



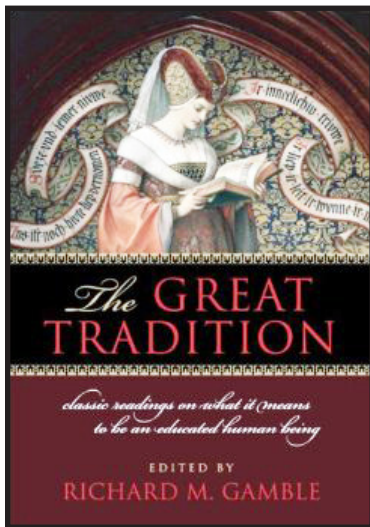
# NIGHTSTAND ARTICLES

## Cicero<sup>1</sup>

106 - 43 B.C.

*Only those are men who are perfected in the arts appropriate to humanity.*

REPUBLIC



Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman lawyer, statesman, and peerless orator, defended the traditions of the Roman Republic first against Catiline and then against Julius Caesar. His remarkable career ended tragically when he was beheaded by

Marc Antony's henchmen in the civil wars following Caesar's assassination. His surviving letters, dialogues, and treatises set the standard of literary Latin in antiquity and later among the Renaissance humanists. At the time of the Roman Empire, according to H. I. Marrou, "being educated meant, to a Latin, knowing Virgil and Cicero."<sup>2</sup> Cicero helped bridge the Greek and Roman intellectual worlds (it was quipped that he taught Plato to speak Latin). Marrou writes that in Cicero "Latin Hellenism reaches its perfection. Cicero not only knew Greek perfectly, but he had assimilated all the Greek culture of his day. In Athens and in Rhodes he had studied rhetoric and philosophy as deeply as any Greek. His culture was profound, not as a superficial veneer, not as an affectation."<sup>3</sup> He endured around him, however, shallow Romans for whom cultivation was such a veneer and affectation. In the *Tusculan Dialogues* he wrote, "We Romans have gone to school in Greece; we

read their poets and learn them by heart, and then we think ourselves scholars and men of culture" (ii.27). Cicero occupied himself with the true cultivation of the ideal orator. An orator in the Roman world was more than a highly skilled public speaker or courtroom attorney; he was a statesman. In several of his works, Cicero ponders the best education of the consummate public servant, a man possessing both eloquence and wisdom held in fruitful balance. His ideal leader combined action with reflection, practical experience with the learned arts, and fidelity to tradition with "the foreign learning which originated with Socrates" (Cicero's *Republic*, III.iii).

## THE SELECTIONS

*Pro Archia Poeta* (62 B.C.) is Cicero's moving tribute to a beloved teacher and friend. The speech is a patriotic defense of the Greek poet Archias's right to Roman citizenship (against the counter claims of the prosecuting attorney Grattius). The dialogue *De Oratore* (On the Orator) dates from 55 B.C. and is central to Cicero's mature thinking on education. In Aubrey Gwynn's estimation, *De Oratore* is "a masterpiece which may not unfairly be called the orator's programme of educational reform," a work that embodies "the fullest statement of Cicero's educational theory."<sup>4</sup> Through the mouth of Crassus, his former rhetoric teacher, Cicero

1. Excerpt from: *The Great Tradition, Classic readings on what it means to be an educated human being*, Edited by Richard M. Gamble
2. *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. by George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 259.
3. *Ibid.*, 258.
4. *Aubrey Gwynn, Roman Education from Cicero to Quintilian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 81.

offers a penetrating discourse on the proper relationship between philosophy and oratory, or between the contemplative life of academic leisure and the active life of public service. Cicero tries to maintain a workable real-world synthesis between the two that would produce the rare combination of learned orator and eloquent philosopher. *The Orator* (46 B.C.) is a prose work in which Cicero addresses some of the same themes, concluding “that whatever ability I possess as an orator comes, not from the workshop of the rhetoricians, but from the spacious grounds of the Academy” (iii.12), and that “the foundation of eloquence, as of everything else, is wisdom” (xx.70). Finally, two additional works directly concern education as the cultivation of wisdom and virtue: the dialogue *De Partitione Oratoria* (On the Parts of Oratory), written about 46 B.C., and the profound and influential treatise *De Officiis* (On Duties), written in 44 B.C. in the grim days after Caesar’s assassination. These were written for Cicero’s son Marcus as he began his university studies in Athens.

### *from Pro Archia Poeta*

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... You will no doubt ask me, Gratus, to account for the deep interest I feel in my friend. It is because he provides refreshment for my spirit after the clamour of the courts, and repose for senses jaded by their vulgar wrangling. Do you think that I could find inspiration for my daily speeches on so manifold a variety of topics, did I not cultivate my mind with study, or that my mind could endure so great a strain, did not study too provide it with relaxation? I am a votary of literature, and make the confession unashamed; shame belongs rather to the bookish recluse, who knows not how to apply his reading to the good of his fellows, or to manifest its fruits to the eyes of all. But what shame should be mine, gentlemen, who have made it a rule of my life for all these years never to allow the sweets of a cloistered ease or the seductions of pleasure or the enticements of repose to prevent me from aiding any man in the hour of his need? How then can I justly be blamed or censured, if it shall be found that I have devoted to literature a portion of my leisure hours no longer than others without blame devote to the pursuit

of material gain, to the celebration of festivals or games, to pleasure and the repose of mind and body, to protracted banqueting, or perhaps to the gaming-board or to ball-playing? I have the better right to indulgence herein, because my devotion to letters strengthens my oratorical powers, and these, such as they are, have never failed my friends in their hour of peril. Yet insignificant though these powers may seem to be, I fully realize from what source I draw all that is highest in them. Had I not persuaded myself from my youth up, thanks to the moral lessons derived from a wide reading, that nothing is to be greatly sought after in this life save glory and honour, and that in their quest all bodily pains and all dangers of death or exile should be lightly accounted, I should never have borne for the safety of you all the brunt of many a bitter encounter, or bared my breast to the daily onsets of abandoned persons. All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavour the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence.

“But,” an objector may ask, “were these great men, whose virtues are perpetuated in literature, themselves adepts in the learning which you describe in such fulsome terms?” It would be difficult to make a sweeping and categorical reply, but at the same time I have my answer ready. Many there have been, no doubt, exceptionally endowed in temperament and character, who, without any aid from culture, but only by a heaven-born light within their own souls, have been self-schooled in restraint and fortitude; I would even go so far as to say that natural gifts without education have more often attained to glory and virtue than education without natural gifts. Yet I do at the same time assert that when to a lofty and brilliant character is applied the moulding influence of abstract studies, the result is often inscrutably and unapproachably

noble. Such a character our fathers were privileged to behold in the divine figure of Scipio Africanus; such were those patterns of continence and self-control, Gaius Laelius and Lucius Furius; such was the brave and venerable Marcus Cato, the most accomplished man of his day. These surely would never have devoted themselves to literary pursuits, had they not been aided thereby in the appreciation and pursuit of merit. But let us for the moment waive these solid advantages; let us assume that entertainment is the sole end of reading; even so, I think you would hold that no mental employment is so broadening to the sympathies or so enlightening to the understanding. Other pursuits belong not to all times, all ages, all conditions; but this gives stimulus to our youth and diversion to our old age; this adds a charm to success, and offers a haven of consolation to failure. In the home it delights, in the world it hampers not. Through the night-watches, on all our journeying, and in our hours of country ease, it is our unfailing companion....

*from De Oratore*  
*Book III*

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XIV.... For the genuine orator must have investigated and heard and read and discussed and handled and debated the whole of the contents of the life of mankind, inasmuch as that is the field of the orator's activity, the subject matter of his study. For eloquence is one of the supreme virtues—although all the virtues are equal and on a par, but nevertheless one has more beauty and distinction in outward appearance than another, as is the case with this faculty, which, after compassing a knowledge of facts, gives verbal expression to the thoughts and purposes of the mind in such a manner as to have the power of driving the hearers forward in any direction in which it has applied its weight; and the stronger this faculty is, the more necessary it is for it to be combined with integrity and supreme wisdom, and if we bestow fluency of speech on persons devoid of those virtues, we shall not have made orators of them but shall have put weapons into the hands of madmen.

*from The Orator*

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The man of perfect eloquence should, then, in my opinion possess not only the faculty of fluent and copious speech which is his proper province, but should also acquire that neighbouring borderland science of logic; although a speech is one thing and a debate another, and disputing is not the same as speaking, and yet both are concerned with discourse—debate and dispute are the function of the logicians; the orator's function is to speak ornately. Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, used to give an object lesson of the difference between the two arts; clenching his fist he said logic was like that; relaxing and extending his hand, he said eloquence was like the open palm. Still earlier Aristotle in the opening chapter of his *Art of Rhetoric* said that rhetoric is the counterpart of logic, the difference obviously being that rhetoric was broader and logic narrower. I therefore expect this perfect orator of ours to be familiar with all the theory of disputation which can be applied to speaking; this subject, as you well know from your training along this line, has been taught in two different ways. Aristotle himself taught many principles of argumentation, and the later dialecticians, as they are called, produced many thorny speculations. For my part I advise one who is attracted by the glory of eloquence not to be entirely unacquainted with these latter authors, but to be thoroughly trained either in the older logic of Aristotle, or the newer of Chrysippus. He should know first the force, nature and classes of words, both singly and in the sentence; then the different modes of predication; the method of distinguishing truth from falsity; the proper deduction to be drawn from each, *i.e.* what is consequent and what is contrary; and since many ambiguous statements are made, he should know how these can be solved and explained. These are the things the orator must get,—for they are continually coming up—but because in themselves they are somewhat unattractive, a certain grace of style will have to be used in presenting them.