

THE FIGURE OF CATILINE IN THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA*

Any educated Roman in late antiquity would immediately have recognized the figure of Catiline, for the simple reason that Sallust, together with Vergil, Cicero, and Terence, formed the core of the school curriculum. When his grandson starts school, Ausonius rejoices in a second chance to read the *Catiline* and the *Histories* (*Ep.* 22.61 ff.):

iam facinus, Catilina, tuum Lepidique tumultum,
ab Lepido et Catulo iam res et tempora Romae
orsus bis senos seriem conecto per annos.

Writers of textbooks on grammar could take it so much for granted that Sallust would head the *grammaticus*'s syllabus that the proper nouns Catilina and Iugurtha become the obvious paradigms for declining the first declension: 'nomina quae genetivo in AE exeunt nominativo in A, ut Catilinae Catilina.'¹ So it should not surprise anyone that there are reminiscences of Sallustian passages in historical writers, ordinary pagan laymen, and the Christian Fathers:² they had all had to read Sallust as schoolboys. The seven different references to Sallust in the *Historia Augusta* do not require us to postulate deep historical research on the part of the author. He is mentioned in passing as a great man (*Severus* 21.2), as a stylist (*Hadrian* 16.6), and as a biographical historian (*Aurelian* 2.1; *Quadrige tyrannorum* 6.3): and there are specific references to particular passages—Micipsa's death-bed speech at *Jugurtha* 10 (*Severus* 21.10: 'divinam Sallusti orationem'), the comparison of Cato and Caesar at *Catiline* 54 (*Maximus et Balbinus* 7.7) and the contrast of *virtus* and *ingenia* from *Catiline* 8.4 (*Probus* 1.1).

As a consequence, Catiline is found throughout antiquity as the typical symbol of the nefarious rebel against constituted authority. It is in that guise that he already appears in Vergil, suffering the torments of Tartarus (A.8.668 f.):

et scelerum poenas, et te Catilina, minaci
pendentem scopulo Furiarumque ora trementem.

One of the three references to Catiline in the *Historia Augusta* falls into this category: in the life of the usurper Firmus (*Quadrige tyrannorum* 6.3, mentioned above), we are told that the writer does not propose to waste his time telling us salacious details about Firmus' private life like his relations with crocodiles, as other (apparently fictitious) writers like 'Aurelius Festivus' do: he is a reliable historian like Livy and Sallust, neither of whom mentions these irrelevancies about Clodius and Milo, Catiline or Pompey. But the two other appearances of

¹ Martianus Capella iii. 300 (cf. 279 and 290).

² Cf. Schanz-Hosius iv.1 on (e.g.) Ammianus, Aurelius Victor, the *Origo Gentis Romanae*, Symmachus, Hilary of Poitiers (cf. *PL* 10.25 f.), and Jerome (cf. *PL* 23.29); Manitius' *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur* 165 ff.

des Mittelalters on Isidore, Julian of Toledo, Benedict, and Gregory of Tours; for Sallust in the High Middle Ages, cf. B. Smalley 'Sallust in the Middle Ages' in *Classical Influences on European Culture AD 500–1500*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1971), pp.

Catiline in the *Historia Augusta* (*Avidius Cassius* 3.5; *Clodius Albinus* 13.2) do not make sense in terms of this tradition.³ The use of the Catiline-figure here can I think only be accounted for if he is exemplifying something else: the type of man who combines in his character apparently contradictory qualities.

Men who were not straightforwardly black or white were rather a problem for educated Romans. Popular moral philosophy assumed that a man's character (*physis*, *natura*) never normally changed: the *Lives* of Plutarch are perhaps the most obvious expression of this widespread attitude.⁴ But this was not just a philosophical postulate. During their years at school, Romans had not merely read through with their *grammaticus* innumerable character-sketches in historians and orators which were little more than lists of either good or bad qualities; they had formally learnt at the rhetorician's school the framework into which any conceivable person would have to be fitted if he was going to be mentioned in a speech, either positively or negatively. We can see this (for example) from Cicero's summary of the 'laudandi vituperandique rationes' in the *Partitiones Oratoriae*,⁵ or Quintilian's scheme 'de laude ac vituperatione'.⁶

After this kind of education, any figure who combined positive and negative qualities was bound to be a problem—hence it was much easier to 'explain' Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian as *exempla* of bad emperors who managed at first either to disguise or to repress their vices, than to try to make an objective assessment of character development. Catiline had already been a problem for Cicero: possibly Cicero was aware of the *historical* Catiline's good qualities for the excellent reason that they had been on friendly terms for a quarter of a century.⁷ There is no problem in the *Catilinarians*: he has a list of vices straight from the handbooks,⁸ and any positive picture is dismissed as the fabrication of Catiline's supporters. The ability to endure cold, hunger, hard work, and lack of sleep (*in Cat.* 2.5.9; 3.7.16) is not a positive but a neutral quality which we frequently find associated with evil personalities (eg. Tacitus' Sejanus), and it was in that sense that Sallust took it over from Cicero for his own character-sketch.

It is in the *Pro Caelio* that we find Cicero giving us a picture of Catiline with good elements to balance the bad. He is of course trying to explain away his client's association with the rebel, and he does this by saying that Caelius was misled by the positive characteristics. This is achieved through a series of polar opposites: a clause from a *vituperatio* followed by one from a *laudatio* (5.12 f.); the account then concludes 'cum tristibus severe, cum remissis iucunde, cum senibus graviter, cum iuventute comiter, cum facinerosis audaciter, cum libidinosis luxuriose vivere'. From this list of contrasting qualities Cicero is satisfied of Catiline's 'tam varia multiplexque natura: neque ego umquam fuisse tale monstrum in terris ullum puto, tam ex contrariis diversisque atque

³ 'Looks like a piece of the biographer's nonsense', B. Baldwin 'The Vita Avidii', *Klio* 58 (1976), 112.

⁴ Cf. J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch: Alexander* (Oxford, 1969), p. xxxviii; A. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (1974), pp. 132 ff. N. Rudd, *Lines of Enquiry* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 154 ff., 160 ff., considers attempts to explain apparent character-inconsistencies. In Latin biography this theme already appears in Nepos: *Alcibiades* 1.4 'ut omnes admirarentur in uno homine tantam esse dissimilitudinem

tamque diversam naturam.'

⁵ 21.70–23.82. Cf. 80 fin.: 'Atque haec quidem virtutum. vitiorum autem sunt genera contraria.'

⁶ *Inst. Or.* 3.7. Cf. 19: 'Qui omnis etiam in vituperatione ordo constabit, tantum in diversum.'

⁷ Cf. *ILS* 8888; D. L. Stockton, *Cicero* (Oxford, 1971), p. 7.

⁸ *In Cat.* 1, 6.13; *in Cat.* 2, 4.7–5.9 and 11.25.

inter se pugnantibus naturae studiis cupiditatibusque conflatum.' To anyone who had learnt the rules of panegyric and invective, the man who had qualities of both was indeed a *monstrum*. Although Sallust used a similar series of antitheses for his description of Catiline,⁹ his purpose was not to balance negative with positive (*Cat.* 5): 'Corpus patiens inediae, alboris, vigiliae supra quam cuiquam credibile est. Animus audax, subdolos, varius, cuius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni appetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. Vastus animus immoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat.' The idea of describing a character by means of antithesis greatly appealed to Silver Latin prose writers: Tacitus' Mucianus (*Hist.* 1.10) is 'luxuria industria, comitate adrogantia, malis bonisque artibus mixtus: nimiae voluptates, cum vacaret; quotiens expedierat, magnae virtutes: palam laudares, secreta male audiebant...'; while Galba is (1.49.5) 'famae nec incuriosus nec venditator; pecuniae alienae non adpetens, suae parvus, publicae avarus . . .'; but Catiline nowhere appears as the 'ideal type' of such a character.

The *Historia Augusta's* lives of Avidius Cassius and Clodius Albinus are 'secondary', original insertions among the lives of those emperors for whom there was sufficient information through a reliable source. For both of them the writer had to create a biographical framework of his own into which to fit the pieces of factual information which he could take from the source's account of the contemporary legitimate emperors, Marcus for Cassius and Severus for Albinus. But although these accounts would give some information about political and military events, this was not enough for a Roman biographer: since Suetonius, any analysis of an emperor's life had to be *per species*, and a biographer would disappoint the expectations of his audience if he failed to include sections about the moral characteristics and private lives of his subject as well as public affairs. This distinction was not of course restricted to imperial biographies: it is a logical extension of the schema of analysis which the rhetorical textbooks prescribed for any description of an individual, positive or negative: cf. e.g. Cic. *Part. Or.* 22.75 'facta in propria virtutum genera sunt dirigenda' or Quint. 3.7.15, 'in species virtutum'.

So when he came to compose the lives of his usurpers, the writer of the *Historia Augusta* was faced with the problem of finding material which would fill out the schema which his audience expected. He was quite conscious of this problem: in the case of Cassius, after the rubrics *origo* (1.1) and *pueritia* (1.5), he had to go on to *natura et mores* and apologizes that (3.1) 'of course not much can be known about men whose lives no one dares to render famous because of those by whom they were conquered'. The structure of this life is slightly unbalanced because all political events have to be grouped around Cassius' death (6.5–9.4), since that was the direct result of the only 'fact' the writer knew about him, his rebellion against Marcus. To pad out the rubric character, he introduces an account of military discipline (4.1–6.4), illustrated by every conceivable commonplace on the stern commander known to Roman historians,¹⁰ and this entirely artificial polarity between the philosophic Marcus and the practical disciplinarian Cassius naturally introduces the revolt.

⁹ On Sallust's use of short series of antitheses in his characterizations, cf. K. Latte, *Sallust* (Leipzig, 1935), pp. 26 f.

¹⁰ Cf. Margot Streng, *Agricola: Das Vorbild römischer Statthalterschaft nach dem Urteil des Tacitus* (Bonn, 1970).

The account of Cassius' character is a simple list of qualities: it consists of five pairs of opposites, relating to his temper, and his attitudes to religion, wine, food, and sex (3.4): 'Fuit his moribus, ut nonnumquam trux et asper videretur, aliquando mitis et lenis, saepe religiosus, alias contemptor sacrorum, avidus vini item abstinens, cibi adpetens et inediae patiens, Veneris cupidus et castitatis amator.' It concludes: 'nec defuerunt qui illum Catilinam vocarent, cum et ipse se ita gauderet appellari, addens futurum se Sergium, si dialogistam occidisset'; the writer then explains this reference to Marcus Aurelius, and adds a final sentence that he wished also to be called Marius (3.8, 'qui se Marium dici vellet') because of his devotion to military discipline.

There is no problem about the reference to Marius the disciplinarian, and the Catiline/Cicero polarity parallels that between Cassius and Marcus. But what made the author think there was a connection between Catiline and the figure who combines good and bad characteristics?

It has long been accepted that in general the writer's procedure was to find material for his secondary lives by adapting themes he found in the sources he used for his primary lives.¹¹ It has recently been argued that when he looked for material for the life of Avidius Cassius, he found some additional facts in the letters of Cornelius Fronto.¹² We will come back to Fronto in a moment; the characteristics of Cassius, however, are clearly taken from one of the lives the author had already written up when he came to this point, Hadrian. Cassius the disciplinarian (as a—purely artificial—foil to Marcus) inevitably led the author to remember what he had said about Hadrian: 'disciplinam militarem tenuit' (3.9; cf. 10.3 and 22.1). What other Hadrianic features could he find to apply to Cassius? Ancient authors were divided in their judgement about Hadrian. Dio Cassius tells us in his character-sketch (69.5 ff.) that Hadrian was criticized for his strictness and desire to spy and meddle in the affairs of others (the *Historia Augusta* gives a nice example of this at 11.5 ff.), but that he balanced and made up for these by his *epimeleia* and *pronoia*, *megaloprepeia* and *dexiotēs*.¹³ In the *Historia Augusta*, this contradiction is expressed through a series of polar opposites, and this must be where the similar list in the life of Cassius originates from (*Had.* 14.11): 'idem severus laetus, comis gravis, lascivus cunctator, tenax liberalis, †simulator',¹⁴ saevus clemens et semper in omnibus varius'. Some writers had sought a 'political' explanation for these contradictory traditions about Hadrian: we are told (20.3) that 'Marius Maximus says that he was cruel by nature, and that the reason why he performed many acts of kindness was that he feared that the same thing might happen to him as happened to Domitian.' Whether or not the author of the *Historia Augusta* subscribed to this explanation, it did not stop him from describing Hadrian's character in terms of a split personality.

¹¹ T. Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften* 7 (1909), 319. Fortunately an assessment of the degree to which the main source of information for the primary lives was the consularis Marius Maximus (G. Barbieri, *Riv. Fil.* 32 (1954), 36, 262) rather than the hypothetical *ignotus* postulated by Syme is not necessary here.

¹² J. Schwartz 'Avidius Cassius et les Sources de l'Histoire Auguste', *BHAC* 1963

(1964), 142; B. Baldwin 'The Vita Avidii', *Klio* 58 (1976), 103; T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels 1978), pp. 50 f.

¹³ Dio also describes Hadrian's military *disciplina*, 69.5.2 ff.

¹⁴ One word appears to have dropped out of the text: Hohl proposed *dissimulator* from Sallust *Cat.* 5.4 (and the *Epitome*, see next note); others have suggested *simplex*.

Fortunately we can know something more of what the author read in his source, because that source also lies behind a very similar passage in the life of Hadrian in the *Epitome de Caesaribus*:¹⁵ Hadrian was 'varius multiplex multiformis; ad vitia atque virtutes quasi arbiter genitus, impetum mentis quodam artificio regens, ingenium invidum triste lascivum et ad ostentationem sui insolens callide tegebat; continentiam facilitatem clementiam simulans contraque dissimulans ardorem gloriae, quo flagrabat.' Here we have both the interpretation in terms of purposeful dissimulation ascribed to Marius Maximus by the writer of the *Historia Augusta*, and the antithetical arrangement of characteristics.

If we place these two passages side by side, it becomes clear that the source of the *Historia Augusta* had expressed the contradictions in Hadrian's behaviour in terms of the language of Sallust in his description of Catiline—with the major difference that Sallust's figure remains entirely negative, while the purpose of the source's analysis of Hadrian was precisely to account for the coexistence of negative and positive traditions. (One whole Sallustian phrase, 'supra quam cuiquam credibile est', has found its way into the *Epitome* (14.3), although here it is applied to *memoria* rather than to *vigilantia*.) This accounts for the reference to Catiline in the life of Avidius Cassius: the writer recognized that the passage he was copying from the life of Hadrian was based on Sallust's description of the rebel, with which he was of course familiar.

How perverse is the writer's claim that Cassius boasted of being like Catiline? Despite Sallust's use of the *Pro Caelio* for his characterization, there is nothing positive about the Sallustian Catiline: to the best of my knowledge the presence of good as well as bad qualities is nowhere associated with Catiline except in the *Pro Caelio* and the *Historia Augusta*. The one other relevant passage occurs in a letter of Cornelius Fronto to Marcus Aurelius. This letter is unfortunately very fragmentary, but it contains a discussion of the use of rhetorical figures in several passages from Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha* (*Ep.* 3.1, p. 100 Van den Hout; Vol. 2, p. 158, in Haines's Loeb edition). Fronto says that Catiline had been described in terms of antithesis, paronomasia, and epanaphora, and he cites both the relevant passages from the *Catiline* and from the *Pro Caelio* ('Alieni appetens, sui profusus . . . ' from Sallust; and from Cicero 'Quis clarioribus viris quodam tempore iucundior . . . ', pointing out that eight sentences in succession begin with the same word). Fronto cites the Cicero passage as an example of epanaphora, not of antithesis, because he is discussing style, not content. Nevertheless this letter suggests that second-century rhetoricians were analysing both the Ciceronian and the Sallustian passage in the same context, and (therefore) that anyone who had studied rhetoric at this time (like Marius Maximus?) would know both passages, and would be aware that Catiline could be used as a paradigm for a historical figure about whom there were both positive and negative judgements—like Hadrian (Fronto includes Hadrian among those emperors who shared good and bad characteristics,¹⁶ but he does not make him a Catiline figure). There is hardly enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that there was a tradition for the use of Catiline as an *exemplum* for the combination of good and bad qualities. But we can say that, quite apart from the tradition of Catiline as the evil

¹⁵ The parallels are exhaustively discussed by Jörg Schlumberger, *Die Epitome de Caesaribus* (*Vestigia* 18, Munich, 1974), pp. 86 ff.; cf. 'Die Epitome de Caesaribus und

die *Historia Augusta*', *BHAC* 1972/74, (1976), 201 ff.

¹⁶ *De Feriis Alsicensibus* 3.5 p. 214 Van den Hout (= Loeb 2.9).

revolutionary, the writer of the *Historia Augusta*, having perhaps read Fronto's letters, was able to recognize the description of 'Hadrianus varius multiplex multiformis' in his source as based on Catiline; and thought that his readers would understand the reference.¹⁷

Exactly the same train of thought will have led the writer to make the other reference to Catiline, in the (secondary) life of Clodius Albinus. Again, he was forced to use his imagination: the 'divisio' *origo* (1.3–4.7) is padded out with bogus letters, not to mention two mutually contradictory explanations for the name Albinus, and *pueritia* (5.1–10) contains the requisite omens of future greatness. This is followed by Albinus' *militia* as an *adulescens* (6.1–8) and tenure of the imperial office (7.1 ff.), the latter partially dependent on the account in Herodian. After his last campaign and death (8.4–9.4), the absence of a funeral, and a note on his family (9.5–7), we have the section *de moribus* (10.1 ff.). Here there are fictitious letters by Marcus Aurelius as well as by Severus; we are referred to Severus' autobiography, Marius Maximus, and Herodian for information about Severus' campaign of terror against the senatorial supporters of Niger and Albinus (12.14), but the sources for information about the *mores* specifically are variously *quidam* and 'Cordus', 'qui talia persequitur in suis voluminibus' (11.2). 'Cordus' says that Albinus was a glutton—we are provided with a remarkable menu, including 400 oysters—but sober. Severus on the other hand ascribes his ill temper to alcoholism: another clash of contradictory traditions. At this point the discussion of *mores* is interrupted because the writer thinks it important to say something about Albinus as a supporter of the Senate (12.1 ff.)—a discussion which is continued after the completion of the rubric on character. The characterization ends with a statement about his appearance, voice, and temper, and continues 'in luxurie varius, nam saepe appetens vini, frequenter abstinens, armorum sciens, prorsus ut non male sui temporis Catilina diceretur'. Why Catiline? Not because Albinus, like Catiline, had rebelled against the authorities, but because the contradictions between favourable and hostile accounts in his sources reminded the author of other characters paradoxically combining opposites: his own Cassius, his source's Hadrian, and the ultimate prototype Catiline, as he had first appeared in the *Pro Caelio*.

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¹⁷ There is some further evidence that Fronto was read in the late fourth and early fifth centuries A. D., e.g. from Jerome, *Ep.* 125.12. I can find no explicit borrowings from the *Pro Caelio* in the *Historia Augusta*, though this speech regained popularity in late antiquity (Quintilian refers to it twenty times, but Aulus Gellius only mentions that it was criticized: *N. A.* 17, 1.4 ff.). There are six references in Arusianus Messius, and other grammarians referring to the speech are Diomedes, Nonius Marcellus and M. Plotius Sacerdos (74th cent.), Agroecius of Sens and the *Ars Cledonii* (5th cent.), and Priscian, thrice. Amongst rhetoricians, Julius Victor cites the speech six times. A fifth-century papyrus from Egypt contains much of the *Pro Caelio*, suggesting that it was then a standard text for learning Latin (R. A.

Pack, *The Greek and Latin literary texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 1952), no. 2283 = *Pap. Oxy.* 8.1097, 10.1251). It was popular with the Church Fathers: cf. Victricius of Rouen's *De laude sanctorum* 10 (*PL* 20.452B), Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Lucae* 7.157; Austin, in his edition of the *Pro Caelio* p. 73, suggests it was Augustine who popularized this speech of Cicero's. For Jerome's use of the *Pro Caelio*, see J. F. Gilliam, 'The *Pro Caelio* in St. Jerome's Letters', *H. Tb. Rev.* 46 (1953), 103 ff. There is a fine example of a *monstrum* in the same letter which refers to Fronto (*Ep.* 125.18): 'procedebat in publicum intus Nero, foris Cato, totus ambiguus, ut et contrariis diversisque naturis unum monstrum novamque bestiam diceret esse compositum'.