

Catiline as Anti-Socrates in *In Catilinam I*

The serious scholarship so far devoted to Cicero's *Catilinarian Orations* is surprisingly sparse in light of its place in the Western canon. The scholarship that specifically treats its Platonic and Socratic elements is extremely limited, and of this nothing appears to have been published in over half a century (Most recent is Coulter, 1956; next is Drabkin, 1936). Yet the Socratic ethos is no less than the key to understanding Cicero's construction of Catiline's ethos. As I shall argue in this paper, Cicero portrays Catiline as the Anti-Socrates.

There can be no doubt that Cicero held Socrates in high enough regard to be such a standard of virtue. In the *Tusculan Disputations* he says, "Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere" (*Tusc.*5.10). He was a kind of Prometheus, a benefactor to all mankind, but more to the point in *In Catilinam*, he was an ideal citizen, who served his state and preserved its laws at the cost of his own life. Though a Greek, he was a model of Roman virtue. Cicero invites comparisons between Socrates and Catiline by emphasizing the criminal activity of Catiline that most echoes the charges against Socrates in the *Apology*, namely that he is a corruptor, in particular, of the youth (1.26; 2.7-9). Cicero's audience would recognize this parallel in light of the preceding passage in which Cicero personifies the state and has it rebuke Catiline: "tu non solum ad neglegendas leges et quaestiones verum etiam ad evertendas perfringendasque valuisti" (*Cat.*1.18) This recalls a similar passage in the *Crito* where Socrates has the personified commonwealth of Athens and its laws rebuke him for considering defying their verdict. "ἄλλο τι ἢ τοῦτω τῷ ἔργῳ ᾧ ἐπιχειρεῖς διανοῆ τούς τε νόμους ἡμᾶς ἀπολέσαι καὶ σύμπασαν τὴν πόλιν τὸ σὸν μέρος; ἢ δοκεῖ σοι οἷόν τε ἔτι ἐκείνην τὴν πόλιν εἶναι καὶ μὴ ἀνατετράφθαι, ἐν ᾗ ἂν αἱ γινόμενα δίκαια μηδὲν ἰσχύωσιν ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ ἰδιωτῶν ἄκυροί

τε γίνονται καὶ διαφθείρονται;” (50a9-b2). Cicero’s own imagined prosecution by the personified state cannot avoid recalling such a famous antecedent, especially given the similar circumstances.

With the foundation of this comparison set early on in the oration, Cicero maintains a tension between the height of Socrates’ virtue and the depth of Catiline’s depravity with the result that their characters could not be made to appear more severely opposed. In the end, whereas Socrates crowns his virtuous efforts by remaining to face execution, Cicero insists that Catiline crown his treasonous efforts by fleeing into exile to join his army. Then, in Socratic fashion, Cicero caps this first oration with a prayer.

Though the scope of this paper is limited only to examining Catiline’s ethos in *In Catilinam I*, I believe the depiction of Catiline as the Anti-Socrates persists throughout the *Catilinarian Orations* and even the *Pro Caelio*. Thus this paper is potentially the beginning of a much larger and quite consequential inquiry into the figure of Catiline in the Roman imagination, because, if this contrast is fundamental to Cicero’s depiction of Catiline, it is not unreasonable to look for it in all subsequent depictions of Catiline. Thus this study will, I hope, shed light on later Latin works that deal with the figure of Catiline and aid in their interpretation.

Works Cited

- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1988 . *Orationes: Pro Sex. Roscio, De Imperio Cn. Pompei, Pro Cluentio, In Catilinam, Pro Murena, Pro Caelio*. Vol. 1. Ed. Albertus Curtis Clark. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Coulter C. C. 1956. “Plato's Crito and Cicero's in Catilinam I.” *Classical Bulletin* 33: 1.

Drabkin I. E. 1936. A platonic reminiscence in Cicero, In *Catilinam I.19. The Classical World*
34: 77.

Plato. 1995. *Opera: Euthyphro, Apologia Socratis, Crito, Phaedo, Cratylus, Sophista, Politicus, Theaetetus*. Vol. 1. Ed. E. A. Duke. Oxford: Clarendon.