version of the Isocratean and Aristotelian *πρόβλημα*. On the other hand, the *decorum* principle is based primarily upon the adequation of the orator's actions and speeches to his *persona*:

*decere quasi aptum esse consentaneumque tempori et personae; quod cum in factis saepissime tum in dictis ualeat, in uultu denique et gestu et incessu –contraque item dedecere*<sup>54</sup> (*Orat.* 74).

Of course, the *Orator* mentions both the circumstances and the orator's *persona* as the touchstone of *decorum*. But the philosophical origins of the concept shall tend to give a

<sup>52</sup> “For important criminal cases need one style of language and civil actions and unimportant cases another [...] The audience also is important –whether it is the Senate or the people or a jury; [...] and consideration must be given to the age, rank and position of the speakers themselves, and to the occasion, in peace time or during the war, urgent or allowing plenty of time.”

<sup>53</sup> “And so at this point it does not in fact seem possible to lay down any rules, except that we should choose a more copious or more restrained style of rhetoric, or likewise the intermediate style that has been specified, to suit the business before us.”

<sup>54</sup> “Propriety is what is fitting and agreeable to an occasion or person; it is important often in actions as well as in words, in the expression of the face, in gesture and in gait, and impropriety has the opposite effect.”

greater importance to the *persona* criterion, as the *De officiis* suggests. *Decorum*, in the philosophical sense, means strictly to be adequate to oneself, and the developments of *Orat.* 69-70 allow us to infer that this approach shall also prevail in the rhetorical treatise. But what does being adequate to oneself mean in a rhetorical context? This question will be at the core of the tension between philosophical and literary rhetoric in the treatise.

### Being Adequate: Rhetoric, Philosophy and the Strictures of Normativity

In the *De officiis*, the *persona* is the only reference used in order to apply the *decorum* principle correctly. One shall do and say only what is adequate to oneself (*quod quaque persona dignum est*, *De off.* I, 97), just as the poet chooses his words according to the characters who will utter them. But the comparison with theater first used by Cicero is quickly put aside, since a man's *persona* is defined in a much more complex way than a character's. According to the Ciceronian explanation of Panaetius's doctrine, whereas literary characters have only one *persona*, human beings possess four different ones, organized in two pairs<sup>55</sup>. Nature has given man his first *persona* (*personam imposuit ipsa natura*, *De off.* I, 97), that is, his rational nature, which makes him superior to any other living creature: it is this first *persona* which gives a man "his capacity for moral self-direction"<sup>56</sup>. The second *persona* corresponds to what is peculiar to each human being: this *persona* is *proprie singulis tributa* (*De off.* I, 107), assigned to each individual in particular. To this first pair, Cicero adds two other *personae*. The third one depends on fate (*persona quam casus aliqui aut tempus imponit*; *De off.* I, 115), and corresponds to the social and civic status of an individual, and to the standing of one's family. The fourth and last *persona* depends on one's will, and consists in one's course of life. It is the result of a choice<sup>57</sup>, which is generally dictated by family tradition –but one can also choose to develop a talent one's ancestors did not possess, value or have the opportunity to cultivate (*De off.* I, 117).

The role played by these four *personae* in the determination of *decorum* relies on a hierarchic principle: any action must befit the *personae* in a strict order of precedence. Rational nature comes first, then personal characteristics, then social status and, last, personal choices<sup>58</sup>. This explains why the second *persona* must always be taken into account alongside the first one. One must respect one's rational nature, and only when its preservation is well assured, preserve one's own characteristics. Such a protocol will ensure that one does not use one's vices as an ethical reference:

*Admodum autem tenenda sunt sua cuique, non uitiosa, sed tamen propria, quo facilius, decorum illud, quod quaerimus, retineatur. Sic enim est faciendum, ut contra uniuersam naturam nihil contendamus, ea tamen conseruata propriam nostram sequamur, ut etiamsi sint alia grauiora atque meliora, tamen nos studia nostra nostrae naturae regula metiamur; neque enim attinet naturae repugnare nec quicquam sequi, quod assequi non queas*<sup>59</sup> (*De off.* I, 110).

<sup>55</sup> On the theory of *personae* set forth in the first book of the *De officiis*, which I only briefly summarize here, see [DE VOGEL 1963], [DE LACY 1977], [GILL 1988], [GILL 1993], [DYCK 1996], [LÉVY 2003].

<sup>56</sup> [GILL 1988], p. 173.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> It must be noted that Cicero never alludes to the possibility of a contradiction either between nature and personal characteristics (first and second *personae*) or between those personal and social characteristics (second and fourth *personae*). See [GILL 1988], p. 179 and 197. The fourth *persona* can also be viewed as the result of the adequation to the first three *personae*.

<sup>59</sup> "Everybody, however, must resolutely hold fast to his own peculiar gifts, in so far as they are peculiar only and not vicious, in order that propriety, which is the object of our inquiry, may the more easily be secured. For we must so act as not to oppose the universal laws of human nature, but, while safeguarding those, to follow the

The scope given to the concepts of *decorum* and *persona* in the *De officiis* is, of course, much wider than in the *Orator*. In his treatise of 46 BCE, Cicero selects, in the philosophical treatment of *decorum*, only what can be applied to oratory and rhetoric. What must therefore concern us here is, above all, the use of the second and third *personae*. The first one need not intervene in the *Orator*, since it has no oratorical application. The fourth one is already a given: the orator's course of life is that of a public figure – if this possibility is still granted to him in the decaying political system. The two other *personae*, on the other hand, are at the core of oratorical *decorum*, since they share the common feature of being immediately visible to the public. The third *persona* has a direct rhetorical application, since it encompasses all the social qualities which are referred to not only in the doctrine of style – style must respect an orator's *dignitas*–, but also in the definition of *decorum* spelled out in the *Orator*:

*Non enim omnis fortuna non omnis honos non omnis auctoritas non omnis aetas nec uero locus aut tempus aut auditor omnis eodem aut uerborum genere tractandus est aut sententiarum semperque in omni parte orationis ut uitae quid deceat est considerandum*<sup>60</sup> (Orat. 71).

The second *persona* is also of great importance regarding the oratorical context, since it corresponds to the individual features of an orator, to that which helps differentiate him from another orator<sup>61</sup>. Sustaining this *persona* implies maintaining one's personal coherence (*aequabilitas*)<sup>62</sup>, a coherence which necessarily disappears if one tries to mimic someone else's *propria natura* and falls into inconsistency (*discrepantia*):

*Omnino si quicquam est decorum, nihil est profecto magis quam aequabilitas uniuersae uitae, tum singularum actionum, quam conseruare non possis, si aliorum naturam imitans, omittas tuam*<sup>63</sup> (De off. I, 111).

What is particularly striking in this instance is the example Cicero uses to explain the nature of the second *persona*. While he favors dramatic examples such as the *aequabilitas* of Cato who, once defeated, chose to die and thus remained consistent with his own nature (De off. I, 112), the first illustration Cicero puts forward is the adequacy of oratorical style and individual nature. Each orator has his own characteristics and reveals them through speech and public behavior:

*Vt enim in corporibus magnae dissimilitudines sunt [...], sic in animis existunt maiores etiam uarietates. Erat in L. Crasso, in L. Philippo multus lepos, maior etiam magisque*

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bent of our own particular nature; and even if other careers should be better and nobler, we may still regulate our own pursuits by the standard of our own nature. For it is of no avail to fight against one's nature or to aim at what is impossible of attainment."

<sup>60</sup> "For the same style and the same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life, or every rank, position or age, and in fact a similar distinction must be made in respect of place, time and audience. The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider propriety." The syntagm *quid deceat* is not used here as the equivalent of the fourth virtue of style.

<sup>61</sup> As C. Gill rightly stresses, "the qualities Cicero itemizes are often ones which contribute, in some way, to making the people in question well-known"; they "serve to make people (at least, some people) *distinguished*, that is, accomplished and notable in society." ([GILL 1988], p. 181)

<sup>62</sup> See [DUGAN 2001], p. 130-131.

<sup>63</sup> "If there is any such thing as propriety at all, it can be nothing more than uniform consistency in the course of our life as a whole and all its individual actions. And this uniform consistency one could not maintain by copying the personal traits of others and eliminating one's own."

*de industria in C. Caesare, L. filio; at isdem temporibus in M. Scauro et in M. Druso adulescente singularis seueritas, in C. Laelio multa hilaritas [...]*<sup>64</sup> (*De off.* I, 107-108).

*Decorum* implies the respect of one's *propria persona*, which means, for the orator, to take his nature into account and adapt his style to it. Trying to escape this nature and to build a style which contradicts it will only lead to failure. The *decorum* theory, as explained in the *De officiis*, seems to favour the view that prevailed in the *De oratore*, eleven years before, when Cicero considered that an outstanding orator could have a peculiar style and attain excellence by using it. But the *De officiis* actually goes further than the *De oratore* in the valorization of stylistic idiosyncrasy. When the *De oratore* takes the orator's peculiar features into account, he does so outside the realm of the stylistic *quod decet*. As it is conceived by Cicero in 55 BCE, the *quod decet* only prescribes an adequation between topic and style, and is in no way concerned with the orator's stylistic identity, which flourishes on its own and is independent of the theory of propriety. In the *De officiis*, on the other hand, it is the orator's idiosyncrasy which constitutes the very basis of *decorum*. The point of view, therefore, changes completely: it is no longer a question of maintaining some room for idiosyncrasy, in the theory of stylistic adequacy, but of turning the second *persona* into the main reference and tool of this adequacy (*De off.* I, 110, cited above). From this point of view, an orator will respect the *decorum* principle only if he preserves his *aequabilitas* and uses the style which fits himself. *Decorum* is therefore impossible to define abstractly.

Imported into a rhetorical treatise, this philosophical *decorum*, based upon Panaetian views, could be an important improvement in the theory of propriety. As it encompasses style and behaviour in general (*Orat.* 70 sq.) and draws its origin from the idea of personal harmony, *decorum* could bridge the realms of rhetorical norms and oratorical idiosyncrasy which had always been treated separately –or even opposed– in the ciceronian *corpus*. But the meaning of rhetorical *decorum* in the *Orator* depends on the reference used in its concrete application, that is how the *persona* is analyzed. According to the role actually given to the second *persona*, *decorum* will introduce oratorical versatility and idiosyncrasy in the doctrine, or stiffen the normative bias of the treatise. When Cicero details the various components of the orator's *persona* which must be taken into account in order to achieve complete *decorum*, it becomes obvious that the second *persona*, as it is conceived in the *De officiis*, has no role to play in the *Orator*. Only social criteria are mentioned, the *persona propria tributa* being totally forgotten, as we have already seen in *Orat.* 71 cited above. *Fortuna*, *honor*, *auctoritas* and *aetas* are the only aspects of *persona* explicitly mentioned. Although the orator must make his behavior and discourse fit his own characteristics, these characteristics do not have as large a scope as they will have two years later in the *De officiis*, and are restricted to social and civic qualities. Despite Cicero's numerous allusions to the philosophical dimension of his rhetorical doctrine and the obvious kinship between the *Orator* and the *De officiis*, rhetorical *decorum*, when it comes to its application, falls short of being the concept that reconciles rhetorical propriety and ethical harmony. How did this take place?

First, philosophical *decorum* in itself seemed in complete contradiction with the general design of the *Orator*. How could the principle of *aequabilitas* and personal coherence be reconciled with the criticism of individual style voiced both in the *Orator* and the *De optimo genere oratorum*? It seems obvious that an orator will have the utmost difficulties in being true to his own personal characteristics during the oratorical performance –as philosophical *decorum* would prescribe (*tenenda sunt sua cuique non uitiosa, sed tamen*

<sup>64</sup> "In the matter of physical endowment there are great differences [...]. Diversities of character are greater still. L. Crassus and L. Philippus had a large fund of wit; C. Caesar, Lucius's son, had a still richer fund and employed it with more studied purpose. Contemporary with them, M. Scaurus and M. Drusus, the younger, were examples of unusual seriousness; C. Laelius of unbounded jollity."

*propria*; *De off.* I, 110) – if he also has to abide by the rule stated in *Orat.* 69. The contradiction lies in the very statement of this rule, which links *decorum* to the control of the *tripartita uarietas* of oratorical functions and styles, thus ruling out the use of a specific, personal style instead of the conjunction of the three canonical ones. The idea that one must adapt one's style to one's own *natura* is nowhere to be found in the *Orator*, despite the philosophical echoes which could have the reader suppose so: in the *Orator*, as we have already seen, the *proprium* is necessarily *uitiosum*. In the light of this contradiction, we must entirely reinterpret the meaning of *decorum* and give a new explanation of its use in the treatise of 46 BCE.

Although *decorum* in the treatise clearly derives from the ethical doctrine of the *officia* –rather than from the rhetorical *quod decet*–, it cannot bear the same philosophical meaning as in Panaetius's doctrine. It had to be adapted to the new context of its use, and must be analyzed accordingly. First, the reader can simply consider that the rhetorical *decorum* is an incomplete version of its philosophical source. Such a view could be confirmed by the numerous allusions to the necessity of a more thorough explanation of the concept. *Ad id quod agitur satis*, states Cicero in his development (*Orat.* 73), thus implying that his analysis –and maybe the very concept he is using– is incomplete, as we have seen. But this does not mean, in any case, that Cicero has made an undue or misguided use of the concept when he tried to import it into the realms of rhetoric. Rather, we must consider that the limitation put on the scope of *decorum* is due to the very nature of rhetoric as it is conceived in the *Orator*. Unlike ethical *decorum*, oratorical adequacy is not only defined as a coherence between the orator and his discourse, but also takes into account both the circumstances and the audience. Eventhough the philosophical influence is clear in the *Orator*, it is limited because of the very nature of oratorical persuasion. The principle of rhetorical *decorum* implies therefore a threefold system of references of which the orator's *persona* is only one aspect. Unsurprisingly, its scope is reduced in order to make room for the other parameters, and this reduction leads to the elimination of personal features. If the orator is to fulfill the judge's (and the public's) expectations, he must, as Cicero clearly explains in *Orat.* 69 *sq.*, use the whole range of rhetorical functions and, therefore, the whole range of corresponding styles. To be adequate necessarily means to free oneself from one's stylistic particularity in order to be convincing, and the second *persona* cannot play any role in this version of *decorum*.

But rhetoric and ethical philosophy also differ on the question of *decorum* in another way, since their theoretical focus is necessarily not the same. In the treatise of 46 BCE, the perfect orator is defined by his capacity to win the assent of his audience. Logically, he is viewed according to the proper goal of oratorical practice (winning the case), and must adapt himself –that is, his second *persona*– to its requirements. In this case, *decorum* is only a means for reaching the goal assigned to the orator (convincing the audience) and not an end in itself. The philosophical theory of the *officia*, on the other hand, is not concerned with goals, but with means and manners (*quomodo*) only. Ethical judgment is not passed on achievements or failures, but on how one has succeeded or failed, how one has preserved his *persona* in the various activities of his life. The goal in itself is less important than the *persona*, and the means is, in a way, the real end. Priorities are reversed, and one chooses a suitable goal –that is, his fourth *persona*– by taking his own characteristics –his second *persona*– into account:

*Suum quisque igitur noscat ingenium acremque se et bonorum et uitiorum suorum iudicem praebeat, ne scaenici plus quam nos uideantur habere prudentiae. Illi enim non optumas, sed sibi accommodatissimas fabulas eligunt [...]. Ergo histrio hoc uidebit in scena, non uidebit sapiens uir in uita? Ad quas igitur res aptissimi erimus, in iis*

*potissimum elaborabimus*<sup>65</sup> (*De off.* I, 114).

But even though Cicero insists on the philosophical value of the *Orator*, the *decorum* and the orator's *persona* remain oratorical tools which must be used in order to win the audience over, and are not cultivated as an end in themselves. The inadequacy of philosophical *decorum* in the rhetorical context is, therefore, essentially due to the role given to the fourth *persona*. As this *persona* is a given in the *Orator* –since the orator has chosen to be a public figure, an advocate or a magistrate–, the capacity to fulfill this role is of course required, and the second *persona* is partly defined already. As Antony explains in the *De oratore*, one who does not have the necessary qualities will not be able to achieve anything in oratory<sup>66</sup>. Because it assumes that the orator possesses a certain physical and intellectual nature, the rhetorical point of view necessarily diminishes the importance of personal characteristics in the determination and preservation of *decorum*: this *decorum* can be more general, and centered on social qualities, since good orators all share a common set of characteristics. This apparent tautology –one must take one's own characteristics into account, but these characteristics are shared by every good orator and become, therefore, general ones– is at the heart of the theoretical problem of adequacy in the treatise. It takes us back to the question of idealism and to the definition of the perfect orator. The rhetorical notion of *decorum*, far from being a clumsy theoretical import, is in fact the key of this definition and of Cicero's project in the treatise. It will pave the way for a literary understanding of rhetoric and eloquence.

### ***Decorum*, An Essential Step Toward a Literary Rhetoric**

In fact, the gap between philosophical and rhetorical *decorum* can be easily bridged if the reader remembers that the *Orator* does not deal with actual rhetorical practice, but with an abstract and ideal figure. The point of view we first took led us to consider that the second *persona* was neglected in the rhetorical approach favored by Cicero. Another, perhaps more fruitful, analysis would give the philosophical stance adopted in the *Orator* its full value. If we take into account the fact that Cicero depicts the ideal orator (*summus orator*, *Orat.* 7), the perfect type (*forma* or *χαρακτήρ optimi oratoris*, *Orat.* 36), we can understand the reason why he specifically chose to use the notion of *decorum* rather than the already well-known stylistic concept of *quod decet*. Describing an orator who never existed (*qualis fortasse nemo fuit*, *Orat.* 7), Cicero diminishes, as we have seen, the importance of idiosyncrasy in the determination of *decorum*. But from the ideal point of view he first adopted, we can consider not only that personal characteristics can be dismissed, but also that they do not exist at all. If the ideal orator is the one who will be able to switch from one style (and one oratorical function) to another, then his personal characteristics will be limited to this very capacity. The *summus orator*'s second *persona* is nothing else than this technical ability and perfection. This is the reason why the use of *decorum* did not open the way to a wider understanding of stylistic idiosyncrasy, but became the most normative tool Cicero could conceive to design his ideal orator.

The theory of the *officia oratoris* tends to confirm this analysis. When he chose to replace the triad *docere* / *conciliare* / *mouere* by the triad *docere* / *delectare* / *mouere*, Cicero

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<sup>65</sup> “Every one, therefore, should make a proper estimate of his own natural ability and show himself a critical judge of his own merits and defects; in this respect, we should not let actors display more practical wisdom than we have. They select, not the best plays, but the ones best suited to their talents [...]. Shall a player have regard to this in choosing his role upon the stage, and a wise man fail to do so in selecting his part in life?”

<sup>66</sup> See *De orat.* II, 85-86.

did not try to create a new version of *conciliare*<sup>67</sup> or simply try to change the theoretical point of view, by turning to a more evaluative one<sup>68</sup>, but renewed the whole understanding of the second function. As the *De oratore* makes clear, *conciliare* necessarily implies making the qualities of the orator visible in order to win the favor of the audience:

*Valet igitur multum ad uincendum probari mores et instituta et facta et uitam eorum, qui agent causas, et eorum, pro quibus, et item improbari aduersariorum, animosque eorum, apud quos agetur, conciliari quam maxime ad beneuolentiam cum erga oratorem tum erga illum, pro quo dicet orator*<sup>69</sup> (*De orat.* II, 182).

The qualities taken into account need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that they cover the whole range of social, but also intellectual and moral values<sup>70</sup>. In this context, the function of *conciliare* is to convey a set of signs (*proferre signa*, *De orat.* II, 182) through the arguments, the style and the action used by the orator, signs that delineate the orator's *ethos*. The whole function is therefore centered on the orator himself, and depends on his individual qualities since, according to Cicero, it is difficult to forge the appearance of qualities one does not possess<sup>71</sup>. But when Cicero uses the newly devised notion of *delectare*<sup>72</sup> in the *Orator*, the function no longer depends upon the orator's personality, but is, on the contrary, centered on the audience and the pleasure it draws from the discourse. According to this new conception, the various ethical signs that appear during the performance do not play any role. The orator is now evaluated only from a technical point of view, that of efficiency, as Cicero already stated in the *Brutus*:

*Qualis uero sit orator ex eo, quod is dicendo efficiet, poterit intellegi*<sup>73</sup> (*Brut.* 184).

That *decorum* does not leave any room for idiosyncrasy should not come as a surprise in a text that replaced an ethical function (*conciliare*) with a purely aesthetic one (*delectare*). Such a theoretical turn is easily understandable, since the ideal orator does not have to display an idiosyncrasy, but boasts, on the contrary, qualities which simply correspond to his stylistic capacities. As he tries to conceive the nature, style and behavior of the ideal orator, Cicero creates an abstract model : the *summus orator*'s style is perfect, so *decorum* is the adaptation to his own perfect *persona* limited to his stylistic ability and social status, as stated in the *Orator*. If *decorum* improves on the *quod decet*, it is only because it is now a general organizing principle of the doctrine which takes both style and functions into account and aims at controlling style and action altogether. But as a principle of propriety, it still relies mainly on the social qualities of the orator, and gives his *persona* a more abstract character than it used to have. Accordingly, whereas the *De officiis* reproduces the innovative approach

<sup>67</sup> [FANTHAM 1973] is wrong when she tries to prove that *delectare* is an improved version of *conciliare* (p. 274 sq.).

<sup>68</sup> [WISSE 1989], p. 213 sq.

<sup>69</sup> "Well then, it is a very important contribution to winning the case that approval should be given to the character, the habits, the deeds and the life, both of those who plead the case and those on whose behalf they plead, and that these characteristics of the opponents are likewise disapproved of; and that the minds of the audience are, as much as possible, won over to feel sympathy towards the orator as well as towards the person the orator is speaking for" (transl. J. Wisse).

<sup>70</sup> E.g. *dignitas, existimatio uitae, lenitas, pudor, comitas, facilitas, liberalitas, mansuetudo, pietas, gratus animus*.

<sup>71</sup> *De orat.* II, 182: *facilius ornari possunt, si modo sunt, quam fingi, si nulla sunt*.

<sup>72</sup> The new triad first appeared in the *Brutus*: *Tria sunt enim, ut quidem ego sentio, quae sint efficienda dicendo: ut doceatur is apud quem dicitur, ut delectetur, ut moueatur uehementius* (*Brut.* 185).

<sup>73</sup> "But what sort of an orator a man is can only be recognized from what his oratory effects."

of Panaetius and its emphasis on individual characteristics, the *Orator* makes a perfectly coherent use of the philosophical concept of *decorum*, now adapted to the normative point of view stated at the beginning of the treatise.

In this regard, the *Orator* must be considered as a turning point in the history of rhetoric. While the *De oratore* aimed at grounding rhetorical theory in Roman oratorical and political practice<sup>74</sup>, thus furbishing new theoretical weapons for those who wanted to carry on the Republican tradition, the *Orator* now takes the disappearance of the traditional political life as a given, and finds refuge in a theory which evacuates the material and practical aspect of oratory. Explicitly meant for the Roman context, the *De oratore* gave to its readers the tools they needed to enter the forensic and political arena and, as distant from perfection as they may have been, to attain their goals and play their part in the political life of the Republic. Provided he possessed the minimal physical and intellectual requirements, every orator could play a significant role on the oratorical scene, since the goal was to develop one's skill according to one's own style and preference. By using a concept which, instead of reinforcing this idiosyncrasic orientation as it should have, helped prescribe a normative model of stylistic variation, Cicero turned his back to this political project. At first, this new theory gave Cicero leverage against the Atticists, since it proved that in order to be convincing, an orator had to use the three levels of style, and not confine himself to the plain one, the only style favored by the Atticists according to Cicero. But if we turn to the possible reception of the treatise, after the death of its author, during the triumvirate or the beginning of the principate, the consequences of this theoretical choice become obvious. For readers who were, by then, deprived of the freedom of speech and the political activity once enjoyed among the Republican nobility, *decorum* became a *norm* instead of a *principle*.

What I mean by such a distinction is that in the Republican context, propriety had to be understood as it was explained in the *De oratore*, as a principle of coherence and fidelity to oneself in order to be as efficient as possible and to push one's political agenda. But in a context where oratory had to be devoid of political meaning and consequences, where all attention was focused on aesthetic questions –as we can see in the texts of Seneca the Elder–, *decorum* was a norm, that is, a reference used to evaluate how distant a *declamator* was from perfection. His individuality was not to be taken into account: in the literary practice of declamation, one has to use the appropriate style to fit the appropriate function at the appropriate time and, therefore, to apply the rules. Paradoxically, the *decorum* would not help the orator to find his own oratorical *persona*, but would force him to fit a set of abstract rules largely inadapted to actual practice. By trying to build a theory which, he hoped, would be useful even after the approaching collapse of the Republic, Cicero not only anticipated its downfall, but accompanied it by slowly changing rhetoric and oratory into an abstract and literary concern.

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<sup>74</sup> The new habit of translating *De oratore* by the title “On the Ideal Orator”, initiated by J. May and J. Wisse 2001 translation is, therefore, highly misleading.



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