

that was hardly representative of senators as a whole – that is that he was a “new man” (*homo novus*) whose standing rested not on noble heritage, military achievements, or awesome *auctoritas* but upon his eloquence and his canny political leadership as *consul togatus* in the crisis of 63, subsequently “betrayed” by the “optimates” whose savior he styled himself to be, sent into humiliating exile by a tribune and the Roman People for his violation of law and tradition, later a committed advocate of peace, even of accommodation with a victorious Caesar, and finally a zealous defender of the morality of the assassination and leader of a powerful attack against Caesar’s first potential successor. Such a brief résumé alone gives a hint of the specificity of the Ciceronian perspective and how questionable it can be to extrapolate from his many lamentations (or exultation) over current events to senators as a whole; attentive readers of Cicero’s letters will be familiar with how remarkably closely Cicero’s pronouncements about the “ups and downs” of the Republic (mostly downs) track the vicissitudes of his own personal fortunes.²⁷ More fundamentally, however, scholars have often been inclined to adopt Cicero’s perspective on the very nature of the Republic itself as if in such matters he could speak for his entire society. But it should give us pause to consider for a moment just how dubious it would be to do the same with a modern politician’s views, even those of an eyewitness participant possessed of commanding authority such as Winston Churchill, not to mention lesser figures who have nevertheless put their stamp on an age (e.g. Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan). Cicero may fairly be thought of as, on the whole, a moderate senator, as is shown by his arguments in the *De legibus* in support of “popular” institutions like the tribunate or the (mostly) secret ballot, or his strenuous efforts to mediate the looming crisis of the Caesarian Civil War. Yet the Roman Republic was “the Senate and People of Rome” (*SPQR* – a formula interestingly inverted in its first two epigraphic appearances in the second century BC), and an important implication of the resurgence of the People as a political agent in recent scholarship (as described earlier in this chapter) is that the job of defining the nature or norms of the Republic cannot properly be left to senators alone.²⁸ Scholars raised on

²⁷ Hodgson 2017: 105–162 traces Cicero’s rhetorical self-identification with the *res publica* from the consular orations to the late 50s. See, for example, *Red. pop.* and *Red. sen.*, passim; *Dom.* 73–76, 96–102; *Sest.* 136–147; *Prov. cons.* 2–3, 13–14, 45, and most interestingly, the retrospective exculpation of Pompey and Caesar at *Fam.* 1.9.11–14. Griffin and Atkins 1991: xiii, rightly comment that Cicero’s talk of the “loss of the Republic” tends to be “an exaggerated way of expressing disappointment with its present condition” (more or less identical with Cicero’s present condition).

²⁸ *ILLRP* 514, lines 6–7; *AE* 2006.624. Cf. Polyb. 21.10.8. Moatti 2018: 260–269 (cf. 2017: 40–48) provides a valuable review of the history of the formula, noting that it does not appear to be formally fixed until Augustus.