

# **Selected Political Speeches of Cicero Study Guide**

**Selected Political Speeches of Cicero by Cicero**

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# Plot Summary

Cicero (106 - 43 B.C.) was a famous philosopher, orator and statesman during the upheavals that ultimately led to the destruction of the Roman republic. He was widely regarded as one of the most intelligent and civilized 'old men' of the republic, even during Caesar's dictatorship. Further, he was thought to be the greatest orator in the Roman world during his life. Cicero wrote a variety of philosophical, rhetorical (on the study and practice of rhetoric), political and legal works. However, this compilation does not include any of those works. Instead, it is composed entirely of his speeches. There are nine, and they are ordered chronologically through his life.

The first speech, "In Verrem I" is one of two 'juridical' orations included in the book - it is given in court and is intended to defend or convict a defendant. Cicero is serving as prosecutor against the infamously corrupt governor of Sicily, Verres. There are seven "In Verrem" speeches, but five were never given because Verres fled before the trial ended. "In Verrem I" is the first of these speeches. The next speech is "In Verrem II.5." It is the last of the seven speeches, the last of the five that were never given. It lists all of Verres's crimes in detail and was rather damning. This speech was later released to the public. "De imperio Cn. Pompei" is a 'deliberative' speech. It is given in the Roman forum and attempts to convince a group of people in a non-legal setting (typically legislative) to take a certain course of action. This speech was given during the second Mithridatic War. Mithridates, the king of Pontus, was at war with Rome over several territories. One of Rome's great generals, Pompey, had been leading the battle and he had to be renewed to continue legally leading Roman troops in battle. The speech argues in favor of retaining Pompey's command.

The next four speeches are all given within a week or two of one another. They are given when Cicero is consul and faces a conspiracy to overthrow the Roman government. A patrician, Catiline, and some of his allies, wish to take over Rome for themselves and elevate Catiline to consul (or even dictator). One of Cicero's greatest acts as consul was to quell this conspiracy. The famed 'Catilinarians' - the speeches Cicero gave on the occasion of the Catilinarian conspiracy - are some of the most famous orations in history. The eighth speech, "Pro Marcello" congratulates then dictator Caesar on pardoning his old rival Marcellus. Caesar had also lifted Cicero's exile; this was his first speech since his return. Finally, the ninth speech is "Philippic II," one of fourteen speeches where Cicero defends himself against vicious rhetorical attacks by Marcus Antonius. The Philipppics round out Cicero's life, as Marcus Antonius eventually has occasion to have him murdered.



# Chapter I, In Verrem I

## Chapter I, In Verrem I Summary and Analysis

In Verrem "Against Verres" is a series of juridical orations given by Cicero, who was serving as Prosecutor in a trial against the corrupt governor of Sicily, Verres. These speeches were given in 70 B.C. and there seven speeches altogether, five of which he could not give, as Verres had fled into exile. These speeches are highly political, particularly In Verrem I. Verres, despite his corruption, was well-connected. The people of Sicily despised him as did many in Rome; so, they backed Cicero. However, Verres's allies supported the famous orator and lawyer Hortensius against Cicero. The defense's strategy was to delay the trial as long as possible, until 69 B.C. when Hortensius and an ally would be elected to consulships and their friend Marcus Metellus elected praetor and president of the extortion court. Cicero would lose his case instantaneously. However, Cicero thwarts their strategy and gives In Verrem I against Verres anyway. It has become a historical classic.

Cicero opens by urging the jury to convict Verres because the jurors are despised by the people (they are senators). The reputations of the courts have been tarnished and are considered corrupt. To fail to convict Verres would be to confirm the suspicions of the populace and threaten an upheaval in the judicial system. Many are worried that Verres has the ability to bribe his way towards an acquittal. After making this crucial point, Cicero launches into a series of intense attacks on Verres action and character. Verres is not only a criminal, Cicero argues, but he has an incredible audacity that must be put down. Verres is "reckless" and "insane." He knows that Cicero is going to expose him and he has a strategy of delay to defeat him, Cicero tells the jurors. His vices in Sicily are true horrors. Sicily cannot be restored to its previous state, three years before Verres's governorship began. Cicero tells the jurors that a contract to buy them off has already been set up. They should take this as evidence of his corruption. He tells the jurors that the defense scheduled the court date in such a way as to make collecting evidence very burdensome for Cicero and that they were waiting, again, until 69 B.C. when they could make this all go away.

Cicero turns to attack Hortensius, accusing him of not taking the trial seriously. Cicero is out for Hortensius's reputation, so he attacks Hortensius for defending a wicked man and that this action threatens his patriotism. Cicero must oppose evil in order to defend the honor of the legal profession. He then returns to emphasize the political point of the oration - the jury must convict to retain the honor of the senatorial courts and to regain the trust of the people. He promises not to pull any tricky legal moves during the trial and argues that his procedure follows precedent. The speech ends with a brief list of accusations against Verres - arbitrary and cruel actions against Roman citizens and allies, embezzlement and, indirectly, blasphemy.



## Chapter 2, In Verrum II.5

### Chapter 2, In Verrum II.5 Summary and Analysis

In Verrum II is the last of the Verrines, the seven forensic (i.e. legal) speeches Cicero wrote against Verres. As noted in the last chapter, Cicero was only able to give the first two speeches (In Verrum I is the second), as the evidence against Verres was so damning that he fled into exile after In Verrum I was given. In Verrum II is a series of five speeches, with the last one, In Verrum II.5, printed here. It is a detailed list of all of Verres's crimes and an assault on any possible defense against them. The speech is very long and Verres's train of abuses appalling. Verres's reputation for great military genius might spare him. Cicero is going to ruin Verres's military reputation to expose his corruption, along with repeating his crimes. First, in Verres's war against the slaves, it was not Verres's skill that saved Sicily. In fact, Verres did not protect Sicily from slave revolts and conspiracies; many of them simply had not been reported to the people of Rome. To illustrate, Cicero discusses an unheard of revolt in Triocala, and then moves to discuss his same failure to do his job in the cases of Aristodamus of Apollonia and Leo of Imachara. Again, Verres should not be lauded as a great general. Cicero explores Verres's failure to act appropriately in Apollonius's case. As he transitions away from this topic, Cicero makes sure to inform the jury of Verres's abuse of the wives of Sicily and repeats some rumors of Verres's sexual misconduct. He recounts Verres's corrupt rise to power and then concludes that Verres's deserves no credit for the war against runaway slaves.

Next, Verres poorly maintained Sicily's naval defense, instead embezzling fleet money. He did not build the famed trireme of Messina at his own expense, as was reported. Cicero challenges him to prove it. Verres cooked the accounting books. Cicero continues at length on this matter to expose Verres's corruption as a military general, his only possible redeeming virtue. The oration turns to Verres's corrupt protection of a pirate captain; Verres not only refused to behead him but even set him free. This even as he executed Roman citizens (Roman citizens were held in particularly high regard, so treating a pirate better than a Roman citizen would have been considered an incredible outrage). Cicero attacks one of Verres's military commanders, Cleomenes of Syracuse. He explains Cleomenes's role in setting the pirate captain, Heracleo, free. The people protested and Verres ignored them. Heracleo eventually taunted the people by sailing his four galleys around the Sicilian coast. Verres feigned a response to satisfy the people, but again, it was a feigned response, not a genuine one. The people demanded the return of Cleomenes, but he could not be found.

Cicero accuses Verres of running corrupt trials. He covers some of those falsely accused, and also recounts how Verres had a hand in killing the relevant witnesses. The Sicilians are old and loyal allies of Rome, and Cicero points out that they were horrified by the verdicts of these trials, that Verres shamelessly killed and imprisoned the innocent. Cicero implores the jury to find Verres guilty in part so that those who were



persecuted by Verres can be safe. He discusses how oppressed and harassed the Sicilian elite had been, and particular cases are covered.

For Verres to effectively reply to the charges he must deny all of these perfectly obvious accusations. He argues that Verres cannot escape these charges by emphasizing his connections to the jurors. Cicero claims that since he has spoken the truth, he has discharged his duties to the Sicilians. He moves away from the well-being of the Sicilians and to Verres's treatment of Roman citizens. Verres is reckless, criminal and insane. He persecuted the Roman citizens living in Sicily. He discusses the case of the persecution of Servilius and that the prison created by the cruel Dionysius, dictator of Syracuse, was the home of falsely accused Roman citizens. Why did Verres persecute Roman citizens? Pure, unadulterated greed. He aimed to loot Roman citizens. Other Roman citizens died as well, and not of any natural event. Verres's cruelty is appalling and while Cicero admits that he has been harping on a small number of points, he says that emphasis is enough to convict Verres. He then repeats more cases of the persecution of Roman citizens and reminds the jury of the glorious liberties possessed by Roman citizens, and of how shamelessly Verres trampled them.

Cicero suggests that the jury might let Verres off but that this would be a great mistake, so he turns to offer advice to the opposing counsel, Hortensius. He asks Hortensius to reflect on the damage he is prepared to do to the courts and his country by using his great abilities to defend Verres. He reminds Hortensius that there are already grievances against him and his allies among the Roman people. Verres is not Hortensius's friend or a family member, so he owes Verres nothing. Cicero emphasizes that he will not give up in his case against Verres and that Hortensius will have to fight him endlessly. He then asks that juror to convict on behalf of the Sicilians and Roman citizens. He ends with an extended prayer to the gods to bring justice against Verres.



# Chapter 3, De imperio Cn. Pompei ('On the Command of Gnaeus Pompeius')

## Chapter 3, De imperio Cn. Pompei ('On the Command of Gnaeus Pompeius') Summary and Analysis

This speech is Cicero's first deliberative speech. He is recommending the election of General Pompey to command Roman forces in the war against Mithridates, the king of Pontus. At this time, Cicero is praetor. The proposal was very popular, so it probably would have passed without Cicero's support. However, the speech increased Cicero's prominence, as he supported a popular cause. Pompey is fighting in the Second Mithridatic War (83 - 81 B.C.). Mithridates was king of some territories won during a time he was allied with Rome. Since then, however, the alliance fell apart. Pompey was the greatest general of his age and had a significant history of military successes.

Cicero opens by complimenting the crowd for coming out to hear his oration. He is happy that he can interact directly with the citizens of Rome. He reminds his audience that Rome is in the middle of a serious conflict with both Mithridates and Tigranes, both of whom wish to conquer Asia. The people must decide what to do and they must choose a general to command them. He suggests that they approach the decision in three steps, first by considering the war's character, next its scale and finally the appropriate choice of commander.

The character of the war is serious. The Roman people are in danger of losing their empire. The Roman people are eager for glory and renown and so they must destroy the possibility of disgrace that has been presented to them by Mithridates. He is devoted to fighting a war beyond the rigor of the first. Cicero argues that the Roman people's ancestors had fought in defense of the empire and that they should too in order to honor them. Further, the Roman people's economic interests are at stake.

Cicero then turns to the war's character and emphasizes that the war should not be taken lightly. The war looks largely won to some but Mithridates has allied with Tigranes, the king of Armenia. He has built up his forces. And some Roman forces have been disbanded, so future conflict is inevitable.

Finally, Cicero considers the choice of commander. A good commander must possess military knowledge, ability, authority, and luck. Cicero then argues that Pompey possess all of these qualities. First, it is clear that Pompey has great military knowledge, demonstrated in part by his dramatic and quick rise to power. Further, Pompey's ability is unparalleled. He is dedicated to his duty, possesses great courage and is thorough in battle. He has foresight and speed. And many different countries - Italy, Spain and Gaul - have been witness to it. He also cites Pompey's clearing the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. Pompey is a superb general, and shows moderation. He has great authority, as



evidenced by the fact that so many have surrendered to me and he further possesses great luck.

The war is both serious and of great scale. Therefore, the Roman people should pick Pompey to be their general. Yet Quintus Catulus and Quintus Hortensius disagree. They are concerned about putting so much power in the hands of one man, as he might lead a coup upon his return. Cicero argues that Pompey's character will prevent this. He gives examples of some generals that have led coups and others that have not, arguing that Pompey is more like the latter than the former. Further, the subjects of the Roman Empire despise them. Pompey's reputation has the ability to win regard across the empire. Further, there are many important individuals who support him. Cicero throws in his lot for Pompey as well.





# Chapter 4, In Catilinam I

## Chapter 4, In Catilinam I Summary and Analysis

Cicero was elected consul of Rome in 64 B.C. In 63 B.C. a coup was attempted by Lucius Sergius Catilina (Catiline, in English). Catiline's followers attempted a coup in order to take control of Rome. The Catilinarians (the following four letters) were a series of condemnatory orations Cicero gave against Catiline and his followers given at various stages of the conspiracy. The First Catilinarian was a speech that Cicero gave in the Senate after a spy uncovered Catiline's plot to assassinate him. Catiline was in the senate for this, but he sat alone.

Cicero begins the speech with a direct attack on Catiline. He complains that Catiline is losing the patience of the Senate with his 'recklessness'. Catiline's plans have been exposed, and it is an outrage that he remains alive. Catiline should have been killed long ago by the Roman consul. However, Cicero cannot arrest and execute him due to popular pressures; Catiline's wickedness has not been fully exposed. Cicero shows that he is one step ahead of Catiline by exposing one of his allies' plots. He tells the Senate the Catiline was plotting his death just the previous night and encourages Catiline to retreat into exile. Cicero thanks Jupiter for protecting the people against Catiline's treachery. But the new plot threatens the country on a deeper level. Catiline had already offered to retreat into exile but has changed his mind. Cicero encourages him to reconsider.

Cicero turns to the interests of Rome and how Catiline is threatening them. He exposes still another plot and maintains that he would go into exile were he in Catiline's position. Catiline has been involved in so much crime, how could any shred of dignity he has left prevent him from doing anything else? Catiline surely deserves to die, but at least he could withdraw himself from public. Cicero argues that Catiline has already lost the respect of the senate, since Cicero could not speak so ill of anyone else in the senate and not be killed where he stood. He maintains that Catiline should go into exile if for no other reason than to harm Cicero's reputation.

Cicero turns to defend himself against the accusation that he should already have killed Catiline. He argues that this would have hurt the unity of the country and cites a past case of assassination as an example. Catiline still has enough public support to where killing Catiline would cause public unrest. That said, the threat of conspiracy remains and the senate must remain aware of it. For now, the traitors may leave. Cicero ends by repeating his exhortation to Catiline to go into exile.



# Chapter 5, In Catilinam II

## Chapter 5, In Catilinam II Summary and Analysis

Catiline responded to Cicero by arguing that he was innocent and that Cicero was a 'squatter', since his family was not originally patrician. This was not taken well by the senate and Catiline ran out of the senate chamber. He leaves letters behind him, instructing his followers and asking others for help. The next day, Cicero gives Catilinam II, where he tells the people that Catiline has run off and he exposes the sorts of people who support Catiline's conspiracy.

Catiline is clearly a criminal and a traitor, Cicero exclaims. He asks that the crowd not blame him for not apprehending Catiline; Cicero denies that the man himself is a danger. He attacks Catiline's army as an embarrassment in comparison to the Roman army. He strongly desires to be rid of Catiline and his followers. Some complain that Cicero forced Catiline into exile, but this is not so. It is hard to run a country well, and even harder to save it. He hopes and prays that Catiline will never head an army that threatens Rome. Since Catiline is alone, however, what have they to fear?

Catiline has supporters within the city; that is the problem. There are many types. The first groups are those who have great debts and desire for them to be alleviated. The next group are debtors who not only want to have their debts relieved but wish to gain power through Catiline's political rule. The third group consists of strong, old men. They remain loyal to Catiline as he was once a great man, but even these men are corrupt for staying loyal this long. The fourth group is not as unified in personality, but they are 'unruly'. They have been destitute for some time and have despaired; they have left to join Catiline's army but they are too lazy to pose a threat. The fifth group is composed entirely of criminals and Cicero hopes that they will be killed. Finally, the last group is the basest of all, as they are Catiline's closest followers.

The Roman people must guard themselves against these corrupt groups, Cicero warns. He then turns his attention to address these six groups. Any of them are free to leave now, and retreat into exile. However, if these groups stay to commit conspiracy or enter to do the same, then Cicero will consider them enemies. He will put down the conspiracy by whatever means necessary. He ends with a promise to the citizenry that he will protect them from the conspirators.



# Chapter 6, In Catilinam III

## Chapter 6, In Catilinam III Summary and Analysis

The Third Catilinarian is given a week after the Second Catilinarian. Catiline has reached an ally's camp and this puts his guilt beyond doubt. Cicero fortunately finds the opportunity to collect evidence against Catiline's allies within the city. Cicero's spies help him to uncover yet another plot and Cicero orders that six of Catiline's co-conspirators be brought to him; four are caught, one escaped and of the sixth we know nothing. Cicero convenes the senate and has it surrounded by an armed guard. Cicero has evidence presented against the conspirator and afterward a senate decree thanks Cicero and his allies for saving Rome. They apologize for not heeding Cicero's warning earlier. That evening, Cicero leaves the temple and walks to the forum. There he tells the people what has transpired; this causes public opinion to turn wholly against Catiline.

The speech begins with a proclamation that the city has been saved from an immediately conspiracy; today the city should be jubilant. He then proceeds to recount some of the relevant events. While Catiline had fled Rome, his partners remained, but Cicero discovered that one of these men, Public Lentulus, had attempted to stir up a war within the empire to destabilize the regime. This plot was thwarted nearly upon Cicero's being informed. He summons one of the envoys involved and offers him immunity from prosecution for sharing his evidence. Cicero also summons some of the 'Gauls' that Catiline's allies had used to communicate their deceitful message. He had the letters produced, and they assured the guilt of these men. Cicero tells the people that the senate has passed a decree of thanksgiving to the gods in Cicero's name. The conspirators are now under arrest. Cicero does not take sole credit for this, however. He thanks the gods for their aid.

Cicero reminds the people of passed times when it appeared that the gods were punishing the city as evidence that Rome is wholly under the power of the gods. And now, he argues the gods favor Rome. The conspiracy, after all, has been stopped. Cicero would be presumptuous to take all the credit. Thus, Cicero's decrees thanksgiving should be celebrated at all houses of worship and that the people should have a holiday. How glorious it is the civil war has been averted, given how horrible it is.

Cicero asks for no reward for his service. He prefers his reward to be located in the hearts of the Roman people. Cicero must also bear a burden; he must live with his enemies rather than having the fortune of killing them on the battlefield. Cicero ends as night falls, and encourages the people to worship Jupiter, the guardian of Rome. He tells the people to guard their homes for now, for the crisis is still active, but will soon be over.



# Chapter 7, In Catilinam IV

## Chapter 7, In Catilinam IV Summary and Analysis

Two days later the senate convenes to decide what to do with the conspirators, the five who were (now) being held in jail. The senate has a vigorous debate and many change sides. Silanus, the consul-elect argues that the conspirators should be executed. This, he argued, would deter Catiline's other supporters. However, this course of action would be illegal, as they would not have had a trial. Next, the other consul-elect, Murena agrees with Silanus, as do fourteen additional ex-consuls. Caesar speaks next and argues that execution would set a bad precedent and argues instead for imprisonment for life in a well-armed Italian town. However, this proposal is seen as unworkable and Cicero says this. (Caesar's proposal benefited him politically, since he could wear two faces to two different groups - appear to the senate to be against the conspirators and to the people as wanting to save their lives). No one knew what the right thing to do was. Nero argued that the decision should be put off until Catiline is captured or killed. Cicero gives the Fourth Catilinarian to review the different proposals on the table, argues that Silanus is right, and encourages the senate to make their decision before the night.

Cicero opens by acknowledging that many in the senate fear for their lives and for Cicero's, but he bears the suffering gladly. He asks the senators to consider the interests of themselves, their families and their country; the security of the people is of the utmost priority. The conspirators are clearly guilty and Cicero demands a decision about their fate. Two proposals are on the table - one from Decimus Silanus and the other from Gaius Caesar; the former prefers the death penalty and the latter life imprisonment. Silanus holds that the conspirators, because they tried to destroy Rome, do not deserve to live. Caesar argues, however, that the conspirators do not deserve to be liberated from their suffering and further that the decision would be unjust as they would be deprived of their right to trial.

Cicero asks the senators to suppose they follow Caesar's view. That is merely the 'popular' path and the proposal only aims to promote Caesar's popularity with the people. Second, he is wrong that the law requiring that all Roman citizens be given fair trial applies to traitors. And anyway, even if he is right, then why is he defending life imprisonment? There is an inconsistency in his proposal. Instead, the senate should prefer Silanus's proposal; the people will get over being upset and Cicero will argue publicly that the sentence was more lenient. He argues further that no one would doubt the justice of killing a man who threatened one's family with death; the conspirators' attempt to destroy Rome should be held on the same analogy. He illustrates this with a few examples.

Cicero has been hearing whispers that he can't implement a decision, should the senate make it today. But Cicero assures them that this is wrong. Everyone agrees that something severe should be done to the conspirators. Nonetheless, the senate should



not be worried about the people, as the Roman people will support them in the end. Cicero maintains that he acts in the interests of the people and asks for the senators to continue the debate. He argues that he does not need glory that would come from acting in his own interests and argues that glory instead should be given to Scipio, Paullus and Pompey for their victories in war. Victory abroad is better anyway, as enemies are either killed or enslaved. Cicero is simply interested in defending Rome. Because he argues sincerely in favor of his proposal, the senate should trust in his wisdom. Cicero further maintains that he will obey their decree no matter its decision. Further, he will take responsibility for it.



# Chapter 8, Pro Marcello

## Chapter 8, Pro Marcello Summary and Analysis

Pro Marcellus is given in 46 B.C., after Cicero's exile and exoneration by Caesar. Cicero is coming out of years of isolation and depression and is horrified by Caesar's destruction of the republic. However, since Caesar exonerated him and because he is dictator, Cicero can say nothing against him. Cicero has often returned to the senate (which at this time has no real power), but has so far kept silent. This is his first speech since his exile. Pro Marcello praises and thanks Caesar for pardoning Marcellus, his greatest enemy and a defender of the republic. This speech is not a defense, however; instead, it is a speech of praise, although many have wondered exactly why Cicero is giving it. Some believe Cicero is trying to maintain his relevance and his reputation for great oratory. Some think Cicero is subtly pressuring Caesar to restore some republican liberties and others think he is trying to find a role for himself in the new political landscape.

Cicero first acknowledges his long silence and admits his great grief over exile. Finally, the dark night is over. He thanks Caesar for lifting his exile from Rome and he says that Marcellus has been given the same great gift. Gaius Caesar must be praised for his great achievements. Cicero then engages in what appears to be hyperbole, saying that Caesar's achievements "are greater, almost, than the human mind or understanding can grasp ..." Caesar has conquered great barbaric nations and has unparalleled military glory. He also may take full credit for these accomplishments. He also thanks Caesar for ending the Civil War. Cicero points out that he can understand Marcellus's joy at being pardoned and tells Marcellus that he should be grateful to Caesar for his magnanimity.

Cicero, great republican that he is, cannot go without issuing some criticism of Caesar, however small. Many suggest that Caesar's grab for power has made him liable to attack or even assassination; he encourages Caesar to take this possibility seriously. He raises the idea only to encourage Caesar to be vigilant. He then uses the threat of assassination as an argument that Caesar restore many of the lost republican liberties, for instance that the court system should be restored. He must also pursue other policies that will win him acclaim. He is saddened that Caesar has publicly said that he has lived long enough to achieve the glory he wanted. Cicero thinks this is madness, to judge his life according to his personal glory rather than the good of his country. This will undermine his reputation in future generations. The Roman people cannot be secure unless Caesar is secure.

Cicero ends by returning to praise Caesar for his generosity and thanks him once more.



# Chapter 9, Phillipic II

## Chapter 9, Phillipic II Summary and Analysis

The Phillipics, of which there were fourteen, are improperly named. They refer to speeches given by a Greek orator, Demosthenes, which were given against Philip II of Macedon. Cicero's Philippics also oppose and criticize a ruler - at this time, Marcus Antonius, who shared power with Caesar's nephew, Octavian. It has been six months since Caesar's assassination and all are afraid of political instability. Cicero returned to Rome after Caesar's assassination to find Antonius proposing honors to Caesar to the senate. Cicero is disgusted and does not come to the senate meeting. Antonius viciously lashes out at him. Cicero replies the next day with Phillipic I. He is outwardly polite but subtly attacks Antonius in a particularly brutal fashion. Antonius responds by publicly declaring his hatred of Cicero and demanding that he return to the senate. Cicero decides it is too dangerous to attend. Antonius then gives a speech (which we do not have) savaging Cicero and blaming him for all of Rome's problems - Clodius's murder, the Civil War and the assassination of Caesar. Cicero responds immediately by writing the Second Philippic, but he never gave it, to avoid dignifying Antonius's accusations with a response. Eventually, however, Cicero releases the speech to circulate. Ultimately, however, Antonius is able to seize power with Octavian and Lepidus, ending the republic and lists various people to be killed. Cicero is among them and died a noble death.

Cicero laments that often in his life an enemy of the Roman people has attacked him. Marcus Antonius is simply the latest. Cicero begins by addressing Antonius's charge that he has violated their friendship. Antonius claimed that Cicero had done him a favor by not killing him. Cicero laughs at the idea that this is a favor or that he should show gratitude to Antonius for it. This only illustrates that Antonius is a moron. Antonius is a bad friend, and insane.

Cicero then turns to defend himself against Antonius's accusations. Antonius accused Cicero of being a bad consul and blamed the death of Clodius, the Civil War and Caesar's assassination on him. First Cicero argues that many consuls thought him an excellent consul. They thought of him as the father of the republic after all. Many of these men have died, but there are men alive who approve of Cicero's consulship as well. Antonius's consulship, in contrast, has been awful. Throughout the speech Cicero is insulting Antonius directly, calling him an idiot, arrogant, impudent and insane. Cicero turns to Antonius's accusation that he is responsible for the death of Clodius. In actual fact, Antonius was the far bigger threat to him. Milo was the one who killed him anyway and an inquiry never accused Cicero of any wrongdoing.

Next Cicero addresses Antonius's claim that he caused the Civil War by accelerating the decline of Caesar and Pompeius's friendship. Cicero did advise Pompeius against Caesar but Cicero always supported peace and harmony, even after Caesar took over. Cicero also did not cause the assassination of Caesar. The claim against him was that



Brutus, after he stabbed Caesar, called out to Cicero and congratulated him for restoring freedom to Rome. This was taken to imply that Cicero was in on the attack, but this, Cicero argued, was far from conclusive evidence. Cicero continues to review evidence in favor of Antonius's claim and dismisses it all. He also addresses several minor claims Antonius made against him. All of Antonius's arguments are nonsense, the ravings of a lunatic, Cicero argues.

Now Cicero turns to Antonius's record. He begins by arguing that Antonius has been corrupt since his childhood, that he bankrupted his father. He accuses him of sexual improprieties in his youth and implies that there are other improprieties that he cannot mention for the sake of decency. He reviews several other parts of Antonius's life, seeking to undermine his reputation at each stage. For instance, when Antonius was elected quaestor, he immediately ran off to support Caesar. Antonius gave Caesar an excuse to make war on his country. In fact, Antonius had a major role in starting the Civil War. Caesar even handed Italy over to Antonius in his absence and during this time conditions in Rome worsened. Antonius was involved in the Civil War and killed Roman citizens, in contrast to Cicero who did not participate. The accusations continue at length, focusing on Antonius's during the Civil War and the poor quality of his consulship. He then turns to attack Antonius's allies and friends. Now that Antonius is in power, Cicero - for all these reasons - has no confidence in him to do anything but destroy the republic. He has even mismanaged Caesar's papers and allowed them to be bought and sold, nor did he review them in the first place. Antonius's return to Rome caused great panic for various reasons as well. Cicero accuses Antonius of not being truly loyal to Caesar.

Even to this very day Antonius displays his corruption, Cicero exclaims. He only hours earlier encircled the senate with guards to capture Cicero. He says that Antonius cannot last long due to the fact that he cannot be trusted. Further, he will be in fear of his own supporters, just as Caesar was. Of all the horrors Caesar inflicted on the Roman people, at least the people have discovered who they can and cannot trust. Antonius is not one of them. Cicero ends by asking Antonius to look over his country and how much harm he has done. He wants Antonius to make peace with his country. Cicero has defended the Roman people his entire life and would offer his own body to protect it. He has led his life well and been loyal to the republic. He wants only two things: that when he dies, the Roman people are free and that each person's fate "may reflect the way he has behaved towards his country."





# Characters

## Cicero

Cicero is one of the greatest statesmen, intellectuals, philosophers and politicians of classical antiquity. He was born in 106 B.C. just prior to the birth of Julius Caesar. Cicero grew up rich. During this time, wealthy families usually played a role in politics, but not Cicero's. He had an elite education in Rome where he studied philosophy and rhetoric. He also studied in Athens and Rhodes. He became a lawyer, garnering his first fame there and was elected to the Senate in 76 B.C. In 63 B.C. he was elected to a consulship. During his consulship, he achieved fame in uncovering and thwarting what was known as the "conspiracy of Catiline." He ardently defended the governmental structure of the Roman republic and decried the dictatorship of Caesar. His influence vanished, however, when Caesar took control. He was happy when Caesar was assassinated and came back into public life to attack Marus Antonius. Cicero was killed during a period of assassinations for opposing him.

Cicero is the main character of the book, as he is the only one who speaks. Every speech is one that he either wrote, gave or both. And everything we observe in the book is through his eyes. The first two speeches, "In Verrum I" and "In Verrum II.5" display his skill as a lawyer. These were among his first public addresses and they made him into a rising star in the Roman republic. The next speech, "De imperio Cn. Pompei," was given when Cicero was consul and only made him more popular. The middle four speeches, the Catilinarians, were all given on the subject of the "conspiracy of Catiline." These speeches resulted in the crushing of the conspiracy, which made Cicero incredibly popular; he was even called 'the father of his country' for keeping Rome safe against a dangerous conspiracy. The final two speeches both occur after Cicero's exile, a depressing time during which he wrote most of his philosophical works. "Pro Marcello" praises Caesar for pardoning Caesar's long-time enemy Marcellus. The final speech is given before Cicero's death at the hands of Marcus Antonius. Antonius insulted Cicero upon his return to the senate and the Philippics are Cicero's speeches in his defense and an attack on Antony.

## Catiline

Cicero became consul in 63 B.C. During this year, a coup against the Roman government was attempted. The leader of the coup was a patrician named Lucius Sergius Catilina (In English, 'Catiline'). Catiline had an 'unsavory' past. He desired to seize power and become consul (or dictator) and he sought to do so unconstitutionally. Catiline had many followers in Rome and they were prepared to revolt. Catiline's family did not have political influence. Though born into a high class, Catiline was not thereby entitled to political power. He had served in the military under Strabo and Sulla and amassed vast wealth, which he used to enter politics and avoid going to jail when he murdered members of his family. He then served in the military again and eventually



served as praetor and governor of Africa, where he gained a reputation for being rapacious and committed extortion. He was taken to trial and the trial kept him from becoming consul. He attempted to run but the presiding consul, Tullus, did not allow him to be nominated. He ran again in 64 but had to compete with Cicero and Antonius.

Antonius and Catiline formed an alliance to defeat Cicero and attempted to buy votes but they came under scrutiny for these actions. Cicero attacked them savagely in public. Catiline lost and then was prosecuted a second time. When Cicero was elected consul, he had Catiline as an ally but Catiline's lust for power destroyed their connection. Instead, Catiline plotted overthrow and had the support of the many debtors in town and veterans who fought with Sulla. The plot was brief, but serious, as Catiline had forces to back up his coup; but Cicero was able to use spies to uncover many of the conspirators' actions and ultimately expose Catiline, forcing him into exile. After another year, Catiline's armies were defeated by Antonius; in the end, Cicero's speeches turned Catiline into one of the great villains in Roman history.

## **Verres**

The corrupt governor of Sicily who Cicero prosecutes in the "In Verrum" series of speeches.

## **Caesar**

Gaius Caesar, the first dictator of Rome, who lifted Cicero's exile and was eventually assassinated. Cicero hated dictatorship and was pleased by Caesar's death.

## **Marcus Antonius**

Caesar's consular colleague and enemy of Cicero's. After a series of vituperative exchanges, Marcus is able to seize power. Soon thereafter, he has Cicero killed.

## **Hortensius**

A famous orator and lawyer, Hortensius was responsible for Cicero's defense.

## **Pompey**

One of Rome's great generals, Cicero supported retaining him as general leading Roman forces in the second war against Mithridates.



## **Brutus and Cassius**

The famed friends of Caesar who eventually assassinated him. Brutus is thought to have congratulated Cicero after stabbing Caesar for restoring Roman freedom.

## **Mithridates**

The king of Pontus and Rome's most powerful enemy during the first century B.C. Cicero defends retaining Pompey as general of the Roman army fighting Mithridates in Rome's second war against him.

## **Marcellus**

Marcellus was Caesar's greatest enemy prior to Caesar's dictatorship. Caesar pardons Marcellus from exile, and Cicero gives his first speech to the senate since his exile praising Caesar for this decision.

## **The gods**

The Pantheon, the gods of the Roman people, are thanked in many of Cicero's speeches, particularly Jupiter.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Verres's Trial**

The court where Verres's trial was held.

### **The Forum**

The public square of Rome where many political speeches were given.

### **Curia of Pompey**

Where the senate met during the time of many of Cicero's speeches. It was also where Caesar was assassinated.

### **Sicily**

Verres was the corrupt governor of Sicily.

### **Pontus**

Mithridates was the king of Pontus, he was also the greatest threat to Rome during the first century B.C.

### **Rome**

The setting of all of the relevant political events and speeches in the book. It was the seat of the Roman Empire.

### **Debts**

Many of Catiline's supporters were in great debt. In exchange for support, Catiline offered to reduce their debts.

### **The Office of Consul**

The consul was the highest elected office in the Roman republic. It was elected yearly and during Cicero's time two consuls were elected at once. Cicero served as consul in 64 B.C.



## **The Office of Triumvir**

A quasi-dictatorial office, a triumvir was one of three dictators of the Roman republic/empire.

## **The Office of Praetor**

The office of praetor typically was held either by an army commander prior to or during battle or was an elected magistrate with various duties.

## **Pontifex Maximus**

The supreme pontiff is the office of Caesar, held first by Julius Caesar, a contemporary of Cicero's.



# Themes

## Retaining Republican Government

Cicero was widely known as a member of the 'old guard' of the Roman republic. He was an ardent believer that rulers should be elected by the people, or at least by those citizens with the proper qualifications. Dictatorship was politically unstable and unaccountable to the people; thus, a decent republic could not be run by a dictatorship. Cicero was a long-time senator and was once the Roman consul, the highest elected office in the Roman republic. When Caesar took over and effectively destroyed the power of the consul and the senate, Cicero was dismayed.

We can see throughout his speeches that Cicero aims to defend the republic. In one speech, Cicero argues that the courts should convict Verres to retain public confidence in these institutions. In another speech, he argues that the Roman republican form of government was under threat by Catiline. Even Cicero's mild speech in praise of Caesar mentions that dictatorship is unstable and that Caesar is in danger of being assassinated if he does not restore many of the republican liberties that he destroyed. Sometimes Cicero seems to act against the interests of republican government however. One example may be his recommendation that Pompey be given great power to fight the war against Mithridates. But he did this in order to protect the republic, not to undermine it. One might also see Cicero's speech in praise of Caesar as a reflection of lost loyalty to a republican form of government, but he uses the speech as an opportunity to encourage Caesar to rule in a more republican fashion in the face of political pressure not to criticize him.

## Destroying Enemies of the Republic

Cicero always saw himself as a protector of the Roman republic. From his time as a young lawyer to his death at the hands of Marcus Antonius, his actions appear to be guided by his patriotism and loyalty to Roman traditions. This is perhaps most prominent in his defense of republican institutions throughout his work and as we covered in the previous theme. But he is not only loyal to republicanism; he is also loyal to Rome. When Rome has what he perceives to be an enemy, Cicero attacks the man with great ferocity. Consider Verres, for instance. Cicero believed that Verres's corruption helped to make Rome hated among its subjects and only reinforced their conviction that their Roman rulers were evil. He also detested that Verres had killed Roman subjects. He praised Pompey to the heavens for ridding the Mediterranean of pirates and being a man of great character, both of which helped to restore honor to the republic. He despised Catiline for trying to gain power unconstitutionally and believed that when he had crushed that Catilinarian conspiracy that he had done the republic and the Roman people a great good. In his fourth speech against Catiline, he praises the good fortune of Rome, which is clearly one of his main goals in his life. And in Philippic



II, Cicero argues that he has only ever acted in the interests of the Roman people when Marcus Antonius accuses him of being a poor consul.

## Political Maneuvering

Cicero's oratorical skill brought him many accomplishments and blessings, as he was understood to be the greatest Roman orator of his day. Because he could be so powerfully convincing, he was able to accomplish impressive political maneuvers with his speeches. For instance, the *In Verrum* series helped to establish his reputation as an up and coming politician and orator and ultimately led him to exceed Hortensius (an older rival) in oratorical skill. His speech in favor of Pompey was used to capitalize on a popular proposal in order to strengthen his position amongst the people. The *Catilinarians* are full of political maneuvering. He exposes Catiline's attempts at a coup in the senate and forces Catiline to exile himself. Cicero is able to turn the people against Catiline with one of his speeches (*Catilinarian III*); Catiline had great support amongst many Roman inhabitants until Cicero gave this speech.

In the final *Catilinarian*, Cicero is able to convince the senate to vote to punish Catiline's fellow conspirators. His speech on behalf of Marcellus was a matter of subtle political positioning. He reestablished his presence in the senate and his reputation as a great orator. He praised Caesar but was able to slip in some criticisms of him all the same. In this way he signaled to his audience that while he would not resist Caesar, he would also not resist those who sought to restore the republic.

# Style

## Perspective

The book has two perspectives, one major and one minor. The minor perspective is that of the translator and commentator, D.H. Berry. At the beginning of each section of speeches, Barry gives a measured, lengthy and impartial summary of what historians know about the situations surrounding Cicero's speeches. He also gives detailed character sketches and reports on various theories concerning events that we have little information on. The major perspective, however, is Cicero's. Cicero gives all nine speeches that comprise the book. Each speech has a different purpose and so has a different perspective, particularly as they range over Cicero's entire political career. The first two speeches are aimed at the conviction of Verres, the next at the retention of Pompey as general. They are attempts to make Verres look as bad as possible and contain various insults of Verres alongside Cicero's ample evidence of Verres's guilt. His perspective is not impartial, dramatic and grandiose.

The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh speeches all concern the Catilinarian conspiracy. They inform the people of what is happening, tell the senate about Catiline's crimes and the crimes of his conspirators and exhort Catiline to retreat into exile. In these speeches, Cicero is concerned to crush the Catilinarian conspiracy and so aims to convince his audiences of the dangers of Catiline and his allies. The eighth speech praises Caesar for pardoning his long-time enemy Marcellus, but we do not know Cicero's true intentions in giving it. The speech is cryptic and may contain a condemnation of Caesar's actions while dictator. The final speech is aimed to discredit Marcus Antonius to as great a degree as Cicero is able.

## Tone

In a sense, there is a consistent tone throughout the book. At times, Cicero is accusatory and at others he praises, but in general there is a tone of seriousness, invective, inspiration and drama. Cicero always speaks with passion. For instance, he usually opens by immediately drawing his audience to a particular matter of the utmost importance. Further, he sometimes even argues that the gods are behind whatever proposal or event he is discussing. His speeches often contain incredible invective. In his condemnation of Verres, he goes on at great length about how horrible Verres's character is. And in the Catilinarians, Cicero does the same to Catiline. Finally, in Philippic II, Cicero launches an all out assault on Marcus Antonius calling him a lunatic, an idiot, impudent and perverted. Next the tone is full of inspiration. In his speech arguing for the retention of Pompey as general, he praised Pompey to the skies, arguing that Rome has no better general and that Pompey's abilities are 'superhuman'. When the Catilinarian conspiracy is crushed, Cicero tells the people in the forum that the gods are behind them. When he praises Marcellus, he argues that Caesar's accomplishments are almost too great and numerous for any mind to grasp. Finally, the





speeches are full of drama - Cicero's style of argument is so passionate and often melodramatic that it produces a sense that one is watching a soliloquy in a play. The degree of intensity Cicero brings to his oratory is enough to make one wonder if he takes himself seriously or whether his audiences were simply less put off by hyperbole than modern audiences.

## Structure

Cicero, *Political Speeches* is structured into nine chapters which correspond to nine speeches in Cicero's life. Each chapter is a speech that covers a particular conflict or engagement in Cicero's political career. The chapters are also arranged chronologically. Further, there are three speech 'types' in the book. The first is juridical - it is given in court and is aimed to defend or convict a defendant. The second is deliberative - it is usually given in the senate, but sometimes to the people - attempting to convince the audience of a particular point. Finally, there are epideictic speeches, which are given to display or give praise. The speeches are complimented by wonderful introductions by the translator, along with a variety of other resources, like chronologies, maps and so on.

The first speech, "In Verrem I," is one of two 'juridical' orations included in the book. Cicero is serving as prosecutor against the infamously corrupt governor of Sicily, Verres. There are seven "In Verrem" speeches, but five were never given because Verres fled before the trial ended. "In Verrem I" is the first of these speeches. The next speech is "In Verrem II.5." It is the last of the seven speeches, the last of the five that were never given. It lists all of Verres's crimes in detail and was rather damning. This speech was later released to the public. "De imperio Cn. Pompei" is a 'deliberative' speech. This speech was given during the second Mithridatic War. Mithridates, the king of Pontus, was at war with Rome over several territories. One of Rome's great generals, Pompey, had been leading the battle and he had to be renewed to continue legally leading Roman troops in battle. The speech argues in favor of retaining Pompey's command. The next four speeches are all given within a week or two of one another. They are given when Cicero is consul and faces a conspiracy to overthrow the Roman government. A patrician, Catiline, and some of his allies, wish to take over Rome for themselves. One of Cicero's greatest acts as consul was to quell this conspiracy, which he did partly through his speeches. The eighth speech, "Pro Marcello" is really a speech congratulating then dictator Caesar on pardoning his old rival Marcellus. Caesar had also lifted Cicero's exile; this was his first speech since his return. Finally, the ninth speech is "Philippic II," one of fourteen speeches where Cicero defends himself against vicious rhetorical attacks by Marc Antony.



## Quotes

"The very thing that was most to be desired, members of the jury, the one thing that will have most effect in reducing hatred felt towards your order and restoring the tarnished reputation of the courts, that it is which, in the current political crises, has been granted and presented to you." (13)

"As soon as he returned from his province, a contract was undertaken, at great cost, for buying up this court." (14)

"Members of the jury, I see that none of you is in any doubt that Gaius Verres has openly plundered everything in Sicily that is sacred or profane, public or private, and that he has engaged in every type of theft and robbery not merely without any compunction, but without even the slightest degree of concealment." (30)

"I pray that Rome, and my own sense of obligation, may be satisfied with this single prosecution that I have undertaken, and that from now on I may be allowed to defend good men instead of begin compelled to prosecute bad ones." (101)

"Mithridates, however, devoted all the time that followed not to effacing the memory of the first war, but to making preparations for a fresh one." (112)

"Immortal gods! Is it really possible that the astonishing, superhuman ability of a single mortal man has brought such a beacon of light to our country ...?" (121)

"In view of this, Catiline, finish what you have started: leave the city at long last." (160)

"We have been living for a long time now, conscript fathers, amid the dangers of a conspiracy and the attempts on our lives ..." (168)

"How lucky Rome would be, if it could indeed get rid of this urban trash!" (172)

"Now, citizens, prepare your own armies and your own defenses to fight these crack troops of Catiline's!" (178)

"We consider the day on which we are saved to be at least as jubilant and joyful as the day on which we are born ..." (181)

"It is in your own hearts that I would like all my triumphs, all my decorations of honor, monuments of glory, and badges of praise to be founded and grounded." (190)

"How can we call it cruelty when the crime we are punishing is so monstrous?" (197)

"You have a leader who is thinking of you and not of himself - something you do not always have." (201)



"It is your task, Gaius Caesar, and yours along, to restore everything that you can now see lying battered and shattered ... by the violence of war." (218)

"We cannot be secure, Gaius Caesar, unless you too are secure ..." (221)

"Would you like us, then, to look at your record from your childhood onwards?" (244)

"Two things alone I long for: first, that when I die I may leave the Roman people free - the immortal gods could bestow on me no greater blessing; and second, that each person's fate may reflect the way he has behaved towards his country." (270)



## Topics for Discussion

Do you think Verres would have been convicted had he not gone into exile? Were Cicero's accusations in *Verrum II.5* enough to convict him? Please give a clear argument for your answer.

Some worried that Pompey should not be given so much military power, but Cicero disagreed. Why did he disagree? Was he right to disagree or not? Please give a clear argument for your answer.

Should Cicero have sought Catiline's death in the first *Catilinarian*? Or would exile have been sufficient?

Should Cicero have supported the death penalty for Catiline's co-conspirators? What do you think of the argument between Silanus and Caesar? Who is right and why?

What do you think is going on in *Pro Marcello*? Why is Cicero giving the speech? Please list as many reasons as you can. Speculate, but defend your speculation.

Do you think Cicero is too harsh on Marcus Antonius in *Philippic II* or not? Please defend your answer.

Taking the book as a whole, what do you think of Cicero's oratorical style? What is good about? What is bad about it? Please defend your answer.