

Original Paper

The Power of Dialogism in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*

Hubert King^{1*}

¹ Milton Academy, Milton, USA

* Hubert King, Milton Academy, Milton, USA

Received: October 5, 2020

Accepted: October 12, 2020

Online Published: October 17, 2020

doi:10.22158/sll.v4n4p105

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v4n4p105>

Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to highlight and analyze cases of dialogism between Sallust and Younger Cato in the *Bellum Catilinae*. Through close reading and linguistic analysis, prominent dialogue and its historical implications were examined. Afterwards, I used existing literature on dialogism and speeches in Ancient Historiography to speculate on Sallust's motivation for incorporating dialogism into the *Bellum Catilinae*. I posit that Sallust uses dialogism as a tool to inspire introspection in the reader.*

Keywords

rhetoric, classics, dialogism, historiography, linguistic

1. Introduction

Standing before the Senate, Cato begins to deliver a speech aimed at the very core of Roman society. Concerning Roman affairs both domestic and abroad, he exposes the decay of morality into materialism, laziness, and a loss of linguistic accuracy. He states that Romans praise riches and practice laziness, and do not distinguish between morally strong and deficient citizens. According to him, ambition claims all the rewards of virtue, and romans praise riches and follow inactivity: *habemus luxuriam atque avaritiam, publice egestatem, privatim opulentiam. Laudamus divitias, sequimur inertiam* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Interestingly, in earlier chapters Sallust hints at similar issues with the moral situation in Rome, similarly declaring that avarice subverted honesty, integrity, and other honorable principles: *namque avaritia fidem probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvertit* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 10). Throughout the *Bellum Catilinae*, it is often noted that Sallust thoroughly documents his pessimistic attitude towards contemporary Rome. Since Cato's speech in Chapter 52 draws parallels to Sallust's earlier remarks, and the accuracy of Sallust's account far from certain, an important question emerges: If these thoughts were not Cato's true feelings, why did Sallust adapt Cato's thoughts to echo his own agenda? In ancient historiography, speeches are always products of the historian's imagination. Since emphasis was placed so heavily on rhetoric by ancient scholars, speeches carry the utmost

importance throughout the *Bellum Catilinae*. Since authenticity could not be perfect, historians' emphasis was placed not on purely objective recounts of the facts, but a narrative that served a purpose, whether it be to teach or to entertain. Given the observation of echoes between Sallust and Cato, this paper aims to document the instances where such dialogue occurs and reflect on its significance and purpose.

2. Result

Three main themes arise in Sallust's portrayal of Cato's speech in chapter 52 of the *Bellum Catilinae*: the Romans' materialism, the loss of *vera vocabula*, and laziness. First, Cato claims that the Romans are overly materialistic, valuing their *domus, villae, signa, tabulae* more than the welfare of Rome (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Cato uses *ista* to distance himself from these items, also using *amplexamini* to further emphasize their wrongful infatuation with wealth. The concrete specificity of his claims builds a rhetorical foundation, from which he later expands this claim of materialism to more abstract ideas, like *luxuria atque avaritia*. Noting that he has spoke out on this issue often also serves as a way to further show the Roman's desperation to silence men who speak out on the wrongs of their indulgences: *multa verba in hoc ordine feci... multosque mortalis ea causa advorsos habeo* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Next, in articulating how his Stoic philosophy did not allow him to pardon anyone for wrongful deeds, Cato personifies *lubido*, licentiousness, characterizing Roman society as a human manifestation of licentiousness (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Even the leaders of senate suffer from materialistic values. They serve, in the manner of a slave, the pursuit of wealth over their constituents' wellbeing: *hic pecuniae aut gratiae servitis* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). The theme of *luxuria atque avaritia* is also in Sallust's earlier remarks. Sallust states that Rome's rampant materialism poisons the youth, who grow prodigal, undervalue their items while simultaneously coveting what was another's: *igitur ex divitiis iuventutem luxuria atque avaritia cum superbia invasere: rapere consumere, sua parvi pendere aliena cupere* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 11).

Secondly, Cato outlines what he sees as a direct factor in the near-ruin of Rome: the loss of *vera vocabula*. He brings to the forefront two main examples: *quia bona aliena largiri liberalitas, malarum rerum audacia fortitudo vocatur* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). To Cato, it is a direct result of these failings of the Romans that the *vacuum rem publicam*, empty republic, devoid of morally strong citizens, is now *in extremo*, in an exigent circumstance (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). The specificity of these two particular examples may be a way of capturing both domestic and international spheres; both the interactions between neighbors and with other states has been tainted by the issue of linguistic accuracy. The loss of *vera vocabula* is highlighted in the loss of distinction between morally sound and deficient citizens: *Inter bonos et malos discrimen nullum* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Having established this fundamental issue, Cato shows its effect in a comparison between Rome's origins and the modern situation. The strengths of Rome's origins were, according to Cato, in the *domi industria*,

foris iustum imperium, animus in consulundo liber, neque delicto neque libidini obnoxius, industry at home, equitable government abroad, and minds impartial in council, uninfluenced by any immoral or improper feeling (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). In lieu of them, he claims there lies pervasive materialism, *luxuriam atque avaritiam*, in both public and private spheres: *publice egestatem, privatim opulentiam* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). With this strikingly explicit contrast between the origins of Rome and of contemporary Rome, Cato shows how the loss of true meaning has caused the loss of their ancestor's virtue, giving rise to materialism and other vices. Sallust documents a similar loss in the meaning of virtue, echoing Cato's comparison to prior generations, stating that while forefathers were honorable in the aftermath of a victory, only preventing the enemy from re-arming themselves, the descendents conducted themselves without honor, looting and plundering the already defeated peoples: *verum illi delubra deorum pietate, domos suas gloria decorabant, neque victis quicquam praeter iniuriae licentiam eripiebant. At hi contra, ignavissimi homines, per summum scelus omnia ea sociis adimere, quae fortissimi viri victores reliquerant: proinde quasi iniuriam facere id demum esset imperio uti* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 12). Regarding domestic affairs, Sallust agrees that the Romans have lost all distinction between sacred and profane, and threw off all consideration and self-restraint: *divina atque humana promiscua, nihil pensi neque moderati habere* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 12). With respect to the relative direness of the moral issues, materialism seems to be the principal issue while the loss of *vera vocabula* serves to cover up the issue and allow citizens to stay in denial.

Third, Cato calls out the tendency for Rome to foster laziness. He urges them to stop indulging in rest and ignorance, for the entire republic is at stake: *expergiscimini aliquando et capessite rem publicam* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). As a general principle, Sallust shared this disdain for laziness and rest, stating that he would not waste his leisure time in indolence or inactivity: *non fuit consilium socordia atque desidia bonum otium conterere* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 4). Echoing Thucydides, Cato calls out the selfishness of the Romans: *separatim sibi quisque* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Cato even claims that Rome's failing morals, linguistics, and productiveness have resulted in the gods' rescinding their protection, explaining the danger that Catiline and his comrades now present. His words are a call to attention for the listless Romans: *vigilando, agundo, bene consulundo prospere omnia cedunt*. He warns that if the Romans continue on their path of ignorant indulgence and laziness, the gods will notice and become enraged: *Ubi socordiae te atque ignaviae tradideris, nequiquam deos implores: irati infestique sunt* (Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 52). Laziness seems to be a result of the materialism that Cato and Sallust denounce, allowing citizens to pursue rest and material success over more honorable pursuits such as protecting the republic.

Though aligned on multiple fronts, Cato and Sallust's commentaries differ in that Sallust's moral analysis of Rome is mostly historical, while Cato does a contemporary analysis, arriving at a similar conclusion: Romans are poisoned by greed and avarice. Sallust creates two separate, agreeing voices, but builds their respective arguments from different origins. The presence of these two voices suggests

a conversational association between Sallust and his adaptation of Cato. Working together, they serve the ancient historian's goal: to commemorate and teach readers. Perhaps the conversational relationship between the voices was designed by Sallust as a rhetorical tool to encourage reflection and introspection on the part of the reader. Hearing Sallust both through his own words and through Cato's speech strengthens the dialogue, and would make the reader feel more inclined to participate in the discussion.

3. Discussion

According to 20th Century political theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the dialogical word is always in an intense relationship with another's word, being addressed to a listener and anticipating a response. It is also designed to induce a response, leaving the discussion open-ended. It is a consciousness lived constantly on the borders of other consciousnesses. For Bakhtin, monological language is a corruption of an underlying dialogism, and language always has an ultimately dialogical aim. Human consciousness is not a unified entity, but rather, is always conflict-ridden between different consciousnesses. Indeed, a single consciousness separate from interaction with other consciousnesses is impossible (Robinson).

The dialogue between Cato and Sallust provides a snapshot of the phenomena described by Bakhtin. Though pushing similar agendas, Cato and Sallust do not agree on everything, as they draw on different parts of history to make their arguments. The very nature of their dialogue is open-ended and incomplete, which encourages the reader to reflect on the situation and find his or her own take on the moral situation and what contributed to it. The nuance of this snapshot of Sallust's work serves to support Bakhtin's claim of dialogism being superior to monologism; the echoes in *Bellum Catilinae* transmit varying, nuanced ideas. While a monological account of the Catilinarian Conspiracy would merely serve a single agenda, Sallust's dialogical account ensures that no voice is a slave to the other; in fact, the voices work together to inspire curiosity and introspection. The events and their roots are captured in a more curious tone, rather than being dominated by the author's own biases.

Interestingly, Sallust lives up to Cicero's description of a historian in *De Oratore*: *aut si quisquam dicitur nisi orator formare orationem eamque variare et distinguere quasi quibusdam verborum sententiarumque insignibus*, if anyone besides the orator is said to form a discourse, and to vary and adorn it with certain distinctions, as it were, of words and thoughts (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.36). The discourse that Cicero describes here is evident throughout the *Bellum Catilinae* between Cato and Sallust. Sallust's use of dialogism to inspire reflection in the reader suggests that interprets his role as a historian to be that of a teacher and mentor. As was the norm in Ancient Historiography, Sallust's recount of the Catilinarian Conspiracy presented more than facts and events; it encouraged reflection upon the morals and values of an entire society. Furthermore, Sallust's use of speech and dialogue shows that Sallust sees another role of history as being an inspiration.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my mom for pushing me through these academic endeavors.

References

- Cicero, M. T. (1942). *De Oratore*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.marcus_tullius_cicero-de_oratore.1942
- Robinson, A. (2012). In Theory Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia. *Ceasefire Magazine*. Retrieved January 11, 2012, from <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/>
- Sallust. (1897). *Bellum Catilinae*. Gotha.