

ERASING THE AETHIOPIAN IN CICERO'S *POST REDITUM IN SENATU*

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The Roman attitude toward the Ethiopian as expressed in scattered passages is far less kindly than the Greek. The usage in Terence and the Auctor ad Herennium which imply a vogue for Ethiopians is probably in imitation of Greek usage. How early the Roman attitude crystalized into racial feeling it is hard to say, and as those who express it are chiefly satirists one must be careful in drawing conclusions. Nevertheless in the absence of an expressed good will and in the face of references which have a superior or contemptuous tone it is evident that the Romans had no special affection for Ethiopians at Rome, however romantically they may have spoken of the races of distant India. The earliest passage in which they are spoken of slightly seems to be in Cicero—*cum hoc homine an cum stipite Aethiope*, Cicero, *De Sen.*, 6. The word does not occur in all the manuscripts and the Oxford and Teubner texts omit it entirely. In notes it is translated 'blockhead' and the statement made that in antiquity the Ethiopians were synonymous with stupidity, a conclusion obviously drawn from the passage and the modern attitude toward them. Even if the word was actually used by Cicero, this passage alone is basis for such a theory.¹

Mrs. Beardsley (*op. cit.*, pp.119–120), in my judgement, is wrong in her conclusion that the Roman attitude toward the Negro crystalized into racial feeling. In support of her view that the Romans referred to the Ethiopians at Rome in a superior and contemptuous tone, Mrs. Beardsley includes the following passages: (1) Cicero, *Red. in Sen.*, 6.14 (cited incorrectly as *De Sen.*, 6); (2) Martial, VI, 39, 6; (3) Juvenal, II, 23. Cicero, *Red in Sen.*, 6.14...*cum hoc homine an stipite Aethiope...*, as Mrs. Beardsley admits, does not appear in all the manuscripts and is omitted in the best established texts. A consideration of the context leads me to believe that the editors (Oxford, Teubner, Loeb) are right in rejecting *Aethiope* or *stipite Aethiope* and in reading *stipite*. Nevertheless, the appearance of the variant indicates that the author of the reading used *Aethiope* in a derogatory sense. (It is possible that the pejorative meaning of *aethiops* was a medieval development.)²

In these two excerpts, Grace Hadley Beardsley and Frank M. Snowden, Jr., discuss the appearance of the word *Aethiops* ('Aethiopian') in Cicero's *Post reditum in senatu* 14.³ Beardsley, whose intellectual project was motivated, as

1. Beardsley (1929), 119.

2. Snowden (1947), 288 n.120.

3. Texts used: Cic. *Har. resp.*, *Red. sen.* (with adjustment, see n.6): Maslowski (1981); *Div.*: Pease (1979); *Off.*: Atzert (1932); *Pis.*: Nisbet (1961); *Sest.*: Peterson (1911); [ps-Cic.] *Rhet. Her.*: Caplan (1954); Varro *Ling.*: Goetz and Schöll (1910).—As Snowden (1947), 288 n.120, notes, Beardsley mistakenly refers to the passage as '*De Sen.*', i.e. *De Senectute*, not *Red. sen.*, i.e. *Post reditum in senatu*. Beardsley's mistake seems to derive from the Lewis and Short Latin dictionary which cites 'Cic. *Sen.* 6' in the entry for *Aethiops*. The definition of *Aethiops* by Lewis and Short—'[a] coarse, dull, awkward man, a blockhead'—for which Cicero *Red. sen.* 14 is adduced is also seriously erroneous. As I discuss

Maghan Keita and, more recently, Najee Olya have discussed, by racial animus and who sought to find evidence of Greco-Roman anti-Blackness that was both consistent with, and therefore a legitimizing *exemplum* for, contemporary anti-Blackness in 20th-century America, took Cicero's words as 'the earliest passage in which [Aethiopians] are spoken of slightly' at Rome—doing so cautiously, given the fact that most editors had deleted it from the text.⁴ Frank M. Snowden, Jr.—whose own work W.E.B. Du Bois explicitly contrasted with Beardsley⁵—responded to Beardsley's assertion that *Post reditum in senatu* contained evidence of anti-Blackness with scepticism, ultimately doubting the legitimate textual presence of the term and interpreting its presence instead as an artefact of hostile scribal intervention. Indeed, both Beardsley and Snowden discuss the fact that *Aethiope* does not occur in all of the Cicero manuscripts. While it is true that none of the authoritative textual editions print *Aethiope* at *Post reditum in senatu* 14, the textual apparatus nonetheless demonstrates clearly that the term appears in the manuscript tradition *more often than it does not*.⁶

stipe P¹: etiope P²
 stipe uel ethiope G
 uel aethiope stipe E¹
 esope H

below, it is the word *stipes* alone at *Red. sen.* 14 which means 'blockhead', and while the term *Aethiops* (Gr. Αἰθίοψ) with its literal sense of 'burnt-face' is hardly the most sensitive appellation, it appears in the Greco-Roman tradition as 'the generic qualification for any dark-skinned person' (Mudimbe [1994], 26; cf. Keita [2000], 128) without any further assertion of moral character or intellect. While, as this article argues, Cicero uses 'Aethiopian' at *Red. sen.* 14 as one part of a hostile characterization of Piso which mobilizes ethnic and racial prejudices, the term *Aethiops* does not itself mean anything other than 'Aethiopian' and should not be defined in the dictionary as essentially a synonym for 'stupid'.

4. On Beardsley's racial motivations and subsequent criticism by Snowden and others, see Keita (2000), 21, 56, 60, 129, 135, 138, 141f., Olya (2021).

5. See Keita (2000), 50 n.22, on the criticism of Beardsley's work by W.E.B. Du Bois (1946), x, who called it a 'stupid combination of scholarship and race prejudice which Johns Hopkins University published' and contrasted the ease with which Beardsley was able to be published with the difficulties faced by Frank M. Snowden, Jr., to whose work classical journals were deeply resistant. On mainstream classicists' refusal to engage with Snowden's research into the representations of Black Africans in Greco-Roman art, see Rankine (2011), 53; and on Rankine, Olya (2022): 'Rankine was correct ten years ago, and still is now.'

6. In the Paris (P) manuscript, *stipe* was corrected to *etiope* by a contemporary hand. In the Brussels (G) manuscript, *stipe* appears together with *ethiope*; likewise, *stipe* and *aethiope* appear together in the Berlin (E) manuscript. Lastly, the London (H) manuscript has *esope*, which seems to be a scribal error for *ethiope*. Given the visual similarity of *stipe* and *etiope*/(a)ethiope/esope, which differ only in one or two letters, the instances where *stipe* and *etiope/esope* appear individually and not together (P; H) may be interpreted as haplographical errors, i.e. the result of the removal of an element considered to be redundant by the scribe. As Mudimbe (1994), 26, notes, the orthography for Latin *Aethiops* is not uniform: 'The word, as noted in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (I.1554.62), presents an impressive number of variations of its sounds (ae- and e-; -th- and -t-, -i- and -y-).' This variety may be at the heart of the textual variation at *Red. sen.* 14. In this article, I adopt the G reading of *Red. sen.* 14, correcting MS *stipe* to *stipite* and adopting *Aethiope* for MS *ethiope*.

Snowden suggests that, since *Aethiope* at *Post reditum in senatu* 14 was used as an insult by whomever it was introduced, the word may have been inserted during an era in which the term was considered derogatory—implying that it was not used as an insult during the Ciceronian period. Putting aside the question of scribal prejudice for now, it is clear that the appearance of *Aethiope* in the manuscripts cannot be attributed, as Snowden suggested, to the intervention of a sole copyist. Furthermore, given the fact that the Latin adjective *Aethiops* is so infrequently attested in the Ciceronian corpus, and would therefore have been encountered infrequently by copyists, what would inspire them to insert this relatively rare word into the tradition?⁷ What I here propose is that we approach the textual variant as legitimate, reading ‘Aethiopian’ back into the Ciceronian text. My aim here is not to argue, as Beardsley wished to prove, that the Romans were homogeneously anti-Black, nor, as Snowden did—who as Patrice Rankine has recently remarked ‘as a classicist clamored for a “color-blind” society’,⁸ to reject the presence of Ethiopians within the arsenal of Ciceronian rhetoric on the grounds that colour prejudice is anachronistic. Instead, I here return to ‘consideration of the context’, to use Snowden’s words as quoted in my epigraph, and argue that the passage in question is indeed evidence of Roman racialized thought, though not in the manner that either Beardsley or Snowden imagined.

In this article, I argue that in the *Post reditum in senatu* 13f. Cicero uses racialized rhetoric to delegitimize Piso’s credentials as a ‘pure’ Roman citizen, emphasizing his ‘mixed’ Gallo-Roman status, and that it is in the context of this broader ethnonationalist rhetoric that Cicero makes a racist ‘joke’ comparing Piso to an Ethiopian in order to encourage his audience to scrutinize Piso’s physical appearance. An analysis of this passage demonstrates that Cicero is using racialized rhetoric as a form of objectification deeply informed by the impact of mass enslavement, with its commodification of the human body, upon the Roman view of ethnicity and race.

Text in Context

With the support of parallel passages of Cicero (*Har. resp.* 5; *Pis.* 19), editors have corrected *stipe* at *Post reditum in senatu* 14 to *stipite*, i.e. *stipes*, ‘log’, ‘stake’, ‘post’—a term which is used of a piece of wood (e.g. *Cat.* 64.289), but also as an insult (i.e. ‘blockhead’) against individuals alleged to be ‘stupid’ (e.g. Ter. *Haut.* 877). In *De haruspicum responso*, one of the parallel passages

7. Setting aside the possibility of other instances of editorial erasure, *Aethiops* appears in Cicero’s textual corpus on only two other occasions: [ps-Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 4.63; *Div.* 2.96. However, this is essentially on par with another ethnic designation used by Cicero—*Cappadox*, ‘Cappadocian’—which appears only at *Red. sen.* 14; *Flac.* 61.

8. Rankine (2021).

cited by editors to correct the passage we are concerned with, Cicero pairs *stipes* ('blockhead') as an insult together with an ethnic slur:

itaque eum numquam a me esse accusandum putavi, non plus quam stipitem illum qui quorum hominum esset nesciremus, nisi se Ligurum ipse esse diceret.

(*Har. resp.* 5)

And so I never thought that I would need to accuse him [= Clodius], any more than I would need to accuse this blockhead [= Aelius Ligus, *tr. pl.* 58 BCE] whose origin would be unknown to us, if he himself did not say that he is *Ligurian*.

Cicero here refers to Aelius Ligus, a tribune who supported Clodius (*Dom.* 49; *Sest.* 69, 94) and vetoed the attempt to recall Cicero from exile in June 58 BCE (*Red. sen.* 3; *Sest.* 68).⁹ Attacking Aelius, Cicero calls him a 'blockhead' (*stipes*), questions his ethnicity (*quorum hominum esse*, lit. 'of what men is he?'), and via wordplay on the family name 'Ligus' recodes him as 'Ligurian'—i.e. the Latin name for the peoples who historically inhabited territories between the Apennines and the Pillars of Hercules.¹⁰ Ligurians had been the regular objects of ethnic stereotyping by the Romans since at least Cato the Elder, whose 'anthropological' investigation of Italian ethnogenesis in the *Origines* characterized 'the Ligurians' as 'uniformly untrustworthy' (*Ligures...omnes fallaces sunt*, fr. 32) and 'illiterate liars' (*inlitterati mendacesque*, fr. 31).¹¹ In the same vein, Cicero, discussing whether it is 'race and seed' (*a stirpe generis ac seminis*) or 'natural acclimatization' (*natura...ad uitae consuetudinem*) which dictates human characteristics, called the Ligurians 'harsh and wild' (*Ligures duri atque agrestes*, all *Leg. agr.* 2.95).¹² The Romans were so hostile to the Ligurian identity

9. Lenaghan (1969), 66.

10. On the fluctuation of geographical territories historically inhabited by the Ligurian peoples (Greek: *Ligyēs*; Latin: *Ligures*; Etruscan: *Lecuste/Lecste*), see Paltineri (2015), 673–5. Contact between the Romans and Ligurians began in the mid-3rd century BCE. Paltineri (2015), 697f., notes that the Romans used a number of violent and coercive tactics in their encounters with the Ligurians: 'The Romanization of Liguria involved at some times massacres, punitive actions, systematic deportations and territorial confiscations.' On epistemicide as consequence of Rome's violent interventions, see Padilla Peralta (2020a).

11. Cato *Orig.* fr. 31 and fr. 32 = Serv. *Aen.* 11.715 and 11.700. On Cato's ethnic stereotyping of the Ligurians as *fallaces*, see Dyson (1985), 93, Corbeill (1996), 88, Gotter (2009), 114. On Cato's characterization of the Ligurian ignorance of their own origins (*Orig.* fr. 31) as a deliberate misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge, see Bispham (2007), 58 n.23, with Dench (1995), 18, Williams (2001), 76. According to Strabo 7.3.7, Hesiod associated Ligurians with Ethiopians, Scythians, and Hippemolgi; see Snowden (1960), 23.

12. Isaac (2004), 88f., cites *Leg. agr.* 2.95 as evidence of Cicero's resistance to astrological theories of environmental racialization (discussed further below). If this is the case, Cicero nonetheless simultaneously uses another form of racialization, namely, the generalization of specific characteristics to an ethnic group, a process described by McCoskey (2012), 3 (my emphasis): 'Just as race's roots stretch beyond the mere biological, racial structures of thought generally extend past simple

that one individual reportedly changed his name from Ligus to Paetus in order to avoid the stigma of association (*Clu.* 72).¹³ Indeed, the stigma was an expression of fear towards not only the foreigner as ethnic ‘other’ but also the slave: Cicero attacks Aelius by naming him *ille nouicius Ligus* (‘that new slave Ligurian’)¹⁴ who acts as Clodius’ *uenalis ascriptor* (‘supporter for sale’, both *Dom.* 49).¹⁵ In sum, *De haruspicum responso* 5, a passage adduced in the textual correction of *Post reditum in senatu* 14, connects the ‘stupidity’ of an inanimate object (*stipes*, ‘blockhead’) with a rhetoric of prejudice constructed out of fear of ‘otherness’ via the intertwined strands of social construction: ethnicity and enslavement.

Turning now to our passage, we see that the rhetorical nexus of imputed stupidity, constructed ethnicity, and association with slavery is likewise present:

nam ille alter Caesoninus Caluentius ab adolescentia uersatus est in foro, cum eum praeter simulatam fictamque tristitiam nulla res commendaret, non iuris <notitia> [studium], non dicendi ui<s, non scien>tia rei militaris, non cognoscendorum hominum <studium>, non liberalitas. quem praeteriens cum incultum, horridum maestumque uidisses, etiam si agrestem et inhumanum existimares, tamen libidinosum et perditum non putares. cum hoc homine an cum stipite uel Aethiope in foro constitisses, nihil crederes interesse; sine sensu, sine sapore, elinguem, tardum, inhumanum negotium, Cappadocem modo abreptum de grege uenalium diceres.

(*Red. sen.* 13f.)

For the other, Caesoninus Caluentius, has been experienced in the forum since his youth, but he has nothing to commend him besides feigned and false austerity: no legal, military, or oratorical capability; no interest in understanding mankind, no qualities of the freeborn. If you had happened to walk by him, you would have seen an uncombed, bristly, sorrowful man, and even if you considered him wild and inhuman, you would not have considered him willful and wasted. You wouldn’t have been able to tell if you were looking at a man or a stupid—let’s say, Aethiopian—

biological classification to ascribe a wider set of characteristics and capacities *to every member of the group*. On *Leg. agr.* 2.95 and Cicero’s use of ‘ethnic *personae*’, see Vasaly (1993), 233.

13. On *Clu.* 72, see Corbeill (1996), 82f.

14. cf. Plaut. *Capt.* 718: *recens captum hominem, nuperum, nouicium* (‘a newly captured man, a recently new slave’ with *nouicius* = ‘recently captured, fresh slave’). For ‘*nouicius*’ as ‘slave’ in Cicero: *Sest.* 78; *Pis.* 1.

15. cf. Plaut. *Aul.* 452: *uenalis* = ‘a slave offered for sale’. While *nouicius* and *uenalis* are used by Cicero in reference to Aelius’ decision to support Clodius when he had initially supported Cicero himself (on Aelius’ change of heart, see Lenaghan [1969], 66)—i.e. in order to emphasize the implication that Aelius accepted a bribe, Cicero’s image of Aelius as tribune with services ‘for sale’ draws symbolically from the literal saleability of the slave.

standing in the forum: an inhuman thing without sense, taste, speechless, slow. You would say that he's a Cappadocian recently plucked from a band of slaves.

Cicero leads his aristocratic auditor¹⁶ into the forum, and places before his eyes an image of Piso drawn with careful attention to physical attributes (body), cognitive ability (mind/voice), and affect (emotional dejection). The motif of 'experience in the forum' (*uersatus est in foro*, *Red. sen.* 13) as a mark of oratorical skill—i.e. the characteristic of an advocate who made his name with forensic display (e.g. *Brut.* 311)—quickly shifts into the image of the foreign slave or freedman who might be encountered in the forum.¹⁷ Piso's physical appearance is unkempt ('uncombed', *incultum*; 'bristly' or 'hairy', *horridum*)¹⁸, and corporeal disorder includes affective disorder—he is also 'sorrowful' (*maestus*, all *Red. sen.* 13).¹⁹ These physical qualities, Cicero implies, are physical reflections of Piso's innate character:²⁰ looking at the sad, unkempt, hairy man leads an elite Roman observer to judge him as 'wild and inhuman' (*agrestem et inhumanum*, *Red. sen.* 13).²¹ Indeed, elsewhere in the Ciceronian corpus, the pairing of *agrestis* and *inhumanus* describes an unacceptable body according to the elite standard:

cum autem pulchritudinis duo genera sint, quorum in altero uenustas sit, in altero dignitas, uenustatem muliebrem ducere debemus, dignitatem uirilem... formae autem dignitas coloris bonitate tuenda est, color exercitationibus corporis. adhibenda praeterea munditia est non odiosa neque exquisita nimis, tantum quae fugiat agrestem et inhumanam neglegentiam.
(*Off.* 1.130)

But since there are two kinds of beauty—in one there is attractiveness, in the other there is honour—we ought to consider attractiveness a female attribute, honour a male one... In regard to the honour of the human form, we ought to maintain our aristocratic colour, a colour achieved by exercise of the body. And while we do not want to be overly careful

16. *Post reditum in senatu* was delivered, as the title announces, before a senatorial audience.

17. cf. *Rosc. Am.* 133f. with Vasaly (2002), 79, on Chrysogonus.

18. cf. *Leg. agr.* 2.13: *corpore inculto et horrido, capillatio quam ante barbaque maiore* ('his [= Rullus'] body was unkempt and disheveled, he was hairier than before and had a bigger beard').

19. In the *Orator*, Cicero, discussing paint pigment, associates *incultus* and *horridus* with 'dark' (*opaca*) colour, in contrast with 'happy' (*laeta*) bright colours: *in picturis alios horrida inculta opaca, contra alios nitida laeta collustrata delectant* ('in paintings, some like rough, bristly dark colours, others, conversely, like shining, happy, bright colours', 36).

20. cf. *QRosc.* 20: *si quam coniecturam adfert hominibus tacita corporis figura* ('if the silent figure of the body can allow us to infer the character of men').

21. Mudimbe (1994), 27, notes that lack of 'cultivation' (i.e. development, refinement, growth; an uncultivated land seems to the imperialist like a blank slate) is at the heart of 18th-century conceptions of 'savagery': "'Savage", from the late Latin *silvaticus* [lit. 'of the woods', 'wild'; close to Cicero's *agrestis*]...is equivalent to marginality and, from a cultural normative space, designates the uncultivated.'

and precious in our cosmetic appearance, we also ought to shun a wild and inhuman carelessness.

Here the exhortation to dress oneself and arrange one's body in an elite fashion, culminating in the avoidance of an *agrestis* and *inhumanus* appearance, includes attention to skin colour: *bonitas coloris* ('aristocratic colour' or 'good colour') is to be 'maintained' or even 'safeguarded' (*tuenda est*). On the one hand, the notion of 'aristocratic colour' is likely to be one with fluid characteristics defined most clearly in opposition to undesirable qualities, rather than by a clear delineation of desirable ones.²² On the other, Cicero's contrast between 'feminine' (*muliebris*) attention to pleasing appearance and the 'masculine' (*uirilis*) attention to honour creates a binarized tension between female and male appearance in the construction of the aristocratic exemplar which invites the notion of gendered colourism. In the Roman imaginary, the elite feminine ideal circumscribes deliberate and performative paleness (e.g. Ovid *Medic.* 11–16, 69–79),²³ and it is this feminine pallor against which Cicero implicitly contrasts the masculine colour given that it is to be maintained by a prescription of physical exercise, i.e. outdoors where male skin may be darkened by the sun.²⁴

For Cicero, then, *bonitas coloris* constructs an elite masculinity within which a 'degree of brownness'²⁵ is the somatic norm.²⁶ At the same time, while the Roman elite body might be defined by the interrelative and binarized forms of feminine paleness vs. masculine colour, a third element is introduced via the foreignness of the slave body. Cicero attributes to Piso a 'slave colour' (*seruilis color*):²⁷

iamne uides, belua, iamne sentis quae sit hominum querela frontis tuae?
nemo queritur Syrum nescio quem de grege nouiciorum factum esse consulem. non enim nos *color iste seruilis*, non pilosae genae, non dentes putridi deceperunt; oculi, supercilia, frons, uultus denique totus, qui

22. cf. Cynthia's *ingenuus color* ('freeborn colour', Prop. 1.4.13) which is not defined by 'lightness' or 'darkness', but rather in contrast to whatever might be interpreted as a *seruilis color* ('slave colour').

23. With Johnson (2016), 50, 68.

24. In his speeches, Cicero often remarks upon physical change in guilty men as a loss of *color*, with 'blanching' as index of lost virility: *Verr.* 2.1.141, *Clu.* 54, *Cat.* 3.13 (with Butler [2002], 88, 99f.). On the broad association of such blanching (i.e. 'whiteness') with failed masculinity in ancient sources, see Dee (2003).

25. As Haley (2009), 31, emphasizes, brown is the somatic norm for the ancient Mediterranean: 'If, then, the reference point for *albus* is pale-brown, not the white of a Nordic consciousness, interpretations and reading of the other skin color terminology are transformed. *Ater*, *candidus*, *fuscus*, and *niger* become degrees of brownness. For me, *candidus* is reminiscent of Gwendolyn Brooks's use of the term "brights" for the lighter shades of brown associated with mixed-race (African-European) Americans.'

26. On gender and race as inseparable constructions, see Cheng (2000), 19, Claros (2021), Haley (2021).

27. Euphemistically rendered by Nisbet (1961), 52, 58, as 'swarthy'.

sermo quidam tacitus mentis est, hic in fraudem homines impulit, hic eos quibus erat ignotus decepit, fefellit, induxit. pauci ista tua lutulenta uitia noramus, pauci tarditatem ingeni, stuporem debilitatemque linguae... obrepisti ad honores errore hominum, commendatione fumosarum imaginum, quarum simile habes nihil praeter *colorem*.

(*Pis.* 1)

Do you now see, beast, do you understand what a bane to mankind your own face is? No one complains that some Syrian from a band of new slaves was made consul. For *that slave colour*, those hairy cheeks, those rotten teeth have not deceived me. Your eyes, brows, expression, and whole face—the silent manifestation of your mind—this is what drives men into a state of delusion, this is what deceived, tricked, and deluded those who were ignorant. Few of us knew those tainted defilements of yours, few knew the slowness of your spirit, the stupidity and weakness of your tongue... You crept into office by human error and by the recommendation of the smoke-blackened busts of your ancestors, with whom you have nothing in common but your *colour*.

Infamously, Cicero here claims that Piso is *darker* than the somatic norm: he has nothing in common with his ancestors *except* for the fact that he is the same ‘colour’ (*color*) as their ‘smoke-blackened busts’ (*fumosarum imaginum*).²⁸ In a fragment of this speech, Cicero explicitly characterizes Piso’s *color* as an invalidation of claims to freeborn status, family connection, and national belonging:

quod minimum specimen in te ingeni? ingeni autem immo ingenui hominis ac liberi: qui *colore ipso* patriam aspernaris, oratione genus, moribus nomen.

(*Pis.* Nisbet fr. viii)

Is there any evidence of natural capability in you at all—the quality of someone who is from here, who is a free man? You who invalidate your claim to this country with your *very colour*, who nullify your family connection with your speech, who void your name with your behaviour.

Significantly, Cicero here claims that *color* is a constitutive feature of the free citizen’s *habitus*, and that inclusion within the *patria* might be rhetorically denied on the basis of skin colour as well as other performances of elite identity such as a ‘speech’ (*oratio*) or commitment to aristocratic ‘values’ (*mores*). At the same time, Piso’s physical appearance—a darker colour than the somatic norm

28. Nisbet (1961), 52, 58, MacDowell (1964), Hughes (1992), Dugan (2001), 61f.

attended by other physical characteristics: bushy beard, bad teeth, and monstrous brow (*Pis.* 1)—does not stand alone but is, importantly, paired with other stereotyping characterizations: ‘inferior cognition’ (*tarditatem ingeni, ib.*), ‘inability to speak’ (*stuporem debilitatemque linguae, ib.*), and an inherently ‘deceitful’ nature (*decepit, fefellit, induxit, ib.*).²⁹ Appearance is not the sole index of character but is taken to be the physical manifestation of ideologically constructed qualities, and it is by virtue of this association between othered body and mind that the rhetoric of racialization begins to emerge.

Furthermore, Cicero has a eugenic and ethnonationalist interest in tracing the ‘corruption’ (in his view) of Piso’s bloodline introduced by his maternal grandfather—a man named Calventius, reportedly an ‘Insubrian Gaul’ (*Insuber, Pis. Nisbet fr. ix*) who settled in Placentia, a Latin *municipium* (*Pis. Nisbet fr. x, xi, 14, 67*).³⁰ Cicero relates that Calventius gradually shed his Gallic identity in order to ‘pass’ as Placentian:

hic cum †adom...Placentiae forte consedit, et pauci<s post annis> in eam ciuitatem—nam tum erat...—ascendit. prius enim Gallus, dein Gallica<nus fuit, ad> extremum Placentinus haberi...est.

(*Pis. Nisbet fr. xi*)

By chance, he settled at Placentia and a few years later was elevated into its citizenship, for at that time it was... For first he was a Gaul, then he was of Gallic extraction, and finally he was taken to be a Placentian.

That this process of cultural and civic assimilation was not complete is asserted by Cicero when he calls Piso *Semiplacentinus*—only ‘half Placentian’ (*Pis.* 14).³¹ Yet Cicero describes Calventius not only as civic anomaly³² but also as agent of bioethical decay. He characterizes Calventius’ genetic intervention into the Piso

29. cf. *Pis. Nisbet fr. vii: quid enim illo inertius, quid sordidius, quid nequius, quid eneruatus, quid stultius, quid abstrusius?* (‘What could be more passive, more dirty, more worthless, more weak, more stupid, more repressed than him?’)

30. However, Cicero is in general imprecise about Calventius’ origin: naming him Insubrian (*Pis. Nisbet fr. ix*), Transalpine (*Red. sen.* 15), or associating him with Mediolanum (*Pis.* 62); the ‘rooster’/‘Gaul’ (*gallus*) pun at *Pis.* 67 asserts Calventius as broadly ‘Gallic’.

31. At the time of the *In Pisonem* (55 BCE), whether to grant Roman citizenship to Cisalpine Gallic communities was still an ongoing debate. In 65 BCE, the *Lex Papia* expelled non-citizens from Rome (*Off.* 3.47) and allowed for the prosecution of those who had illegally acted as Roman citizens (*Dio* 37.9.5). In this year, the censors, Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78 BCE) and the future triumvir, M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 70, 55 BCE), fought over whether to extend Roman citizenship to the Transpadanes (communities north of the River Po). They failed to conduct the census and were compelled to resign (*Dio* 39.9). Roman citizenship would not be extended to the Alps until the *Lex Vatinia* of 49 BCE (*Suet. Iul.* 28.3). See Čulík-Baird (2020), 389–92.

32. In the *Pro Archia* 8, Cicero reports the prosecutor’s assertion that citizenship records in Italy were regularly tampered with, and Cicero himself asserts that non-Romans ‘crept somehow’ (*aliquo modo...inreperunt, Arch.* 10) onto the records of citizens in the *municipia*; see Čulík-Baird (2020), 393.

family as a monstrous perversion—Calventius’ daughter (Piso’s mother) in giving birth to Piso produces not a human but an animal:

te tua illa nescio quibus a terris apportata mater pecudem ex aluo, non hominem effuderit.

(*Pis.* Nisbet fr. xiv)

That mother of yours—having arrived from god knows where!—to produce *you* from her womb, not human but a beast.

Cicero’s characterization of Piso as a ‘beast’ (*belua*, *Pis.* 1, 8) or broadly ‘animalistic’³³—seeded as an index of his devolved, ‘bastardized’ nature³⁴—is activated in the infamous centaurography episode of the *In Pisonem* wherein Piso’s animal instincts are illustrated via alignment with the centaur as mythic enemy of ‘civilization’ (22).³⁵ But the insistence that Piso’s animal nature is a genetic inheritance from his mother also reveals Cicero’s underlying commitment to eugenic theory. As Karen and Barbara Fields demonstrate, the concept of genetic purity (i.e. a pure bloodline into which racial corruptions are introduced and can be scientifically measured) is rooted in the false premise of *unmixed* genetic composition:

Where but in recycled racist fiction are ‘monoracial’ parents to be found to serve as guarantors of ‘accurate racial identity’? The least one can say is that the fiction misrepresents the American experience. According to an estimate derived from decades of census reports, some 24 percent of Americans listed in 1970 as ‘white’ probably had African ancestors, while more than 80 percent of those listed as ‘black’ had non-African ones, which implies that there were nearly twice as many white as black Americans of African descent. Thomas Jefferson’s descendants fit both descriptions. But misrepresentation is not all. While redacting America’s real history, the fiction revives an old fallacy: the move, by definition, from the concept of ‘mixture’ to *the false inference that unmixed components exist*, which cannot be disproved by observation and experience because it does not arise from them... In sum, restoring notions of race mixture to center stage recommit us, willy-nilly, to the discredited idea of racial purity, the basic premise of bio-racism.³⁶

33. *Pis.* 19: *consulem ego tum quaerebam, consulem, inquam...quem in hoc maiali inuenire non possem* (‘I was searching for a consul—a consul, I say, ...I was not able to find a consul in this castrated pig’). On the ‘beast’ as rhetorical device in Ciceronian oratory, see May (1996).

34. Transhistorically, animalistic or zoomorphic imagery (i.e. comparing a human being to an animal) has been a rhetorical tactic of othering, dehumanization, and racialization. On the animalization of people of African descent as technology of the Transatlantic slave trade, see Fielder (2013).

35. On *Pis.* 22, see Köster (2014).

36. Fields and Fields (2012), 3f.

Cicero's insistence that Piso's Gallic mother and grandfather fundamentally negated Piso's claim to humanity—he is an animal (*belua*, 'beast', *Pis.* 1, 8; *pecudem*, 'beast', *Pis.* Nisbet fr. xiv; *maiali*, 'castrated pig', *Pis.* 19) 'not a man' (*non hominem*, *Pis.* Nisbet fr. xiv)—by virtue of their genetic material presents an ancient parallel to modern theories of miscegenation, i.e. the social and legal principle of racial classification known as the 'one-drop rule'.³⁷ Furthermore, Cicero's investigation of Piso's bloodline arises not only out of a desire to destabilize Piso's political position, but out of Cicero's personal fear of the contamination of his own household.³⁸ In the *Post reditum in senatu*, Cicero insists that while the rest of Rome had been taken in by Piso's deceptions, he himself knew the truth of Piso's origin:

is nequaquam me quidem—cognoram enim propter Pisonem adfinitatem quam longe hunc ab hoc genere cognatio materna Transalpini sanguinis abstulisset—sed uos populumque Romanum non consilio neque eloquentia, quod in multis saepe accidit, sed rugis supercilioque decepit.

(*Red. sen.* 15)

In no way did he deceive *me*—for I, due to my family connection with Piso, know how far from this race his maternal descent from Transalpine blood has removed him—but he *has* deceived you and the Roman people, not by intellect or eloquence, the usual kinds of persuasion, but with his wrinkled brow.

Cicero's daughter, Tullia, had married C. Piso Frugi (*Pis.* Nisbet fr. xiii), who during Cicero's exile approached his kinsman, Piso, to try to effect the recall (*Red. sen.* 17) but died before Cicero's return (*Sest.* 68).³⁹ Cicero, speaking as a privileged insider with a family connection, deploys personal knowledge of Piso's 'true' ethnic identity, which Piso, Cicero claims, had successfully disguised (*uos...decepit*, 'deceived you', *Red. sen.* 15). Significantly, it is once more Piso's mother who is the problem: her 'Transalpine blood' (*Transalpini sanguinis*)⁴⁰

37. As Haley (1993), 29, writes, reflecting on Cleopatra and Black identity: 'We have been told that if we have one Black ancestor, then we are Black. Film and plays have reinforced this idea. Our family histories proved this to us. My grandmother was white, had straight black hair, and the nose of her Onondagan grandmother, but she was "colored". Even as a "Greco-Egyptian", Cleopatra was a product of miscegenation. How is it she is not Black?'

38. Indeed, Cicero's racial 'othering' of Piso is part of Cicero's self-presentation as the moral consular alternative, a morality that circumscribes contrastive purity. Such rhetoric demonstrates that 'others' are required as a constitutive feature in the construction of an in-group. In other words, as Cheng (2000), 12, demonstrates, the function of racism is not 'violent rejection' but rather a 'wish to retain that other within existing structures'; 'they need the very thing they hate or fear'.

39. Treggiari (2007), 69.

40. Cicero here locates Piso's origin as Transalpine Gaul; elsewhere he claims it to be Cisalpine Gaul. On this deliberate imprecision, see n.30.

removes Piso ‘from this race’ (*ab hoc genere*, both *Red. sen.* 15).⁴¹ Cicero will never let Piso forget his mother, who presents a counterargument to Piso’s claim of illustrious ancestors:

alter multos plane in omnes partis fefellit. erat enim hominum opinioni nobilitate ipsa, blanda conciliatricula, commendatus. omnes boni semper nobilitati fauemus, et quia utile est rei publicae nobiles homines esse dignos maioribus suis, et quia ualet apud nos clarorum hominum et bene de re publica meritorum memoria etiam mortuorum. quia tristem semper, quia taciturnum, quia subhorridum atque incultum uidebant, et quod erat eo nomine, ut ingenerata familiae frugalitas uideretur, fauebant, gaudebant et ad integritatem maiorum spe sua hominem uocabant materni generis obliti.

(*Sest.* 21)

The other [= Piso] clearly deceived many of us in every way. For he was recommended to the opinion of men by his very nobility—an enticing seduction! All good men are always well disposed towards nobility, both because it is useful for the republic that noble men worthy of their ancestors exist, and because illustrious men and those who have earned the gratitude of the republic live on in memory even after their death. Because Piso always looked melancholy, quiet, because they saw him as uncombed and bristly, and because he had that name which represents the ingenerate *frugality* of the household, they were well disposed towards him, they celebrated him, and they called on him to be a man of purity as promised by the image of his ancestors—forgetting his *mother’s* race!

Cicero suggests that Piso’s ‘passing’ as an aristocratic Roman is the ultimate lie—indeed, it is a lie akin to racial deceit.⁴² Piso’s busts (cf. *Pis.* 1) and the Frugi name promise a bioethical quality—an ‘ingenerate’, ‘seeded’, ‘biological’ (*ingenerata*, *Sest.* 21) family trait. Piso’s claim upon this family name induces the *boni* to hold

41. Given that ‘race’ is a social category and not a biological one (Fields and Fields [2012], 5–11), it is appropriate to translate Cicero’s *genus* as ‘race’, in recognition of the fact that ‘race is an ideological structure that organizes and classifies perceived human variation’ (McCoskey [2012], 2), and in recognition of the ancient tendency to use *genus/genos* to create categories and hierarchies of otherness. For the latter see, e.g., Holmes (2012), 18–25, Kennedy (2016), 10, 13–15, Claros (2021) on Hesiod’s Pandora and the ‘race of women’ (*genos gunaikōn*, *Theog.* 590). In the *Moretum*, Scybale is identified as ‘African by race, with her whole body identifying her home country’ (*Afra genus, tota patriam testante figura*, 32); see Haley (2009), 32.

42. On ‘racial passing’, see Fields and Fields (2012), 88, who demonstrate the interconnectedness of racial categorization with the paranoia and confusion of racist categorizers in the face of physical ambiguity: ‘Young Afro-American girls toyed with such conductors by boarding the streetcar in pairs of differing physical type, one black, one indistinguishable from white. The pair would sit together in the empty middle rows of the streetcar, laughing and chatting, while white passengers stared and pressure built on the conductor to send them to separate sections.’

him to the ‘purity’ (*integritatem, ib.*) promised by his lineage—a purity invalidated, so Cicero claims, by his ‘mother’s race’ (*materni generis, ib.*). Cicero presents Piso as doubly signified: if we examine his face in one light, we see an elite Roman; but if we examine him in another, suddenly we see—is this the real truth?—a foreigner, a Gaul. Returning once more to the *In Pisonem*, we note that Cicero deploys this optical illusion, this lenticular trick, to assert double signification in Piso:

non enim nos color iste seruilis, non pilosae genae, non dentes putridi deceperunt; oculi, supercilia, frons, uoltus denique totus, qui sermo quidam tacitus mentis est, hic in fraudem homines impulit, hic eos quibus erat ignotus decepit, fefellit, induxit.

(*Pis.* 1)

For that slave colour, those hairy cheeks, those rotten teeth have not deceived me. Your eyes, brows, face, and total expression—the silent manifestation of your mind—this is what drives men into a state of delusion, this is what deceived, tricked, and deluded those who were ignorant.

Everyone else, Cicero claims, has been taken in by a face that claims to be a replication of ancient, noble family features.⁴³ But Cicero is not deceived: in the same face he sees not the inheritance of elite nobility, but rather ‘slave colour’, beard, bad teeth—a corruption, and a lie. Piso’s severe brow is not evidence of Roman austerity but rather a physical expression of bioethical degeneration: this is not the true face of a Roman, but the ‘mixed race’ Gallo-Roman, who by virtue of that mixing, Cicero implies, is not Roman at all.⁴⁴ Cicero creates a distance between what Piso claims to be and what he—according to Cicero—‘really’ is. In addition to the ethnic stereotyping that generalized certain peoples as inherent ‘liars’—e.g. Ligurians (*Ligures...omnes fallaces sunt*, *Cato Orig.* fr. 32), Carthaginians (*Carthaginienses fraudulentum et mendaces*, *Leg. agr.* 2.95), Greeks (*fallaces*, *Q.fr.* 1.1.16)—Piso’s ethnic characteristic manifests in *physical* deceit: *uoltus denique totus decepit, fefellit, induxit* (‘your whole face...deceived,

43. That the faces of Roman descendants ought to reflect the features of ancestors is implied and romanticized at *Aen.* 5.75f.: *tuentes | Dardanidae ueterumque agnoscunt ora parentum* (‘as the Dardanidae looked on [the faces of their children, cf. *Aen.* 5.553] they recognized the features of their ancient fathers’).

44. cf. *Pis.* 53: *Romam uero ipsam, o familiae, non dicam Calpurniae, sed Caluentiae, neque huius urbis, sed Placentini municipii, neque paterni generis, sed bracatae cognationis dedecus, quem ad modum ingressus es?* (‘But when you returned to Rome, you who shame your household, which is not the Calpurnian but the *Calventian*, who shame not the city of Rome but the *municipium* of Placentia, who shame not the race of your father but the bloodline of your trousered kin—in what manner did you return?’) It is not possible, Cicero claims, for Piso to simultaneously inhabit two family trees: the *Calventian* (i.e. Gallic) overrides and invalidates the *Calpurnian* (i.e. Pisonian). Cicero repeatedly calls Piso by the double name *Caesoninus Caluentinus* in order to emphasize Piso’s double genealogy: *Red. sen.* 13, *Prov. cons.* 7, *Pis.* 14.

tricked, and deluded', *Pis.* 1); *sed rugis supercilioque decepti* ('he has deceived you with his wrinkled brow', *Red. sen.* 15).⁴⁵ Ultimately, the significance of Cicero's scrutinizing investigation and 'revelation' of Piso's Gallic roots lies not in the fact that Piso's mother and grandfather were Gallic, but rather the fact that Cicero, in applying sustained invective towards his political rival, could draw on a deep fear of ethnic mixing, i.e. miscegenation, and thereby assert and empower a concept of national purity. By activating this sense of paranoia in his audience, Cicero alerts us to the fact that the contemporary aristocracy could be sensitive to, and indeed, hostile towards perceived differences deemed a threat to eugenic notions of purity in the elite Roman identity.

Piso the Aethiopian

In light of the above analysis of Cicero's ethnic scrutiny of Piso, we turn once more to *Post reditum in senatu* in order to examine the role of the Aethiopian in this passage:

nam ille alter Caesoninus Caluentius ab adolescentia uersatus est in foro, cum eum praeter simulatam fictamque tristitiam nulla res commendaret, non iuris <notitia> [studium], non dicendi ui<s, non scien>tia rei militaris, non cognoscendorum hominum <studium>, non liberalitas. quem praeteriens cum incultum, horridum maestumque uidisses, etiam si agrestem et inhumanum existimares, tamen libidinosum et perditum non putares. cum hoc homine an cum stipite uel Aethiope in foro constitisses, nihil crederes interesse; sine sensu, sine sapore, elinguem, tardum, inhumanum negotium, Cappadocem modo abreptum de grege uenialium diceres.

(*Red. sen.* 13f.)

For the other, Caesoninus Caluentius, has been experienced in the forum since his youth, but he has nothing to commend him besides feigned and false austerity: no legal, military, or oratorical capability; no interest in understanding mankind, no qualities of the freeborn. If you had happened to walk by him, you would have seen an uncombed, bristly, sorrowful man, and even if you considered him wild and inhuman, you would not have considered him wilful and wasted. You wouldn't have been able to tell if you were looking at a man or a stupid—let's say,

45. Indeed, we note the ambiguous double signification in the phrase (*sub*)*horridum atque incultum*: at *Sest.* 21, Cicero implies that the quality of 'uncultivation' which this phrase represents could be interpreted as a positive display of elite austerity. But at *Red. sen.* 13., Cicero uses *horridum atque incultum* to imply that lack of cultivation could also be a marker of social or ethnic inferiority, and asks his audience to see this side of Piso, reinterpreting his apparent 'austerity' as evidence of his ethnicity.

Aethiopian—standing in the forum: an inhuman thing without sense, taste, speechless, slow. You would say that he’s a Cappadocian recently plucked from a band of slaves.

I suggest that the entry point into this passage is *itself* an instance of racialized rhetoric, notwithstanding the ethnic and racial comparisons which follow: Cicero calls Piso *Caesoninus Calventius*—‘Calventius’ in reference to his Gallic grandfather (*Pis.* Nisbet fr. ix)—emphasizing ethnic duality in order to negate Piso’s ‘pure’ Roman status.⁴⁶ Cicero’s assertion that Piso is not of pure Roman stock is supported by assimilation of Piso to other foreign identities: here, Cicero compares Piso to the ‘Cappadocian’ (*Cappadocem*, *Red. sen.* 14) recently selected from the slave markets; elsewhere, Cicero compares Piso to ‘some Syrian’ (*Syrum nescio quem*, *Pis.* 1) also recently taken from the slave markets.⁴⁷ That Cicero does not need to be particularly specific⁴⁸ about the race of the slave to whom he compares Piso indexes the contemporary ‘centripetal and centrifugal’⁴⁹ system of mass enslavement which forcibly brought Cappadocians, Syrians, and other ‘others’ to Rome, converting them into racially interchangeable commodities, while simultaneously creating a contrastive physical and ethical category imputed by *seruilis color* (‘slave colour’). In sum, having opened the gateway into the rhetoric of racial multiplicity by first calling Piso ‘Gallic’, Cicero may also call him ‘Cappadocian’—an ethnic slur specific enough to imply foreign, degraded, and ‘servile’ qualities, but vague enough to be aligned with the general mass of ‘otherness’ generated by the slave trade.

Indeed, it is commodified ethnic multiplicity which most urgently argues for the legitimacy of the Aethiopian’s textual presence in *Post reditum in senatu* 13f. A comparison with *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where an Aethiopian slave is numbered alongside other foreign slaves as desirable, luxury commodities, delineates the very concept of ethnic specificity amidst generic variety also invoked by Cicero:

cum puerum respicit hunc unum, quem ego noui—uos non arbitror—alio nomine appellat, deinde alio atque alio. ‘at eho tu’, inquit, ‘ueni, Sannio, ne quid isti barbari turbent’; ut ignoti, qui audient, unum putent selegi de multis. ei dicit in aurem, aut ut domi lectuli sternantur, aut ab auunculo rogetur Aethiops qui ad balineas ueniat, aut Asturconi locus ante ostium suum detur, aut aliquod fragile falsae choragium gloriae conparetur.

(*Rhet. Her.* 4.63)

46. See n.44.

47. *Red. sen.* 14: *Cappadocem modo abreptum de grege uenaliū*; *Pis.* 1: *Syrum nescio quem de grege nouiciorum* (both quoted and translated above); cf. *Dom.* 49: *ille nouicius Ligus, uenalis adscriptor*. Cicero refers to the ‘humorous’ rhetorical tactic of ‘comparing political opponents to Syrian slaves’ (*homines similes esse Syrorum uenaliū*, *De or.* 2.265).

48. See n.30.

49. Padilla Peralta (2020b), 179.

When he turns to his one and only slave—I know him, I don't think you do—he calls him by another name, then another and another. 'Hey there', he says, 'come, Sannio, don't let those barbarians throw things into disorder.' He says this so that that people listening (they don't know the truth) think that he is selecting one slave from the many that he doesn't actually have. But he whispers in his slave's ear, telling him either to go set up the dining couches at home, or to ask his uncle to loan him an Aethiopian so that he can go to the baths, or to put an Asturian in front of his own door, or to prepare some other transparent pantomime of his own false glory.

Here, a free man pretending to have many slaves numbers his imagined possessions: within an imagined group of 'barbarians' (*barbari*) who 'throw things into disorder' or 'confusion' (*turbent*) in their variegated mass, an Aethiopian to attend him to the baths (who really belongs to his uncle) appears alongside an Asturian (i.e. from Hispania Tarraconensis) to stand before his door. Significantly, the free man has 'only one' slave (*hunc unum*) whom he 'calls different names' (*alio nomine...deinde alio atque alio*), recoding the same enslaved body over and over again with different ethnic 'costumes' as part of an elaborate social pantomime designed to reflect his own high status. While this rhetorical vignette clearly draws on themes of Roman comedy—and indeed, Terence 'the African' (*Afer*), notably an African brought to Rome as a slave (Suet. *Vit.* 1), also refers to Aethiopian slaves (*Eun.* 165f., 471)—we nonetheless here have evidence that Roman attitudes towards ethnicity were situated within and inflected by the conceptual machinery of mass enslavement which objectified ethnic variety into luxury commodities designed to reflect the wealth and status of the elite Roman slave owner.

On the one hand, then, Aethiopians appeared as one among *many* different performative ethnic characters prized (or fetishized) by the Romans as slaves, demonstrating that the Roman relationship to the 'Aethiopian' was a negotiation between an elite hegemonic social identity and a conceptually 'mixed' group of social inferiors. On the other hand, Aethiopians also consistently appear as contrastive 'others' in the contemporary Roman imaginary. In the *De divinatione*, Cicero refers to Aethiopians while deploying ancient environmental theory as counterargument to astrological determinism:

dissimilitudo locorum nonne dissimilis hominum procreationes habet?
 quas quidem percurrere oratione facile est, quid inter Indos et Persas,
 Aethiopas et Syros differat corporibus, animis, ut incredibilis uarietas dis-
 similitudoque sit. ex quo intellegitur plus terrarum situs quam lunae tactus
 ad nascendum ualere.

(*Div.* 2.96f.)

Doesn't difference in geography produce different kinds of men? It would be very easy to quickly sketch them out, as well as the ways in which

different peoples differ in both their bodies and their minds: Indians in contrast to Persians, Aethiopians to Syrians. What an incredible variety and difference there is! From this difference, we can understand that position on earth affects birth more than the influence of the moon.

Benjamin Isaac suggests that this passage is evidence of Cicero's *resistance* to the ancient theory of environmental determinism—i.e. the theory that a people's physical and moral character was determined by the climate of the region they inhabited⁵⁰—which was, in fact, part of contemporary astrological theory.⁵¹ However, while Cicero, adopting the sceptical Academic persona in stylized contrast to the Stoic arguments produced in Book 1 of *De Divinatione*, here decouples climate theory from astrological theory in order to argue against the Stoic concept of fate, he nonetheless *accepts and retains* the theory that different climates produce different peoples: *dissimilitudo locorum nonne dissimilis hominum procreationes habet?* ('Doesn't difference in geography produce different kinds of men?') As an exemplification of this assertion—so accepted as to be taken for granted (*nonne?* expects the answer: 'yes, of course!')—Cicero presents the 'fact' that Indians, Persians, Aethiopians, and Syrians have 'different bodies and minds' (*differat corporibus animis*, all *Div.* 2.96f.). They are 'different from each other' (*inter Indos et Persas, [inter] Aethiopas et Syros*), but also—as implied by the orientalism of the imagined west–east axis—they are different from Romans. Like Cicero, who essentially adduced the Aethiopian as an example of 'difference' (*dissimilitudo*, *Div.* 2.96f.), Varro likewise (and repeatedly) used the Aethiopian as a rhetorical example of *dissimilitudo*, emphasizing colour difference:

ut album esse Aethiopa[m] non satis est quod habet candidos dentes
(Var. *Ling.* 8.38)

just as if an Aethiopian has white teeth, it is not enough to call him white
inueniuntur esse dissimiles, si alter erit puer, alter senex, aut unus albus
et alter ethiops, item aliqua re alia dissimile<s>
(Var. *Ling.* 8.41)

they are found to be different, if one is a boy and the other an old man, or one
is white and the other Aethiopian, or they are different in some other way

50. McCoskey (2012), 46–8.

51. Isaac (2004), 87f. Manilius' *Astronomica* vividly combines racial categorization and astrology (4.711–30), describing the different physical characteristics (each has 'its own colour', *proprioque colore*, 4.712) of Germans, Gauls, Hispanians, Romans, Greeks, Syrians, Aethiopians, Indians, and Egyptians. In this ethno-astrological catalogue, Manilius is deeply hostile to Aethiopians: *Aethiopes maculant orbem tenebrisque figurant | perfusas hominum gentes* ('The Aethiopians defile the earth and fashion dyed races of men out of darkness', 4.723f.). On Manilius and astrological climate theory, see Woolf (2011), 49–51, Ford (2020), 69–71.

non esse similis, si alter est ethiops, alter albus⁵²

(Var. *Ling.* 9.42)

it is not the same, if one is Aethiopian and the other white

Indeed, Frank M. Snowden, Jr., notes that Varro's contrast of *albus* and *Aethiops* (alongside Juvenal 2.23: *Aethiopem albus*) demonstrates that *Aethiops* was conceptually a colour term (i.e. darker skin in contrast to lighter skin) in addition to an ethnic designation.⁵³ While Shelley P. Haley importantly warns us not to project our own racial imaginary into antiquity—encouraging us to see the Latin colour terms '[a]ter, candidus, fuscus, and niger' as 'degrees of brownness',⁵⁴ it is also clear that, within this somatic spectrum, Varro considered the 'Aethiopian' to be an *exemplary* term for the concept of difference itself in addition to the concept of contrastive colour. In sum, then, while the Aethiopian existed in the Roman imagination as one of a variety of ethnic slave objects, the *Aethiops* was also conceptually distinct due to a particular physical characteristic—dark skin.

Ultimately, then, Cicero's comparison of Piso to an Aethiopian is, in fact, a racist joke. In the *In Pisonem* 1, Cicero compares Piso to the busts of his ancestors, saying that he has nothing in common with them 'except for his colour' (*praeter colorem*)—the busts are *fumosae*, 'blackened by smoke', and Piso's skin, by implication, is darker than the somatic norm. In the *De oratore*, Cicero says that in oratory effective jokes can be made by emphasizing visual similarity between one's opponent and the ethnic 'other':

ualde autem ridentur etiam imagines, quae fere in deformitatem aut in aliquod uitium corporis ducuntur cum similitudine turpioris: ut meum illud in Heluim Manciam, 'iam ostendam cuius modi sis', cum ille, 'ostende, quaeso'; demonstraui digito pictum Gallum in Mariano scuto Cimbrico sub Nouis distortum, eiecta lingua, buccis fluentibus; risus est commotus; nihil tam Manciae simile uisum est.

(*De or.* 2.266)

Character sketches, where a comparison is made to something shameful like a deformity or some other physical fault, can also be very funny. Like what I said to Helvius Mancian: 'I'll show you what you're like', and he said, 'Oh yeah? Show me!' I pointed with my finger to the

52. Goetz and Schöll (1910) here print <g>albus, but *Ling.* 9.42 is clearly an identical repetition of *Ling.* 8.41.

53. Snowden (1970), 260: 'The use of *Aethiops* in lieu of *ater*... indicates that *Aethiops* was the equivalent of *ater* in this variation of the usual phraseology and that by the *ater-albus* proverbial usage the Romans intended at times to contrast a Black man or a Negro and a white man, and not merely a blond or brunet of the white race.'

54. Haley (2009), 31, quoted more fully n.25.

depiction of the Gaul on Marius' Cimbric shield in the new shops—body twisted, tongue hanging out, cheeks puffed out. There was a huge laugh! Nothing looks more like Mancian!

In the *Post reditum in senatu*, Cicero draws a comparison between Piso and the Aethiopian in order to construct such a caricature:

cum hoc homine an cum stipite uel Aethiope in foro constitisses, nihil crederes interesse; sine sensu, sine sapore, elinguem, tardum, inhumanum negotium.

(*Red. sen.* 14)

You wouldn't have been able to tell if you were looking at a man or a stupid—let's say, Aethiopian—standing in the forum: an inhuman thing without sense, taste, speechless, slow.

The insult of being called an Aethiopian here functions like the pun of L. Aelius Ligus as 'the Ligurian' (*Har. resp.* 5) or the homophony of *gallus/Gallus* ('rooster'/'Gaul', *Pis.* 67, see n.30), except that the joke is not verbal but visual. Indeed, the racist joke may ultimately derive its 'humour' from the tension between Piso's similarity *and* difference to the idea of the Aethiopian: Piso is darker than the average Roman, but not so dark as an *Aethiops*. At the same time, the comparison is not only physical: Cicero's comparison of Piso to the *Aethiops* allows him to characterize his opponent with the perceived qualities of the racialized, enslaved other as caricature: 'insensate' (*sine sensu*), 'lacking cognition' (*sine sapore*), 'lacking speech' (*elinguem*), 'physically reduced' (*tardum*)—in sum, an 'inhuman object' (*inhumanum negotium*). At the heart of the comparison is a serious and sinister Roman perception of the racialized other as passive, inert—not human. In seeking to activate Roman racial paranoia regarding Piso's own 'corrupt' bloodline, Cicero compares his political opponent to a comic 'extreme' of somatic otherness. And in doing so, he leaves evidence of Roman racism for modern audiences to examine—if they are willing to see it in the text.

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