

This paper synthesizes three debated aspects of the *Bellum Catilinae*: Sallust's choice of the conspiracy as a topic, the elision of the *Fourth Catilinarian* in the debate before the senate (followed by the balanced *synkrisis* of Caesar and Cato), and the heroic death of Catiline. I will argue that all of these elements can best be explained by understanding Sallust's work as a criticism of the polarizing rhetoric that accompanied the crisis of the late Republic. Whether or not Sallust was familiar with Cicero's letter to Luceius (*Ad Fam* 5.12) in which Cicero urged his addressee to write a monograph of the conspiracy (Woodman 1988:149), Sallust would have known the *Catilinarians* as well as Cicero's frequent references to these events after his recall (Riggsby 2002:165). In all of these works, Cicero uses language to depict select citizens as an enemy class deserving extirpation (Habinek 1998:70-1). Sallust uses his monograph as an opportunity to highlight the destructive and over-simplifying nature of the rhetoric of stasis. The conspiracy featured an efficacious use of such rhetoric and was a natural choice of topic.

Sallust fails to mention Cicero's *Fourth Catilinarian* despite the fact that he foregrounds the senatorial debate on the fate of the conspirators. He has Caesar describe, in his plea for clemency, the speeches of the other senators in language that strongly evokes the rhetoric of Cicero.

"They have enumerated the savagery of war, the results for the conquered: the rape of girls and boys, children torn from the embrace of their parents, matrons enduring the will of the victors, shrines and homes despoiled, slaughter and fires, and everything filled with weapons, corpses, blood, and grief." (*BC* 51)

Cicero's barbed tongue is thus present in allusion but is not Sallust's only target. By portraying Caesar and Cato as the representatives of this debate (Syme 1964:61, McGushin 1977:309-11), he also alludes to the bitter struggle that had ensued over Cato's memory as it was alternately praised and denigrated by Cicero, Brutus, Caesar and Hirtius.

The muffling of the lead voice that called for the death of the conspirators is explained by Catiline's death, facing forward in the thick of the enemy. In the final battle, Catiline embodies Roman heroism (Scanlon 1987:34) and thereby calls the underlying assumptions of Roman invective into question. In Cicero, digressions that we would now consider slanderous were relevant because of a belief that character is innate. Thus, behaviors that betray an ignoble character mattered, whether or not directly pertinent to the crime under discussion, since a depraved character must result in depraved actions. Sallust, by drawing Catiline to the very template of Ciceronian invective in the first half of his work (Wilkins 1993:138), shatters that template by showing Catiline dying nobly. This disjunction between Catiline's life and death is a condemnation of the over-heated rhetoric of stasis. The disintegrating meaning of language, a theme Sallust adopted from Thucydides (Scanlon 1980), is shown in the *Bellum Catilinae* to be not merely a symptom but a cause of stasis. Meaning fails in part because language is no longer used to communicate but is instead wielded like a blade.