

Tip of the Tongue: The End of Political Speech

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Course Description

In his *Brutus*, Cicero considers the history of Roman oratory and its perilous decline in the political upheavals of the late Republic. This anxiety presages the problems of the early empire, where ascendant autocratic rule complicates if not outright undermines the traditional role of political and legal oratory: in a political system where the rule of law is embodied in the principate, to what degree does one need politicians and lawyers to persuade a senate or a jury? Roman writers were not of one mind in their approach to these pressing questions, and this upper-level Latin course examines how two towering figures of imperial literature—the historian Tacitus and the rhetorical educator Quintilian—treat these anxieties.

In his *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, Tacitus meditates in dialogue form upon the declining role of political speech under an emperor. Sketching a path to *virtus* that avoids the perils and pointlessness of imperial politics, he offers in his *Agricola* a vision of circumscribed achievement when substantive accomplishment is reserved for one ruling family. Taking a more optimistic view, Quintilian argues in his *Institutio Oratoria* that the Roman ideal of a “good man skilled in speaking” is still worth pursuing under an autocrat. Hopeful that his own era will produce a new Cicero, Quintilian persistently advocates for the training of virtuous Romans from a lost political era.

Turning in its final week to Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, the course ponders how societies of any era and any political character make civic excellence available. Voicing his own skepticism of a democracy’s ability to inspire political achievement among its citizens, Tocqueville’s text revisits the questions central to these earlier Latin works on the demise of oratory: under what conditions, to what end, and for whom should a citizen devote himself to political life?

Required Texts

- Cicero. *Brutus, Orator*. Edited and translated by G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Tacitus. *Dialogus de Oratoribus*. Edited by R. Mayer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- —. *Agricola*. Edited by A. J. Woodman and C. S. Kraus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Edited by Olivier Zunz. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Library of America, 2004.

- Quintilian. *Institutionis oratoriae liber XII*. Edited by R. G. Austin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948.

Course Overview

- Week 1
 - Cicero, *Brutus*: §20–76 (Latin); §1-200 (English)
 - Dyck, Andrew R. “Rivals into Partners: Hortensius and Cicero.” *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 57, no. 2 (2008): 142-73.
- Week 2
 - Cicero, *Brutus*: §292–333 (Latin); §201–333 (English)
 - Grube, G. M. A. “Educational, Rhetorical, and Literary Theory in Cicero.” *Phoenix* 16, no. 4 (1962): 234-57.
- Week 3
 - Tacitus, *Dialogus*: 1–14 (Latin); 1–41 (English)
 - Goldberg, Sander. “Appreciating Aper: The Defence of Modernity in Tacitus’ *Dialogus de oratoribus*.” *Classical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1999): 224-237.
- Week 4
 - Tacitus, *Dialogus*: 15–26 (Latin)
 - Levene, D. S. “Tacitus’ *Dialogus* As Literary History.” *TAPA* 134, no. 1 (2004): 157–200.
- Week 5
 - Tacitus, *Dialogus*: 27–35 (Latin)
 - Strunk, Thomas E. “Offending the Powerful: Tacitus’ *Dialogus de Oratoribus* and Safe Criticism.” *Mnemosyne* 63, no. 2 (2010): 241-267.
- Week 6
 - Tacitus, *Dialogus*: 36–41 (Latin)
 - Barnes, T. D. “The Significance of Tacitus’ *Dialogus de Oratoribus*.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90 (1986): 225-244.
- Week 7
 - Quintilian, *Institutio XII*: Pr. and Ch. 1; Pr.–Ch. 11 (English)
 - Brinton, Alan. “Quintilian, Plato, and the ‘Vir Bonus’.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16, no. 3 (1983): 167-84.
- Week 8
 - Quintilian, *Institutio XII*: Ch. 2–4 (Latin)
 - Walzer, Arthur. “Quintilian’s ‘Vir Bonus’ and the Stoic Wise Man.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2003): 25-41.
- Week 9
 - Quintilian, *Institutio XII*: Ch. 10 (Latin)
 - Hendrickson, G. L. “The Origin and Meaning of the Ancient Characters of Style.” *The American Journal of Philology* 26, no. 3 (1905): 249-290, 376.
- Week 10
 - Quintilian, *Institutio XII*: Ch. 11 (Latin); Book XII (English)
 - Witterbottom, Michael. “Approaching the End: Quintilian 12.11.” *Acta Classica* 48, no. 1 (2005): 175-183.

- Week 11
 - Tacitus, *Agricola*: 1–9 (Latin); 1–46 (English)
 - Sailor, D. “Becoming Tacitus: Significance and Inconsequentiality in the Prologue of *Agricola*.” *Classical Antiquity* 23, no. 1 (2004): 139-177.
- Week 12
 - Tacitus, *Agricola*: 9–23 (Latin)
 - Schadee, Hester. “Caesar’s Construction of Northern Europe: Inquiry, Contact and Corruption in ‘De Bello Gallico.’” *Classical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2008): 158-180.
- Week 13
 - Tacitus, *Agricola*: 23–43 (Latin)
 - Keitel, Elizabeth. “Homeric Antecedents to the *corhortatio* in the Ancient Historians.” *Classical World* 80, no. 1 (1987): 153-172.
- Week 14
 - Tacitus, *Agricola*: 44–46 (Latin)
 - Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: Vol. I, Part 2, Ch. 6-8; Vol. II, Part 1, Ch. 1-2

Course Requirements and Grading

This course has a twofold focus: one the one hand, it aims to improve students’ attentiveness to the styles of these various authors, and on the other hand, it asks students to consider seriously the texts’ arguments about the role of political speech under challenging circumstances. Reflecting those aims, the requirements of the course are as follows:

- Participation and In-Class Translation (10%)
- Close Reading Essay (%15)
- Final Paper (30%)
- Translation-Based Midterm Exam (15%)
- Translation-Based Final Exam (30%)