

**Erika J. NESHOLM**

**The House as Moral Battlefield in Cicero's *De Domo Sua***

In *De Domo Sua*, Cicero's Palatine house becomes a battleground for the competing moral attitudes of himself and Clodius, in their respective plans for the future of that house. Soon after his return from exile in 57, Cicero delivers this speech in an attempt to recover his house on the Palatine, which Clodius had confiscated, razed, and dedicated in part as a temple to *Libertas*. Though the concerns of the speech are many, the house becomes the rhetorical focus of the oration, a physical symbol of the broader political and social concerns with which Cicero is engaged. In this paper, building on the recent work of Vasaly (1993) and Treggiari (*JRA* 12:1999), I shall explore in greater detail the function of the house in this speech, and argue that the conflict over the private home can be read as a larger conflict over Republican morals and ideals.

By making explicit the close associations of the private home with the family and religion, as well as with social and political standing, Cicero identifies the physical and conceptual space of the home with the social standing of its owner. Most specifically, Cicero expresses the conflict over the house in moral terms, constructing an opposition between his own views of what a house should be and Clodius' views. Cicero's discussion of the house as his home centers on his family (59), the sacred aspects of home (109), the appropriate restraint and modesty in expenditure (146), the house as a testimony to his political position and service to the Republic (100). He presents Clodius' control over the house as the perversion of all of this: he is greedy and extravagant in his building plans (116) and sacrilegious in his temple dedication (138 ff.). Cicero carefully clusters aspects of Roman ideology, public and private, around the house. He conflates the identities of himself and his house with that of the Republic on the one hand, and of Clodius and his building plans with the perversion of the Republic on the other.

Cicero describes Clodius' destruction of his house as a *bellum hostificum* waged against his walls, roof, and door-posts (60). In so doing, he equates Clodius with an enemy of state (*hostis*, 101, 139), making this out to be not simply a personal grudge, but a national conflict, the spoils of which will stand as a memorial of the outcome. In the context of a city full of physical testimonies to military and political achievements, religious institutions, the glory of previous generations, Cicero situates his house within this larger system of signification, equating it alternately with monuments, tombs, and military trophies, all of which preserve memory for future generations (100). If the house is returned to him, it will function as a lasting testimony of Cicero's social and political power, his family's well-being, his religious uprightness. If, on the other hand, it remains under the control of Clodius, the house will be a monument of Cicero's suffering, Clodius' crime, disaster for the Republic. The house is to be a reminder of this event, commemorated in much the same way as battles are commemorated. Cicero is, in effect, constructing the memory for future generations by suggesting the way his house might serve as a monument of either victory or defeat.

In sum, in *De Domo Sua*, Cicero has constructed his argument in domestic terms to suggest that by leaving the house in Clodius' control, the pontiffs, in effect, would be

sanctioning his actions, his immorality, his hostility to the Republic. By the end of the speech, Cicero has left the pontiffs no choice but to return his house so that it will be a victory monument of the restoration of the city through Cicero, rather than of Clodius' perversions and the disaster they bring for the Republic.