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ROLE-BASED PERSUASION AND STRATEGIC EMBARRASSMENT IN CICERO'S LETTERS

1. *Role theory in the modern and ancient context*

Late Republican Roman society was deeply concerned with a person's roles (defined here as the label applied to a patterned set of expected social behaviours): various distinguishing elements served to emphasise differences in status and their corresponding behavioural expectations, both vertically throughout society and horizontally among the Roman elite[1]. Consequently, the language developed by the elite to legitimise their social and political primacy was largely interactional in nature, reflecting the importance of external perception for an individual's social and political leverage[2]. This preoccupation with external validation of one's self-presentation fits closely with the sociological concept of face, defined by Erving Goffman as «the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact»[3]. Scholarship on Late Republican communication has recognised the importance of the mutual preservation of face in the maintenance of senatorial cooperation, especially with respect to the demands of politeness in epistolary correspondence[4]. In particular, face and the recognition of it has been discussed in connection with Latin concepts such as *dignitas*[5], *verecundia*[6], and *decorum*[7], all of which predi-

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[1] Unceta Gómez 2019, 292-293.

[2] Hellegouarc'h 1963.

[3] Goffman 1967-1972, 5.

[4] Hall 2009, 5-8; White 2010, 79 and 118-122. See also Krostenko 2004, with a focus on the language of «social performance» in the Late Republic.

[5] Hall 2005, 200.

[6] Kaster 2005, 15-20; Hall 2009, 8-13, who defines *verecundia* as the «politeness of respect» that is associated with discernment politeness.

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cate a sensitivity to and maintenance of one's place within a hierarchical social structure. Face, as it is understood in relation to Roman politics, is therefore a beneficial quality for political actors to uphold, and is one of the driving forces for cooperation among the senatorial elite.

This understanding of face highlights the cooperative aspect of Roman politics. However, it overlooks the potential for someone's face to be deliberately undermined: a possibility which has been acknowledged as early as Goffman's seminal work on the concept[8]. I argue that this potential for deliberate face threatening constitutes an important means of persuasion among the Roman Republican elite, especially as a form of extra-institutional political communication: that is, communication regarding a political topic which occurs outside the institutions of Roman government such as senatorial debates[9]. An exploration of the development of roles within instances of communication among the Roman elite using role theory provides greater insight into this more strategic manipulation of face. Namely, I contend that a Roman politician could attempt to influence his peers by drawing attention to aspects of their role, effectively challenging an interlocutor to act in line with the values attributed to them or to risk losing face, and by extension their social and political credibility and influence.

This article proposes two aims. First, after presenting the theoretical background of role theory, I will use role theory to conduct a close reading of three letters written to Cicero in April and May 49 BC by Marcus Antonius, Julius Caesar, and Marcus Caelius Rufus[10], who attempt to convince Cicero not to join Gnaeus Pompeius in his fight against Caesar. This will establish the extent to which the emphasis on certain aspects of Cicero's role(s) constitutes a deliberate persuasive strategy, especially when considered alongside the politeness frameworks which have already been applied to Cicero's letters in earlier scholarship. Comparison with Cicero's reactions to these messages in his letters to Atticus demonstrates an awareness of this strategy and allows for some com-

[7] Unceta Gómez 2019, 304 connects *decorum* to Watts' (2003) notion of «politic behaviour», marking it as a politeness-related phenomenon which recognises the face of an interlocutor.

[8] Goffman 1967-1972, 24-25. Hall 2009, 82-87 provides a brief discussion of this in the context of politeness and persuasion, but from the perspective of flattery as a form of face saving.

[9] Following the definition of Rosillo-López 2021, 17.

[10] Anton. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8A = 199A SB; Caes. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8B = 199B SB; Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A = 200A SB.

ment on its effectiveness. It must be recognised that Cicero's letters cannot give us a true picture of his inner beliefs: as G. O. Hutchinson notes, the constant craftsmanship on display in the construction of Cicero's correspondence «prevents any direct or straightforward access to history»[11]. Moreover, these letters ultimately failed in their attempt to persuade Cicero: he did end up joining Pompeius. However, these letters have been selected because they are one of the few instances where we can establish both sides of an epistolary dialogue: Cicero's reactions to each letter suggest differing degrees of efficacy in their strategy, allowing for some comment on what makes a role-based face threat more or less effective. Additionally, I offer another case study – an epistolary exchange between Marcus Antonius and Cicero in April 44 BC – as a successful example of a persuasive role-based face threat, with reflection on how this request might have been framed more appropriately than the letter from 49 BC[12]. The combination of these close readings demonstrates that role-based face threats were a viable persuasive strategy, especially when implemented alongside other strategies of polite communication.

The second aim of this article is to reflect on the broader utility of role theory as a model for interpreting Roman communication. Specifically, I aim to highlight the ability of role theory to account for strategies of self- and other-presentation in both dialogic and narrative modes of communication: something which is limited in comparable methodologies such as politeness analysis. Moreover, I will discuss how role theory illuminates certain unique properties of epistolary communication in a persuasive context. Finally, I will consider how the examination of roles can extend beyond a single genre for a more comprehensive view of self-presentation across Roman communication.

2. *Role theory in the modern and ancient context*

Role theory developed concurrently among several disciplines in the late 1920s and early 1930s to explain the behaviours characteristic of people in certain social contexts[13]. In role theory, people occupy a num-

[11] Hutchinson 1998, 23.

[12] Anton. Cic. *Att.* 14, 13A = 367A SB; Cic. *Att.* 14, 13B = 367B SB.

[13] Biddle 1979, ix. For a concise summary of the development of role theory, see Callero 2008; for a bibliography of role theory scholarship, van der Horst 2016.

ber of social positions based on traits such as age, gender, profession, social class, personal opinion, or particular circumstances resulting from current events. These "roles" identify commonly recognised sets of individuals, such as Romans, senators, or philosophers: the cumulative grouping of someone's roles might be described as their social identity. Roles are associated with sets of characteristics and patterned responses to situations and interactions with others, which are described as "behaviours." People in a society are, to varying degrees, aware of these associations, and use them to inform their interactions with people in those roles: this awareness can be termed "expectations" for another role's behaviours[14].

Cicero expresses a similar notion in his treatise *De officiis*, during his discussion of the «four *personae* theory»[15]. Cicero attributes people with four *personae* which cumulatively constitute a person's identity: 1) a universal state of being which distinguishes humans from beasts; 2) an individual personality which governs one's innate talents and qualities; 3) a social status which is influenced by chance and circumstance, which I equate with the role theory concept of a role; and 4) a character which people assume by choice through their actions, which I equate with the concept of behaviours. For Cicero, *decorum* – conduct which is appropriate to the social norms of an interaction[16] – is derived from adopting a final *persona* by choice which is most befitting of the first two *personae*, insofar as the circumstances imposed by the third *persona* allow. As Joseph Hellegouarc'h has observed, *decus* – and by extension *decorum* – is etymologically and functionally related to *dignitas*, in the sense that both denote a moral judgment of a person's ability to conform to their political and social roles[17]. Cicero's integration of *decorum* into his discussion of virtues in his *De officiis* reflects his personal concern for the projection of a consistent self-presentation throughout his political career[18]. Likewise, the emphasis on *dignitas* as a fundamental political value shows that the concern was prevalent among the Roman elite[19]. Conse-

[14] Biddle 1986, 68-70, with some variation in the specific terminology used.

[15] Cic. *off.* 1, 107-115; see also Gill 1988; Schofield 2012.

[16] Gill 1988, 195-196; Unceta Gómez 2019, 304.

[17] Hellegouarc'h 1963, 413-415.

[18] On *decorum* as a central virtue in Cicero's adaptation of Stoic philosophy in the *De officiis*, see Schofield 2012.

[19] See, for example, Morstein-Marx 2009, which focuses on Caesar's desire to maintain his *dignitas*. Alternatively, we might look to political texts such as Quintus Cicero's *Com-*

quently, we can say with certainty that roles, expectations, and conformity to those expectations were carefully considered aspects of daily life for the aristocracy of the Late Republic.

This article adopts a variation on role theory proposed by Peter Callero, in which roles function as resources which can be attributed to the self or another to gain or limit access to other types of resources, especially cultural, social, and material capital[20]. In particular, this article argues that it is possible to exploit the general desire for individuals to be perceived as matching the expectations of their role by emphasising those expectations within a dialogue, using the role of the other to gain social or political leverage over them. I describe this process as the «topicalisation» of expectations: a term adapted from linguistics to describe the processes by which a topic is identified as the focus of a communication act[21]. The concept of topicalising role expectations was first examined in a 2011 study of Taiwanese business practices by Wei-Lin Melody Chang and Michael Haugh, in which they conclude that the topicalisation of *guānxi*, which in the Taiwanese context denotes the rights, obligations, and social debt of long-standing reciprocal business relationships, allows an individual to pressure their interlocutor to act favourably toward them without explicitly threatening their face: the topicalisation of the role creates a situation of «strategic embarrassment» which prompts the interlocutor to save face by conforming to role expectations[22].

This notion of topicalising expectations highlights the connection between three fields: role theory, facework, and politeness theory. E. Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor which underpins his study of facework also played a significant part in the development of role theory: the two fields are connected in the notion that people play certain roles, and their performance of these is the criterion for coherent social interaction[23]. Goffman observes that «once someone takes on a self-image expressed through face they will be expected to live up to it»[24], demonstrating a relationship between face management and role awareness.

mentariolum petitionis, or the various political graffiti which adorn Pompeii's walls and adopt *dignus* or *dignitas* as key indicators of political proficiency; on both, see Tatum 2019.

[20] Callero 1994, 229-230; see also Baker-Faulkner 1991.

[21] Sportiche-Koopman-Stabler 2014, 189-191.

[22] Chang-Haugh 2011, 2953.

[23] Goffman 1959-1990; Goffman 1967-1972; see also van der Horst 2016.

[24] Goffman 1967-1972, 9.

This creates an avenue for social control: Edward Gross and Gregory Stone note in a study on embarrassment – one of the consequences of non-conformity to a role[25] – that one party could attempt to establish power over another by presenting a situation in which «only by following the line established by the one who sets the scene may embarrassment be avoided»[26]. In turn, politeness theory – a field which has already found fruitful application within the study of ancient communication[27] – seeks to understand the ways in which these face threats could be mitigated[28]. Most politeness theory, following Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's foundational study, distinguishes between «positive» and «negative» face, respectively representing the desire for approval of one's self-image and the desire not to have one's actions impeded[29]. The topicalisation of role expectations primarily challenges positive face, reflecting the closer association between this understanding of face and Goffman's original interpretation of the concept[30]. A reading of role theory set against politeness studies therefore provides fresh insight into the persuasive practices of the Roman elite: role theory shows how the topicalisation of expectations provides social pressure to conform to a line of action by threatening an interlocutor's positive face, while the implementation of politeness strategies attempts to mitigate the effect of this challenge on the interlocutor's negative face and minimise the directness of the positive-face threat, such that embarrassment and a loss of face only occurs if the interlocutor refuses to adopt the suggested line of action.

3. *Cicero's role in early 49 BC*

The case studies I have chosen to demonstrate the topicalisation of role expectations in practice occur in 49 BC: one of the more volatile years for both Cicero and the Roman Republic[31]. Following the outbreak

[25] Gross-Stone 1964, 1-2.

[26] Gross-Stone 1964, 15. Gross-Stone 1964 also provide a useful overview of the prerequisites for embarrassment.

[27] I highlight, for example, Unceta Gómez and Berger's 2022 edited volume on ancient politeness, and Hall 2009 on Ciceronian epistolary politeness.

[28] This field is largely indebted to the work of Brown-Levinson 1978-1987.

[29] Brown-Levinson 1978-1987, 61.

[30] Bargiela-Chiappini 2003.

[31] Tempest 2014, 161-164 offers a concise but effective summary of the context and key relationships involved in Cicero's position in early 49 BC.

of hostilities between Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompeius, Cicero initially aimed to position himself as a mediator for peace, choosing to remain in Italy to act in this capacity if the opportunity arose. By early 49 BC, this possibility was increasingly less likely: Caesar in particular was at pains to claim Cicero's support to legitimise his authority, especially among the senators who had remained in Rome after Pompeius' flight from the city.

In a letter to his close friend Atticus dated to 2 May 49 BC, Cicero indicates his intention to leave Italy for Malta, removing any possible connection between himself and Caesar, and maintaining the possibility of joining Pompeius' camp at a later date (Cic. *Att.* 10, 8 = SB 199). Cicero's stated reasons for his decision help understand his perception of his own role at the time. Cicero provides three key reasons why he intends to leave for Malta: (1) he is trying to avoid doing something dishonourable[32]; (2) he had hoped for peace, and did not want to provoke Caesar's anger if this transpired[33]; and (3) he wants to act properly for the sake of his daughter, Tullia[34]. These expectations for Cicero's self-attributed role dictate his behaviour at the time, such as his decision to leave Italy.

At the end of this letter to Atticus, Cicero attaches two letters sent to him in April 49 BC, from Caesar's second-in-command Marcus Antonius (Anton. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8A = 199A SB) and Caesar himself (Caes. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8B = 199B SB). We also have a letter from Marcus Caelius Rufus, Cicero's protégé who had aligned himself with Caesar, which Cicero encloses in another letter to Atticus (Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A = 200A SB). While the purpose of these letters was to convince Cicero not to join Pompeius, an act which would indicate Cicero's implicit support for Caesar, it is important that the letters were framed not as speaker-oriented requests but rather as addressee-oriented advice or

[32] *Ut non sit dubium quin turpiter facere cum periculo fugiamus, quod fugeremus etiam cum salute* («There is no doubt that I should avoid a dishonourable course fraught with danger when I would avoid it even if it carried security», trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999, adapted).

[33] *Fefellit ea m<e> res quae fortasse non debuit, sed fefellit: pacem putavi fore. Quae si esset, iratum mihi Caesarem esse, cum idem amicus esset Pompeio, nolui* («One thing misled me, perhaps it ought not to have done but it did: I thought there would be peace. If that came about I did not want to have Caesar angry with me while on friendly terms with Pompey», trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999).

[34] *Tamen nos recte facere et bene audire vult* («Yet she [sc. Tullia] wishes me to do the right thing and to stand well in men's eyes», trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999).

warnings, presenting what the sender perceived as the most appropriate course of action for Cicero within the capacity of his role[35]. The role relationships between Cicero and each sender therefore become important for dictating what resources they can engage with – in this case, which aspects of Cicero's role are the most appropriate for topicalisation – as well as the extent to which this strategic embarrassment must be mitigated with politeness strategies to be persuasive. Caelius' mentor-student relationship presents a marked difference in this respect from the power differential in Caesar's relationship with Cicero, or the historical tension between Cicero and Antonius. Despite these differences, the three senders adopt a similar general strategy of topicalising certain expectations within Cicero's various roles, and connecting these expectations to a line of action favourable to Caesar.

4. *Antonius' initial topicalisation of expectations*

The first letter Cicero forwards to Atticus as evidence of the topicalisation of expectations against him is from Marcus Antonius. The relationship between the two men was cold, which Cicero claims in his second *Philippic* oration was due to his appearance in a civil case against Antonius' interests, and perhaps more significantly, his involvement in the execution of Antonius' stepfather and refusal to release his body for burial (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 3; 2, 17). Despite this history, their mutual relationship with Caesar creates a role relationship – that of two mutual friends – which enables a dialogue between them. It is this role of Caesar's friend which Antonius makes central to his request for Cicero to remain in Italy.

Before he topicalises this role and its expectations, Antonius briefly introduces the behaviour he wishes to discourage from Cicero, and connects it to other aspects of Cicero's role:

> Trans mare <te iturum esse> credere non possum, cum tanti facias Dolabellam <et> Tulliam tuam, feminam lectissimam, tantique ab omnibus nobis fias; quibus mehercule dignitas amplitudoque tua paene carior est quam tibi ipsi.

[35] On this distinction, see Berger 2021.

> *I cannot believe that you mean to go abroad, considering how fond you are of Dolabella and that most admirable young lady your daughter, and how fond we all are of you. I assure you that we care about your face and power more almost than you do yourself.* (Anton. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8A, 1 = 199A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999, adapted)[36].

Here, shock at what Antonius deems to be an uncharacteristic behaviour – Cicero's intention to remove himself from Italy – is justified with a description of the expectations Antonius would attribute to Cicero's self-presentation, namely, his concern for his daughter Tullia and son-in-law Dolabella, and his concern for his personal *dignitas* and *amplitudo*, both qualities associated with conformity to the expectations of the elite Roman political role[37].

In politeness terms, this statement comprises a strategic use of a positive-face threat – that is, a threat to Cicero's self-conceptualisation and the assumption it will be accepted by others[38] – in the first part («I cannot believe [...] how fond we all are of you»), and an exaggerated positive-face reinforcement tinged with ironic criticism in the second («I assure you»). Of the three letters presented to Cicero, Antonius' is the one most directly engaged with face concerns in the sense of Cicero's public-facing self-image: as we will see below, Caesar's letter prioritises the demands of *amicitia*, while Caelius' emphasises familial loyalty. I argue that this is a reflection of the role relationship between Antonius and Cicero. Although Antonius attempts to deploy a «polite fiction» that he and Cicero are *amici* through his repeated emphasis on his affection for Cicero, the reality is that they are not friends[39]. Instead, the common ground they share is based on their roles as senators. Therefore, the expectations on which it is appropriate for Antonius to focus should stem from this senatorial role: specifically, the expectation that senators should collaborate to maintain each other's public images. As such, Antonius focuses primarily on the qualities Cicero would need to maintain to maintain his face as a senator: his *dignitas* and *amplitudo*.

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[36] Throughout this article, I have adapted the most recent Loeb Classical Library translations of texts in order to place further emphasis on terms relating to roles, expectations, and face.

[37] On *dignitas*, Hellegouarc'h 1963, 388-411 and Hall 2005, 200; on *amplitudo*, Hellegouarc'h 1963, 229-230.

[38] Cf. Brown-Levinson 1978-1987, 61.

[39] Hall 2009, 66-67 on the polite fiction of *amicitia*.

The second half of Antonius' letter repeats the topicalisation of expectations for Cicero, and more explicitly connects these to Antonius' desired behaviour for him, this time in the context of Caesar's friendship. Antonius invokes his own role as a close friend and agent of Caesar to provide himself with a sense of legitimacy as he comments on Caesar's attitude toward Cicero:

> Sic enim volo te tibi persuadere, mihi neminem esse cariorem te excepto Caesare meo, meque illud una iudicare, Caesarem maxime in suis M. Ciceronem reponere. qua re, mi Cicero, te rogo ut tibi omnia integra serves.
>
> *For I wish you to persuade yourself that no one means more to me than you except my friend Caesar, and that at the same time I believe Caesar gives the name of M. Cicero a place among his most particular friends. Therefore, my dear Cicero, I beg you not to compromise yourself in any way* (Anton. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8A, 2 = 199A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999).

Antonius' role relationship with Caesar allows him to speak on Caesar's attitudes, and Caesar's attitudes topicalise the expectation that Cicero should not offend Caesar. This leads into the advice itself: «do not compromise yourself in any way,» that is, «do not leave Italy». Antonius' self-attribution of a role as Caesar's close friend suggests a degree of competence regarding the dispensation of advice relating to his wishes, which in turn facilitates Antonius' turn toward a more binding form of advice-giving indicated through the verbs *volo persuadere* and *rogo*[40]. In this way, *amicitia* with Caesar is introduced as another role for which Cicero must meet the demands, recalling Cicero's personal obligations to Caesar for past benefactions.

Antonius' invocation of Caesar demonstrates another prominent aspect of strategic embarrassment via topicalised role expectations: the influence of multiple parties. Embarrassment as an emotion requires an awareness that an audience has witnessed one's failure to conform to a role[41]. Antonius makes reference to a range of third parties: Dolabella, Tullia, an undefined *nobis* who care for Cicero (implying that he was not alone in constructing the message of this letter, as I will discuss below), and Caesar are identified throughout. Furthermore, Antonius

[40] Cf. Berger 2021, 266-267, 276.

[41] Modigliani 1971, 16, 23; Sharkey 1992, 257-258; Oeldorf-Hirsch-Birnholtz-Hancock 2017, 93.

identifies his courier not as a slave or freedman, but his friend Calpurnius (*Att.* 10, 8A, 2 = 199A SB), suggesting another influential party who might judge Cicero's role performance[42]. Therefore, within this letter, Antonius establishes a set of expectations for Cicero, links these to a desirable action, and provides an audience who will witness any embarrassment caused if Cicero fails to reconcile his behaviour with these expectations: all necessary prerequisites for a potentially embarrassing scenario[43], and all of which are facilitated by the interaction of roles within the letter.

However, while role theory helps clarify Antonius' line of persuasion, politeness theory perhaps better accounts for the failure of the approach. Cicero describes Antonius' letter as *odiosas* («disagreeable»; Cic. *Att.* 10, 8, 10 = 199 SB). Antonius' overreliance on politeness language to produce this polite fiction becomes disingenuous; moreover, the underlying critiques of Antonius' comments, in not showing proper respect to Cicero's autonomy (in particular «we care about your face and power more almost than you do yourself»), present too much of a threat to both Cicero's positive and negative face that the letter might be read more as threatening than as a reminder to behave according to defined expectations[44]. Additionally, it may be the case that the polite fiction of their friendship was too unrealistic to justify Antonius' discussion: roles are only useful insofar as both parties accept their premises[45]. The attribution of roles to each party therefore provides a framework for Antonius' persuasive aims: his ineffective formulation of those roles and Cicero's negative reception of his politeness language leads to his failure to persuade.

5. *Caesar's letter and the* amicus *role*

The same day Cicero received Antonius' letter, he received a letter from Caesar himself, who was *en route* to Hispania to fight the Pompeians. The letter is short, and Caesar's tone rather curt. However, Caesar, more expertly than Antonius, topicalises the expectations of Cicero's

[42] Smadja 1976, 92-93; McCutcheon 2013, 189-190.
[43] Oeldorf-Hirsch-Birnholtz-Hancock 2017, 92-93.
[44] Hall 2009, 87-90.
[45] Callero 1994, 238-239.

roles as his *amicus* and as a moderator for the peace and wellbeing of the *res publica* to advise Cicero not to oppose him[46].

Caesar's address begins with a value judgement of Cicero's role performance: he presumes Cicero will do *nihil imprudenter* («nothing imprudent»; Caes. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8B, 1 = 199B SB), presenting a similar strategic positive-face threat to the opening of Antonius' letter. Following this, Caesar establishes the connection between Cicero's role and his advice: Caesar appeals (*petendum*) to Cicero not to join Pompeius on account of their mutual goodwill (*nostra benevolentia*). After this initial advice, Caesar uses the term *amicitia* to characterise his relationship to Cicero three times throughout the letter. In the first two instances, *amicitia* provides the justification for Cicero not to act against Caesar: to do so would be a «grave offence» (*gravis iniuria*). On the other hand, in the final instance Caesar offers his *amicitia* as security for Cicero to follow an honourable (*honestus*) path by maintaining neutrality. *Amicitia* was a prevalent expression of a role relationship in Cicero's literary corpus, where it represents both a notion of genuine friendship and a sense of obligation to uphold the interests of one's friends[47]. Furthermore, Cicero himself had asserted his *amicitia* with Caesar on previous occasions, including publicly in an open letter to Publius Lentulus Spinther in 54 BC (Cic. *fam.* 1, 9 = 20 SB). Therefore, the topicalisation of Cicero's *amicus* role serves two persuasive purposes. It functions as a form of what Hall terms «affiliative politeness»[48], by reducing the social distance between Caesar and Cicero. However, it also presents a positive-face threat by prompting Cicero to uphold the mutual goodwill inherent in the role, which in this instance Caesar connects to the action of neutrality.

It is of course necessary to recognise the power imbalance between both parties in this interaction. Caesar possessed considerable social and political resources which Cicero could not access at the time. This imbalance goes some way towards accounting for Caesar's lack of concern for Cicero's face in that Caesar's power mitigates the potential loss of face for both parties[49]. However, in practice Caesar could exercise very little of this power over Cicero. Cicero had left Rome a few months earlier to avoid meeting Caesar (*Att.* 7, 10, 1 = 133 SB): Caesar could not forcibly re-

[46] Morello 2018, 232.
[47] One of the best analyses of *amicitia* remains Brunt 1965.
[48] Hall 2009, 13-14.
[49] Cf. Ridealgh-Unceta Gómez 2020 on «Potestas».

call him to the city, and their statuses as members of the Senate were at least ostensibly similar enough that explicit demonstration of a power difference could cause offence. The topicalisation of the *amicus* role therefore attempts to frame the interaction as one of friendly advice and a reminder of Cicero's expectations, and to shift the focus away from the power imbalance which would impinge upon Cicero's face. In this way, role attribution and politeness strategies work together to frame Caesar's advice: the lack of explicit concern for Cicero's face implicitly reminds the reader of the power imbalance, but the topicalisation of the *amicus* role provides a softer touch toward the attempt to influence Cicero's behaviour.

While most of Caesar's letter focuses on the expectations of Cicero's *amicus* role, there is one moment in which Caesar expands Cicero's role beyond their *amicitia* relationship. Caesar states that «to hold aloof from civil quarrels is surely the most fitting course for a good, peace-loving man and a good citizen» (*quid viro bono et quieto et bono civi magis convenit quam abesse a civilibus controversiis*; Caes. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8B, 2 = 199B SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999). The terms *boni viri* and *boni cives* feature heavily in Cicero's political rhetoric as a role comprising brave people who supported the interests of the Senate: a role he strived to attribute to himself[50]. Caesar's topicalisation of these qualities therefore exploits Cicero's previous self-attributions of the roles to hold him accountable to his own self-image, presenting a compelling positive-face threat in the process.

Caesar's letter is not so explicit in its introduction of third-party witnesses as Antonius', which aligns with his general tendency toward focusing on the personal intimacy of his epistolary relationships[51]. However, it is likely that there was some collaboration between Caesar and Antonius regarding their message, if not their exact content[52]. Caesar was used to communicating through surrogates, and would often do so in communication with peers such as Cicero to complexify or multiply the effect of a message[53]. Thematically, these letters align to reinforce the expectations of Cicero as *amicus* and statesman, with Caesar's letter

[50] Achard 1973.

[51] White 2003, 86-88.

[52] Shackleton Bailey 1968, 410-411 suggests that Antonius was in Italy while Caesar was in Liguria at the time these letters were written. As such, it may have been a happy coincidence that the letters reached Cicero in quick succession; however, the corroboration between their messages probably reflects a broader strategy on the part of Caesar, which would have been communicated to Antonius.

[53] White 2003, 77-80. See, for example, the exchange between Cicero, Balbus, and Oppius in *Att.* 9, 7A-C = 174A-C SB.

validating the advice Antonius claims to present on good authority as Caesar's friend. This amplifies the pressure to align with expectations, and also increases the awareness of an audience who would witness a potentially embarrassing act of non-conformity.

It is harder to judge within the content of the letters why Caesar's advice failed. Barring the lack of concern for Cicero's face described above, the letter seems to sufficiently engage in enough politeness language to mitigate a face threat: on this reading, contextual factors such as Cicero's non-conformity and pragmatic worries must supply the answer. However, I argue that role theory can help account for this decision. Cicero throughout *Att.* 10, 8 (199 SB) attributes a role to Caesar as a tyrannical leader (*Att.* 10, 8, 6) who had expressed disapproval of Cicero's actions (*Att.* 10, 8, 3), in a stark contrast to Caesar's characterisation of his relationship with Cicero. Such a role discrepancy is damaging to Caesar's credibility as a reliable and rational actor – such is the premise behind the strategic embarrassment in which he tried to engage Cicero – and so the polite language and topicalisation of expectations can be interpreted as disingenuous in a similar vein to Antonius' letter. Consequently, on a role-based reading of this letter, Cicero's negative reception reflects a response which is in keeping with his own self-attributed role as a mediator for state peace against the request of Caesar, an unreliable actor who displays inconsistencies in his own role performance.

6. *Caelius' letter, family dynamics, and emotional appeal*

A day after Cicero sent Atticus the letter and attachments examined above, Cicero dispatched another letter – to which we will return momentarily – and an attachment from his protégé Marcus Caelius Rufus, who had fallen in with Caesar (Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A = 200 SB; also published as Cael. Cic. *fam.* 8, 16 = 153 SB). Unlike the *amicus* relationship Caesar and Antonius attempted to convey, which sought to impart a sense of equality and mutual trust, Caelius focuses on the role relationship between himself as a *protégé* and Cicero as a mentor[54]. This relationship gives Caelius access to a social resource distinct from those of

[54] A similar role relationship would be invoked in 44-43 BC by Cicero himself, in his letters with Plancus. See discussion of how Cicero uses this relationship to attempt to influence Plancus in van der Blom 2024, 257-271.

Antonius and Caesar, in that he speaks from a position of marked deference to Cicero, whom he frames as a *paterfamilias*. Additionally, Caelius could profess a degree of distance from Caesar which would allow him to frame Caesar's role from the perspective of a passive observer rather than an intimate friend: while he notes that he had met and spoken with Caesar (*Att.* 10, 9A, 1; 4), the language with which he describes this relationship is not as intimate as that deployed by Antonius. Caelius therefore has access to potentially powerful resources of persuasion with regard to Cicero; however, this requires a careful use of politeness strategies to balance the effective use of these roles without overstepping the boundaries of deference or loyalty which would cause his role to appear inconsistent.

From early in Caelius' letter, there is a focus on emotion: he notes his agitation that Cicero considers nothing but grief (*nihil nisi triste cogitare*; *Att.* 10, 9A, 1). This quickly leads into the establishment of Caelius' role relationship with Cicero, as well as his advice:

> Per fortunas tuas, Cicero, per liberos te oro et obsecro ne quid gravius te salute et incolumitate tua consulas.
>
> *I beg and implore you, Cicero, in the name of your fortunes and your children, to take no step which will jeopardise your wellbeing and safety* (Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A, 1 = 200A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999).

The verbs indicating Caelius' advice, *oro* and *obsecro*, are markers of highly imposing directive acts such as supplication[55]. However, the urgency and imposition of these terms is justified in two ways. First, on a politeness reading, the request is framed as serving Cicero's benefit: although the request itself threatens Cicero's negative face, it is framed as something which would improve his positive face. The second justification, on a role-based reading of the request, is that Caelius frames Cicero in the social role of a *paterfamilias*: one which carried an expectation to provide for the wellbeing of one's family, but one which was autonomous and required supplication from their dependants rather than a command. Within this role context, Caelius' use of urgent and binding advice becomes acceptable because it can be interpreted within the positive-face affirming framework of supplication. At the same time, the in-

[55] On the language of supplication, see Rodríguez-Piedrabuena 2022.

vocation of Cicero's children (*per liberos*) implies that his failure to meet the expectations of his *paterfamilias* role by acting against Caesar would lead to harm for his dependants as well as himself. Caelius' politeness strategies therefore also serve as a means of topicalising Cicero's role expectations and presenting a potential threat to his positive-face as a way of engendering favourable action.

Caelius goes on to include himself among Cicero's dependants, further emphasising his role relationship with Cicero. He states:

> Qua re si tibi tu, si filius unicus, si domus, si spes tuae reliquae tibi carae sunt, si aliquid apud te nos, si vir optimus, gener tuus, valemus, quorum fortunam non debes velle conturbare, ut eam causam in cuius victoria salus nostra est odisse aut relinquere cogamur aut impiam cupiditatem contra salutem tuam habeamus ***

> *Accordingly, if you care for yourself, for your only son, for your household, for your remaining hopes, if I and your excellent son-in-law have any influence with you, whose careers you surely do not wish to ruin by forcing us to hate or abandon the cause with which our welfare is bound up or else to harbour an undutiful wish contrary to your welfare* *** (Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A, 2 = 200A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999).

This statement picks up a thread started in Antonius' letter, that neutrality would be the most fitting response for Cicero's expectation of protecting his family. However, the role relationship between Cicero and Caelius makes this expectation a more appropriate topic for this letter: what might be read as a threat coming from a superficial *amicus* like Antonius or a leader who has already faced accusations of tyranny like Caesar instead becomes an emotional, highly personal plea when placed in the handwriting of Caelius. The lacuna at the end of this passage presumably recorded a similarly deferential term of advice as noted above: this, combined with the repetition of the conditional *si* clause, would provide an exhortation to Cicero to meet the expectations of his *paterfamilias* role while mitigating the threat to his negative face by recognising his autonomy in the interaction, as he was free to recognise or deny the conditional statement. The use of affiliative politeness strategies therefore allows Caelius to navigate his deferential role to Cicero without presenting too severe a face threat, while the topicalisation of Cice-

ro's role expectations presents an avenue for strategic embarrassment as a way of securing Cicero's cooperation.

A distinction can also be made between Caelius' presentation of his relationship with Cicero compared to Antonius and Caesar in terms of the emotional tone of his language. Antonius and Caesar present their cases in relatively moderate language, befitting their more distant relationship with Cicero. Antonius, for example, focuses on Cicero's status alone by begging «not to compromise yourself in any way» (*ut tibi omnia integra serves*; Anton. Cic. *Att.* 10, 8A, 2 = 199A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999). Caesar, befitting the *amicus* role he and Cicero had professed for each other, cites the *iniuria* caused should Cicero not perform his role adequately. Their own roles as (ostensible) political equals to Cicero demand a more measured approach to their interaction. Comparatively, Caelius, in keeping with the more intimate role relationship he had identified, uses more emotionally charged terms such as «throw into disarray» (*conturbare*) or «to utterly ruin» (*funditus evertas*), conveying a sense of urgency and gravity to encourage Cicero to meet expectations. Emotional language is, of course, an important aspect of rhetorical persuasion[56]; however, access to this form of language is dependent on the role relationship between the presenter and addressee. Therefore, Caelius' presentation of his own role in relation to Cicero's allows him to amplify the severity of the consequences for non-adherence to Cicero's role expectations, which, as I note below, made Caelius' advice somewhat more effective than that of Antonius and Caesar.

Caelius' comments about Caesar also highlight how different configurations of role relationships could provide unique avenues of communication. It is important that the letter writer should conform to their own role when making a request of others. This is noticeable when Caelius discusses Caesar's impatience with Cicero and the Senate. Caesar himself – and to a lesser extent Antonius as his high-ranking associate – needed to maintain his self-presentation of leniency, whether this was expressed in Cicero's words as *clementia* or in Caesar's own words in terms such as *lenitas* or *misericordia*[57]. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for Caesar to express his frustration openly in a letter to Cicero, especially since if Cicero did join Pompeius, he could produce letters

[56] Katula 2009 provides a useful overview of emotional appeal, with a specific focus on its presentation in Quintilian.

[57] *Att.* 9, 7C = 174C SB; Morstein-Marx 2021, 413-477.

sent to him as a means of discrediting Caesar. This is less true for Caelius, who had less pressure to uphold Caesar's image because of their relative social distance, so he could claim to speak more candidly about Caesar's attitude. Moreover, Caelius' implication that Cicero's family would come to harm lends itself to a more sinister reading of Caesar's letter, suggesting that the letters could produce different messages if read as a unit as well as individually. It is clear that these letters were written with some knowledge of each other, as Caelius notes that he asked Caesar to write «in terms best adapted to induce you not to leave» ([*litteras*] *quibus maxime ad remanendum commoveri posses*; Cael. Cic. *Att.* 10, 9A, 4 = 200A SB, trans. Shackleton Bailey 1999). As Caelius' letter shows, the engagement of an individual by others with multifaceted relationships serves both to engage the individual in different aspects of their own role, but also to complexify the messages of the different engaging parties through the interaction of their messages. Different configurations of roles could communicate different expectations, and this possibility had unique implications for persuasion.

Of the three letters, it appears Caelius' had the most pronounced effect on Cicero. In a second letter to Atticus, Cicero notes that although he possessed the same spirit in his intent to join Pompeius, he had lost some faith in this idea based on Caelius' letter and the entreaties of his son Marcus (*Att.* 10, 9, 2 = 200 SB). The effectiveness of Caelius' advice compared to Antonius and Caesar's likely rests on the adept management of politeness strategies as well as the implementation of a role relationship which was both credible and which presented a means for Cicero to save face by playing into the polite fiction presented to him. As noted above, Antonius and Caesar's advice could be disregarded somewhat on the basis that the roles they presented for themselves did not match the reality outside of that interaction: consequently, their topicalisation of expectations for Cicero were founded upon a non-credible relationship between both parties. Conversely, Caelius' attribution of a familial relationship could be corroborated by their previous interactions: Book 8 of the letters *ad familiares* and Cicero's defence oration *Pro Caelio*, for example, demonstrate the close relationship between mentor and *protégé*. The appearance of genuineness in their relationship is then supported by the appropriate use of politeness strategies such as deferential language, reinforcement of mutual bonds, and framing the request as concern and advice rather than coercion. In addition to this, Antonius

and Caesar focus on Cicero in a political capacity or on the direct offence his actions might cause to Caesar: this might have led to a more direct political response from Cicero in terms of securing his neutrality, but it also threatens his political relationship with Pompeius which he also had expressed as a concern. By focusing instead on Cicero's obligations to his family, Caelius offers Cicero an «out» to explain his neutrality without causing offence to either Caesar or Pompeius[58]: one which he claims as an explanation for his intention to depart to Malta (*Att.* 10, 10, 1 = 201 SB). The unique role relationship between Caelius and Cicero therefore lends itself to a softer approach to persuasion, and as such it receives the most desirable response from Cicero.

7. *Factors involved in successful role-based persuasion*

A common factor among the examples above is that they failed to persuade Cicero in the long-term: Cicero eventually joined Pompeius. But, I argue that the letters still demonstrate varying degrees of influence over Cicero's behaviour: Cicero did decide to go to Malta (although this was delayed by Antonius in a later letter), but he notes that he had lost some of his resolve to commit to Pompeius' cause in the short term. Moreover, his verbal echoes of the themes from these letters in his own letters to Atticus suggests that the requests had prompted Cicero to consider the impact of his actions on his self-image. While pragmatic concerns would ultimately trump the role-based requests, the rejection of these expectations – in particular the appeal to Caesar's *amicitia* – was something that Cicero had to make a concerted effort to address in letters and speeches after the civil war. Therefore, despite the lack of long-term success, the fact that we can trace Cicero's response to the role-based requests to see the degree to which each letter succeeded or failed to affect his interpretation of his circumstances allows us to survey what might make a role-based request persuasive.

The most apparent determining factor in the success of a role-based request is the extent to which both parties are attributed a role that aligns with their self-image from prior interactions. Roles are attributed and evaluated in an iterative manner[59]: if a role is attributed which devi-

[58] Cf. Brown-Levinson 1978-1987, 72.
[59] Ashforth 2001, 26-28; Stryker 1980, 62-65.

ates too significantly from previous interactions, extra cognitive work is needed to interpret the interaction, which negatively correlates with persuasive effectiveness[60]. Because Caesar's and particularly Antonius' actions before this interaction did not match Cicero's perception of them or what others had reported in terms of their behaviour, their role-based interactions lacked the credibility to make their requests influential. Conversely, Caelius' letter is more successful in this respect because it utilises a role relationship which was consistent with past behaviour, meaning there was less reliance on a polite fiction and thus more credibility in his advice.

Linked to the need for credibility in an attributed role relationship is the requirement for suitable politeness strategies for the dynamic between correspondents. Caesar's letter, notwithstanding the contrasting view of his behaviour cited by other parties, could present a feasible relationship with Cicero based on their previous assertions of *amicitia*. Even then, Caesar's inattentiveness to Cicero's face suggests a mismatch in the degree of politeness expected for the role relationship being activated. By contrast, Caelius shows the appropriate politeness strategies toward Cicero as a *pater familias*, which minimises the risk of offence and the threat to Cicero's positive face, instead allowing that threat to come from the possibility of embarrassment at not performing his role adequately.

Another factor in the presentation of role-based attempts at strategic embarrassment was the extent to which the expectations of the role in question were clearly outlined. Expectations which had been expressed by one party could be interpreted differently, or even dismissed, by another. Because roles are defined and interpreted through interaction, there is a possibility for expectations expressed by one party to be deliberately or inadvertently misinterpreted. For example, in Cicero's response to Caesar's letter (*Att.* 10, 9, 1 = 200 SB), he claims that Caesar seems to view departure to Malta as conforming to his role as an honourable, neutral man, whereas Antonius' letter suggests the opposite, that going abroad would not be in keeping with expectations for Cicero. While in this situation Caesar's aim of keeping Cicero away from Pompeius was still temporarily fulfilled, the episode provides further evidence of the complexity of political communication and negotiations at a distance, which role-based persuasion offered one attempt at addressing.

[60] This idea has been explored in the greatest detail in the context of narrative persuasion: see, for example, Escalas 2007; Krause-Rucker 2020.

A final factor which influences the success of a role-based attempt at persuasion is the degree to which the role presented aligns with pragmatic concerns outside the letter. The role attributed in one interaction will have an effect on the interpretation of an individual in future interactions. Therefore, the topicalised expectations of a given role might be rejected because of the implication they would create for future interactions, or conversely a role might be accepted because it can offer a useful pretext for other interactions. In the case study above, Caelius' letter is singled out for its influence on Cicero's opinion. I argue that this is in part because the role it presented – Cicero as a *pater familias* concerned with the protection of his family rather than the *res publica* or a (flawed) friendship with Caesar – gave Cicero a convenient role he could adopt to avoid Caesar. In doing so, he fulfils the request of Caelius not to join Pompeius, but he also provides himself with a credible pretext founded upon this role to stay away from Caesar as well.

8. *Antonius' recall of Cloelius – a successful implementation of roles*

A final case study demonstrates the factors outlined above in a more successful context. A month after Caesar's assassination, Antonius wrote to Cicero asking his approval for the recall of Sextus Cloelius. Cicero acknowledges, despite his distaste for Antonius, that the letter was complimentary[61]. Moreover, Cicero accedes to Antonius' request: while Cicero notes Antonius would have recalled Cloelius regardless, it is worth examining this letter to see how Antonius approaches the framing of his request, and what might have made Cicero consider it suitably complimentary and palatable for compliance.

An immediate contrast between this letter and Antonius' earlier letter is its conciliatory tone and the absence of underlying criticisms. The letter opens with a positive-face reinforcement coupled with the initial request: Cicero would display the goodness of heart (*bonitas*) Antonius had always claimed him to possess if he supports Cloelius' recall (Anton. Cic. *Att.* 14, 13A, 1-2 = 367A SB). Antonius then goes on to topicalise several expectations he attributes to Cicero: among others, his *amicitia* toward Caesar, implied in his mutual respect for upholding Caesar's will, and his humani-

[61] *Att.* 14, 13A-B = 367A-B SB.

ty and patriotism feature in Antonius' justification for the request, upholding Cicero's positive face even as he challenges Cicero's desire to uphold these expectations. Moreover, Antonius makes it clear that he will not pursue the matter further without Cicero's consent, establishing a direct attentiveness to Cicero's negative-face wants. It is also significant here that the request follows the conventional pattern of supplicatory addresses, reminding Cicero of their relationship, outlining the request, and reminding him of past benefactions (*postremo meo iure te hoc beneficium rogo; nihil enim non tua causa feci*; «Finally, I have some right to ask this favour of you, for I have done all I could on your behalf»; Anton. Cic. *Att.* 14, 13A, 3). Antonius therefore goes out of his way in this letter to demonstrate attentiveness to both Cicero's positive- and negative-face wants.

The role Antonius attributes to Cicero is consistent with how he viewed himself in earlier interactions. In particular, Antonius' offer of a polite fiction – that Cicero had opposed Publius Claudius' father for patriotic reasons rather than personal enmity (*Att.* 14, 13A, 2-3) – is in line with Cicero's patriotic self-characterisation throughout most of his extant communication. Similarly, the attribution of *humanitas* and *sapientia* («humanity» and «wisdom») aligns with values Cicero would seek to claim for himself within the context of a role as a high-ranking political figure. Through the combination of a suitable attribution of roles to Cicero and the adoption of appropriate politeness strategies for that role, Antonius offers an effective attempt at topicalising expectations for Cicero, which would minimise the face threat from perceived impoliteness in order to focus on the implications for Cicero's role depending on his response.

In response to the final factor outlined in the previous section, Antonius' topicalisation of expectations for Cicero is also effective in that it provides a useful pretext for future beneficial role behaviour by Cicero. In the wake of Caesar's assassination, there was a power vacuum which Cicero, among others, attempted to fill. Antonius' deference to Cicero validates his role as a political authority: the topicalisation of expectations in turn provides Cicero with a way to express his *auctoritas* and reinforce his public image as a leader. In return for Cicero's alignment with expectations through the recall of Cloelius, Antonius offers a validation of Cicero's positive face, as well as a pragmatic resolution for a potential conflict with Publius Claudius. In both cases, the role attribution and the expectations topicalised align with pragmatic concerns, making the request more persuasive.

We see Cicero engage with the topicalised expectations in his response to Antonius. He accepts the assertion of friendship between the two interlocutors and cites the national interest (*res publica*) as the reason for his cooperation (*Att.* 14, 13B, 1-2 = 367B SB). He connects concession to his *humanitas*, and repeats Antonius' sentiment that his enmity toward Publius Clodius (father of the Claudius referred to in Antonius' letter) was a response to a public cause rather than personal hostility (*Att.* 14, 13B, 3-5). Finally, he pushes for Antonius to attribute the recall to Cicero himself, using the topicalised expectations to achieve a pragmatic reconciliation with Clodius. Therefore, even though Cicero privately communicates to Atticus his distrust and distaste for Antonius, at an interactional level between them, it can be argued that this instance of role-based persuasion through the topicalisation of expectations is completely successful.

9. *Role theory in ancient communication*

The discussion above hopes to have demonstrated the utility of a role-based approach to the analysis of Ciceronian communication. Although three out of the four letters examined above fail to secure a favourable response, they were selected because they allow a degree of process tracing of the development of roles and their implementation in persuasive communication. Because we have letters from multiple people to a single correspondent pursuing the same goal, it is possible to compare approaches to the topicalisation of roles; furthermore, because we have Cicero's personal reflections on these letters in his letters to Atticus, we can suggest that certain letters had more or less of an influence on Cicero's behaviour, and from there speculate using a combination of role theory and politeness strategies why this might have been the case. It is also significant that the case studies are from other correspondents to Cicero. It is all too often the case that our assumptions about Roman communication must be mediated by the question of the extent to which an action is uniquely Ciceronian[62]. In this case, the repetition of the strategy suggests that role-based persuasive strategies might have been a more widespread phenomenon. For this reason, in the following section,

[62] Cf., for example, van der Blom 2016, 4 and 10-11.

I will briefly reflect on the broader utility of role theory for understanding other aspects of Roman communication. In particular, I will focus on the applicability of role theory to both dialogical and narrative communication; the significance of a role-based analysis for our understanding of epistolary communication; and the broader viability of a role-based approach to other communicative media.

A common problem for discursive analyses of ancient communication is that we often only possess half of a given dialogue. This is especially true of Ciceronian epistolary studies, where only around a hundred of the roughly 900 extant letters are not authored by Cicero himself[63]. Both politeness theory and role theory are methodologically valuable in that they can be applied to singular instances of communication without requiring the response. While, as the above discussion demonstrates, it can be beneficial to have two sides of an interaction to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of a role-based persuasive approach, it is nevertheless possible and fruitful to examine individual letters for their implementation of roles without knowing whether or not the approach was effective, as this gives insight into how the letter writer wished themselves to be represented to others. Role theory also benefits from application at both a macro and micro level: we can gain perspectives on how Cicero, for example, framed himself in individual interactions using roles, but also how his roles coalesced over the course of his lifetime by looking at his entire corpus. To expand a step further, it is possible in certain cases to survey a wider range of communicators as a way of identifying the cultural values considered important within parts of Roman society, and how those were connected to the resources used within social interaction. Similarly, role theory provides a methodology which can account for both dialogical and narrative letters. While the closely-related politeness framework is useful for the understanding of requests and advice, it struggles to account for self-presentation in letters employing the narrative mode of communication; for example, Cicero's open letter to Lentulus Spinther in 54 BC (*fam.* 1, 9 = 20 SB). By focusing on the role Cicero creates for himself, it is possible to see a connection between self-presentation and access to social and political resources in both dialogical and narrative contexts[64]. Thus, role theory offers a conceptually broad framework for the consideration of Ciceronian communication.

[63] White 2010, 171-176.

[64] On this, see also Kenty 2020, which focuses on role attribution in Cicero's oratory.

Role-based analysis also stands to develop our understanding of epistolary communication as an avenue for persuasion and self-presentation. Letters have often been treated as a necessary but inferior form of communication for correspondents at a distance, rightly drawing on Cicero's own words at times[65]. Recent work on epistolary leadership has begun to address this assessment[66]: role theory can contribute to this development. Letters in ancient theory were presumed to be genuine representations of character: the Greek scholar Demetrius, likely writing some time between the fourth century BC and first century AD[67], suggests that no other form of communication was so character-driven (ἦθος) as the letter (Demetr. 227). Letters were therefore well-disposed toward the presentation of a person's roles. Moreover, as this article demonstrates, roles were defined interactionally and in relation to each other, suggesting that the application of role theory to epistolary correspondence is a fertile ground for further analysis with a particular focus on how the definition of these roles leads to behavioural change in their correspondents.

The unique benefits of epistolary communication stemming from its asynchronous and documentary nature might also be elucidated through a role-based framework. For example, as written documents, letters could be shown to third parties, as Cicero notes on many occasions (and indeed, as is the reason for the survival of the case studies in this article)[68]. A role-based analysis emphasises the underlying potential this creates for any letter to be embarrassing because of a latent potential for circulation[69], which could serve to regulate interactions among the elite in a similar manner to politeness language. Likewise, letters could be kept and re-examined at a future date as a way of topicalising expectations for future action, as Cicero does toward Atticus on at least one occasion to question advice he had provided (*Att.* 9, 10 = 177 SB). The choice to write a letter instead of waiting for an available opportunity to speak in person could be a means of minimising the negative-face threat

[65] See, for example, Trapp 2003, 39-40; Ebbeler 2010, 468-469; White 2010, 20; Rosillo-López 2021, 47-51.

[66] For example, the edited volume by Becker et al. 2024.

[67] Grube 1964.

[68] Cicero reading others' letters: *Att.* 5, 11, 7 = 104 SB; 11, 9, 2 = 220 SB; 13, 45, 1 = 337 SB; 13, 46, 2 = 338 SB; 15, 1, 2 = 377 SB; *fam.* 9, 1, 1 = 175 SB; 10, 12, 2 = 377 SB. Cicero attaching letters from others: *Att.* 8, 11, 6 = 161 SB; 8, 12, 6 = 162 SB; 8, 15, 3 = 165 SB; 9, 6, 6 = 172 SB; 9, 7, 3 = 174 SB; 9, 11, 2 = 178 SB; 9, 13, 1 = 180 SB; 9, 13a = 181 SB; 10, 8, 10 = 199 SB; 10, 9, 3 = 200 SB; 14, 13, 6 = 367 SB; 14, 17, 4 = 371 SB; 16, 16 = 407 SB.

[69] Ebbeler 2010, 471.

which would be presented by an in-person request, so that the implied face threat of topicalised expectations could be realised more clearly. This especially applies to Caesar, who according to Plutarch was the first to communicate by letter despite being near his correspondents (Plut. *vit. Caes.* 17). A reading of role theory with respect to the selection of persuasive strategies therefore presents another avenue of research which would benefit the understanding of Roman communication as a whole.

As a final point of reflection, I argue that role theory has a place in the analysis of Roman communication beyond epistolary correspondence. Joanna Kenty (2020) has already surveyed the strategic adoption of *personae* in Cicero's orations, delivering a role-based analysis of Cicero in everything but name. Studies of Roman *ethos* and exemplarity likewise fall close to a role-based approach, with the malleability of *exempla* in particular reflecting the concept of roles as resources to be employed for a particular social or political benefit[70]. Role theory therefore offers a valuable methodology for the analysis of a range of spoken and written media. Furthermore, the framework of role theory can be extended to visual media: coins, artwork, and architecture can be analysed in terms of the roles they convey for their subject material, creators, and commissioners. This might be read against literature to gain a more comprehensive insight into the values espoused by certain figures across different media. Specifically, I suggest that this comprehensive approach to role use benefits the analysis of political crisis points. In the case of Cicero, I have demonstrated this using his personal crisis of identity in light of the civil war: the analysis could easily be continued with a survey of Caesar's self-presentation during the transition to autocratic rule, or the later transition from Republic to Principate.

10. *Conclusion*

Role theory offers an innovative and methodologically promising approach to the study of Roman political correspondence. This article has demonstrated how a role-based framework can be applied to the reading of four letters from Cicero's epistolary correspondence. By reading the letters within the framework of role theory alongside the more broadly

[70] See, for example, May 1988 on *ethos*; Flower 1996, 60-65 on *imagines*; and on exemplarity van der Blom 2010, 175-286; van der Blom 2016, 204-247; Langlands 2018; Roller 2018.

studied approach of politeness theory, I have demonstrated how Antonius, Caesar, and Caelius undertook different approaches to the characterisation of Cicero. By topicalising different expectations, they sought to influence his behaviour through a process of strategic embarrassment, in which Cicero would be prompted to choose either to cooperate or to lose face and have to account for the discrepancy between the role attributed to him and his actions. I have also demonstrated how role theory supplemented by politeness theory can account for the ultimate failure of some of these communications based on several factors, in particular the inconsistent application of a role, inappropriate politeness strategies relative to the role adopted, and a disconnect between the attributed role and pragmatic concerns for the addressee. Comparatively, examination of a successful instance of role-based persuasion by Antonius toward Cicero shows how concern for these factors was more likely to contribute to a successful request. Finally, I have offered a reflection on the broader applicability of role theory within the study of the ancient world, and the value it stands to offer for our understanding of epistolary communication and other communication media. Although further empirical studies are necessary to validate the extent of these conclusions, this study hopes to offer a first step toward such research by demonstrating the effectiveness of a role-based model in elucidating the political communication of a challenging period of Cicero's epistolary.

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