

Speak Your Mind: The Symbolism of Seeing, Knowing, and Speaking in *in Catilinam I*

Cicero's *in Catilinam I* uses words of seeing, knowing, and speaking to illustrate two sides in the battle for Rome. On the one hand, Catiline and the conspirators are almost bestial in their inability to perceive and understand the society in which they reside. But on the other hand, Cicero and other good Romans (*boni*) are portrayed with the intellectual superiority which only a moral Roman can possess. In the Roman world it was considered right, and even human, for each person to be perceptive of his or her fellow citizens. Who is doing well? Who is doing badly? Who inspires hope? Who inspires fear? If a Roman not only has a negative social quality but also lacks the sensitivity to perceive that error, he exacerbates his disruption of the social cohesion (Kaster 2005, 17-19). Furthermore, Roman society relied on mutual judgments of character between citizens in order to improve individual and group morality; therefore, one incapable of both perceiving the eyes watching him and seeing the nature of others with his own eyes is de facto not a member of Roman society (Barton 2002, 220-223). Cicero portrays Catiline and the conspirators in this way in order to symbolically exclude them from society and make his actions against them seem more legitimate.

For example, the verb *video* is used in the active voice 15 times: seven uses with Cicero as the subject, three with Catiline, three with the senators, one with L. Opimius, and one with *nemo*. Of those three associated with Catiline, one is a question with the expected answer being "no, he does not see" (*In Catilinam I.1*); the second is an infinitive following *possum* and so Catiline did not necessarily see (21); and the third is in the future tense and describes the undesirable situation in which Catiline lives to see not a single good man left in Rome (*virum bonum quemquam neque videbis*; 26). Therefore, throughout the speech Cicero portrays Catiline as being incapable of seeing and perceiving while Cicero himself along with the senators, an

honorable former consul, and the people of Rome are very aware of the people and circumstances around them.

Likewise, words of perceiving, knowing, and understanding are positively associated with Cicero, the senators, and the people of Rome. The verb *sentio* is only used with Catiline when it is a question with the expected answer of “no” (*in Catilinam* I.1), when it is negated by *non* (6), or when it is in the future tense and therefore is not certain (14, 26). Similarly, *intellego* is used with Catiline only in the future tense (8) or as part of a purpose clause in which his knowing directly relies on Cicero’s informing him (20). Finally, the only time that *scio* is used with Catiline is to say that he knows that no one does not know of his failed attempt on Cicero’s life (15). This pattern of Catiline’s incapability continues with the usage of particular nouns and other verbs related to those already mentioned here.

Following works by other scholars on actions and morality in oratory (e.g. Corbeill 2004; Edwards 1993), I will show how Cicero uses words of seeing, knowing, and speaking to align himself with the senate and other good men (*boni*) while depicting Catiline as incapable of proper human emotion as the Romans understood it. In doing so, Cicero builds support for himself by portraying Catiline as un-Roman, unnatural, and therefore unworthy of support from others. Simultaneously, Cicero deflects the responsibility of his actions against the conspirators by showing political support from the senate, the people, and the *res publica* itself who hold knowledge and perceptions similar to Cicero’s. Thus the orator creates a narrative in which good Romans stand united behind him as he opposes the monstrous Catiline.

Bibliography

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