Character assassination in ancient Rome: Defamation in Cicero's First Catilinarian Oration from a historical-psychological perspective

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ABSTRACT: Cicero's Catilinarian Orations of 63 BCE are among the most exemplary pieces of damning rhetoric and defamation from all of antiquity. This paper analyzes the first of these famous speeches, using comparative methods to explore the perceptions of how Cicero commits character assassination on his opponent. For the modern observer, at least two general interconnected themes appeared in the speech. One refers to the emotional atmosphere of fear and anxiety Cicero is building in his audience. The other creates a cognitive dichotomy between "us" and "them". Insights from psychology, history, and sociology can help us to critically connect antiquity to present times, examine how Cicero's attacks against Catiline's reputation worked, and why they were so psychologically effective.

Character assassination is the deliberate destruction of an individual's reputation in the eyes of relevant groups. This is achieved through character attacks, which can take many forms, including spoken insults, offensive tweets, accusations, Internet memes, and newspaper columns, to name but a few. Although such attacks seem ubiquitous in contemporary politics, they are by no means a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, countless kings, queens, dukes, bishops and generals have fallen victim to character attacks. In this paper, we will examine from a new psychological perspective a case of character assassination from the distant past: the defamation of the Roman senator Catiline by his colleague, the famous orator Cicero, in the First Catilinarian Oration of 63 BCE.

While numerous and detailed descriptions of character assassination exist, it is only recently that scholarly attention has been devoted to the

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analysis of character assassination as a psychological cross-cultural phenomenon, viewed of course in a historical perspective. In our earlier works (Icks and Shiraev 2014) we argue that character assassination has central and peripheral features. The latter are culture-bound and time-specific. They are determined by local values, specific social structures, and technologies: a sixteenth-century writer of a satirical pamphlet did not have access to social networks on the Internet. The former (the central features) tend to be cross-cultural and are likely to be present in any historic period: whether it was ancient Rome, medieval France, Communist Russia, or the 21st-century United States. Such universal features include, for instance, rumormongering, stereotyping, lies, name-calling, and the utilization of cultural taboos and enemy images—to name a few—to cast the target of the attacks in a negative light and damage their reputation.

Despite enormous variations in political and social structures, in norms and values, and in levels of technology among different societies and historic epochs, these underlying principles and characteristics of character attacks tend to remain essentially similar. The reason is that they are probably tied to the individual's fundamental cognitive and emotional mechanisms and constants of a person's decision-making. The search for such explanatory mechanisms and constants, such as cognitive dissonance, attribution errors, stereotyping, conformity, projection, and others (Ariely 2010; Koenigsberg, 2014; Tetlock 2016), is part of our ongoing work and is not given significant attention in this paper.

GOALS

In this paper, we will apply several concepts and methods of psychology to a particular historical case of character assassination. We pursue several goals. One is to better understand the essence and psychological mechanisms of character attacks. Another is to demonstrate how these concepts and methods could help us in gaining a better understanding of the workings of defamation in cases from the (distant) past. A third goal is to look into a historic case and attribute the reasoning of the 21st century to an event that took place many centuries ago. And finally, our last goal is to describe the historic circumstances that make this case unique as well as "classical".

We have chosen the case of Cicero and Catiline for several reasons. First, Cicero's Catilinarian Orations are justly famous as some of the best pieces of damning rhetoric from all of antiquity. Second, we possess the complete text of the speeches, even though their published versions have been altered from the words that Cicero actually spoke in 63 BCE (a point to which we will return). Third, we are relatively well informed about the political

and social circumstances in which Cicero's attacks against Catiline took place. Several ancient sources inform us about Catiline's alleged conspiracy against the political establishment and the circumstances that gave rise to it. Finally, despite our great distance to the Roman Republic, in time as well as in cultural values and habits, Cicero and Catiline operated within a political and social framework that had (some) features in common with our own time, such as the individual's acceptance of majority rule, the attention paid to public opinion, negative campaigning and personal attacks on political opponents, and coalition-building. These features are therefore relatable to the contemporary observer.

In the following, we will briefly touch on the significance of character in Greco-Roman oratory. Then we will discuss the historical context in which the First Catilinarian Oration was delivered, as well as the methodology we have applied.

CHARACTER IN GRECO-ROMAN ORATORY

Character can be defined as the moral dimension of an individual's personality and behavior. Hence someone of "good character" displays traits that are considered virtuous by the culture in focus, such as honesty, bravery or wisdom. In Greco-Roman oratory, it was paramount for the orator to project ethos, that is good character, to gain credibility with his audience (Halloran 1982, 60). This is why many ancient speeches, Cicero's included, strike us for the way they are constantly drawing attention to the person of the speaker (May 1988). Likewise, it was considered perfectly acceptable to attack the character of a political opponent, whether in the political arena or in court. Such attacks were often vicious and could be aimed at anything from a person's appearance to their sexual preference. It did not matter whether the accusations were directly relevant to the issue at hand: in the world of oratory, undermining a rival's reputation was always considered fair game. As we will see, Cicero was particularly skilled at heaping abuse on his opponents (Corbeill 2002).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the first century BCE, Rome had become the center of an ever-expanding empire that stretched over parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. However, this vast territory did not yet have an emperor at its head. Sovereignty lay in the hands of the SPQR—the *senatus populusque Romanus*, or "Senate and people of Rome". Each year the people's assembly, consisting of all adult male citizens, elected two consuls to lead the Roman Republic in peace and war. These foremost magistrates were supposed to hold each other in check

and governed in accordance with the Senate, a body comprised of members of the highest social class.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) stemmed from a rich, but non-senatorial Italian family. He was a gifted orator and made a name for himself as a successful lawyer in Rome. When he decided to embark on a political career, he was equally successful, obtaining several political offices and gaining admittance to the exclusive circle of senators. Cicero, in short, was a social climber who started from relatively modest beginnings and grew to great prominence (Habicht 1990; Everitt 2001; May 2002). In contrast, Lucius Sergius Catilina (108-62 BCE)—known as Catiline in English—was the scion of an old aristocratic family in decline. He also embarked on a political career and managed to become governor of the Roman province of Africa (comprising parts of modern-day Tunisia, Algeria and Libya). Afterwards disgruntled inhabitants of the province put him on trial for corruption. He was acquitted, although it was rumored that he had bribed the judges (Levick 2015).

In 64 BCE, Cicero and Catiline competed for the much-coveted office of consul. Although all adult male citizens were eligible to vote in the consular elections, only the privileged few possessed the prestige and the means to run for office. Without exception, candidates were senators who had successfully climbed the political ladder. Consular candidates, then, were never "men of the people", although some of them ran on a platform that advocated the interests of their less fortunate fellow citizens. These so-called *populares* (from the Latin word *populus*, "people") expressed concern about the growing gap between the rich and the poor in Roman society. Ordinary people saw that many of the fruits of Rome's conquests had flowed into the coffers of the upper classes of senators and knights, while the common man had to struggle to get by. Working mostly through the people's assembly, the *populares* strove for reforms, such as the subsidization of grain to feed the urban poor and the redistribution of land held by the state to favor small farmers. Pitted against them were the *optimates* (from *optimus*, "the best"), who represented the interests of the well-off elite who wanted to maintain the status quo. Neither of these groups should be seen as political parties in the modern sense of the word: they were rather loosely defined and lacked formal organization. Rather, politicians associated themselves with whichever label best suited their interests and methods (Morstein-Marx 2004, 204-205; but see also Robb 2010 challenging the *optimates-populares* opposition).

In the consular campaign of 64 BCE, Catiline, despite his aristocratic background, profiled himself as the champion of the common people. He

advocated the radical and populist measure of *tabulae novae*, the cancellation of the debts that plagued many Roman citizens. His opponent Cicero sided with the conservative *optimates*. Together with a certain Gaius Antonius Hybrida, who would only play a minor role in the upcoming affairs, he managed to gain the consulship for 63 BCE. Catiline lost the election and ran for office again the next year, but could not generate the necessary support. After a bitter and tense campaign, he was once again defeated. Apparently, he then decided to pursue power through less orthodox means (Ramsey 2007, 16-18). Throughout Italy, many groups were clamoring for change: members of the urban plebs (the common people) with little to no income; small farmers who could not compete with the great slave-manned ranches of the rich; veteran soldiers who had failed to adapt to a civilian life; even some down-on-their-luck senators and knights who were unable to pay off their debts. Catiline gathered many of these around him to conspire against the establishment.

    Although we do not have any unbiased sources at our disposal, it appears that the conspirators were planning to kill a number of Roman senators and seize power with the help of a garrison of revolutionary forces that had been gathered in nearby Etruria (Dyck 2008, 7-8). To start things off, an attempt at Cicero's life was made on the 7th of November. The latter had been forewarned, however, and simply kept his door shut, so that the would-be assassins failed to fulfil their mission (Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 28.1-3). In response, Cicero convened the Senate the next day—not in its usual meeting place, but in the nearby Temple of Jupiter Stator, a more secure location, which he surrounded with guards. The choice for this sanctuary was no doubt also motivated by its symbolic connotations, as it was dedicated to Jupiter in his role as "Stayer" or "Sustainer" who helped the Romans to ward off enemies. It was here that the consul launched his first verbal attack against Catiline, who was present on the occasion.

CONTENTS AND EFFECT OF THE SPEECH

In his First Catilinarian Oration, Cicero addressed the senators and Catiline directly. He warned the former against the latter, painting his fellow senator as a *hostis*, an enemy of the state. As was customary in Roman oratory, he drew on various *exempla*, moral anecdotes from the past, to argue that Catiline should have been executed long ago, but that he would not give the order as long as some still believed in his innocence (2-6). Throughout his speech, Cicero evoked an ominous atmosphere of lurking danger, of nightly meetings and daggers in the dark. Catiline is portrayed as a corrupt, black-hearted villain who leads a shameful life and is followed by equally

corrupt, shameless cronies. As nefarious as their plans are, they stand no chance of success, since Cicero is ever watchful and will thwart their every move (8). At the end of the speech, the consul urged Catiline to go into exile and to take his followers with him, so that the city would be cleansed of their presence. Finally, he invoked Jupiter to punish all those who had turned against the Republic and its citizens (33).

As the second-century biographer Plutarch records, no senators were willing to sit anywhere near Catiline during the meeting (*Life of Cicero* 16.4). Cicero himself claimed the same in his Second Catilinarian Oration (12). The general mood must thus already have been quite hostile towards the man. However, some of those present at that fateful meeting on November 8 may well have harbored sympathies for Catiline's cause, or may have been undecided on the matter, even if they did not dare to show it openly (Craig 1993, 261). In fact, in the course of his First Catilinarian Oration, Cicero mentions the presence of Catiline's supporters in the audience (9), adding that "there are some men in this body who either do not see what threatens, or dissemble what they do see; who have fed the hope of Catiline by mild sentiments, and have strengthened the rising conspiracy by not believing it" (30).

Weeks before, informers had already warned Cicero that trouble was afoot, prompting the Senate to declare a state of emergency. However, hard evidence against Catiline was lacking. Cicero's options to act were therefore severely limited. It is possible that his goal at the start of the speech was to have Catiline declared a *hostis* and to have him executed, but if so, it must soon have become clear to him that he would not win sufficient support among his fellow senators to enact this measure without repercussions. His goal, then, became 1) to convince the Senate that Catiline was indeed a threat; and 2) to convince Catiline that the Senate was so hostile to him that voluntary exile was his best option (Craig 1993, 260-261). In order to achieve this, he attacked Catiline's character, doing everything in his power to stir up further hostility against his opponent and to alienate him from the other senators.

The ploy succeeded marvelously. According to the contemporary historian Sallust, Catiline rose to protest after Cicero had finished his speech. When he started to launch a verbal attack against the consul, his fellow senators cried out, calling him an enemy and a traitor (*Conspiracy of Catiline* 31.7-8). Plutarch omits any mention of this exchange, but all sources agree that Cicero's speech prompted Catiline to leave the city. It marked the beginning of the end for him as a public figure. In the following weeks, several of his co-conspirators would be arrested and executed. Early in the

next year, Republican forces defeated the army of revolutionaries, thus ending the threat to the establishment. Catiline himself died on the battlefield.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE SPEECH

Roman orators did not read out their speeches, as many modern politicians do (using printed pages or teleprompters), but spoke by heart, which gave them ample room for improvisation. However, it means we have to account for the possibility that they polished or even significantly revised their speeches before publication. This is likely for Cicero as well. In case of the First Catilinarian Oration, he had good reason to tweak his words in hindsight. After Catiline had fled the city, Cicero had ordered the execution of several other conspirators without giving them a fair trial, even though that was their right as Roman citizens. This prompted much indignation in Rome and would even lead to the former consul's temporary exile from the capital in 58-57 BCE as punishment for his "tyrannical" behavior, as his political enemies insisted on calling it. The published version of the First Catilinarian Oration appears to have been altered to address critical responses to Cicero's actions (Lintott 2008, 143; but see also McDermott 1972, 283-284, who rejects the notion that Cicero later revised his consular speeches).

Despite this caveat, the Ciceronian scholar Andrew Lintott is confident we can assume that there is "nothing" in the published version of the First Catilinarian Oration that is "inconsistent with actual delivery on the occasion" (Lintott 2008, 17). It is safe to assume that Cicero will have portrayed Catiline as a danger to society in his original speech and will have threatened to have him executed. These threats may have been toned down in the edited and published version of the speech, so that Cicero could avoid the stigma of tyrannical behavior, but the essential message will have been the same (Lintott 2008, 145-146).

HYPOTHESES

We hypothesize that the speech was effective because Cicero was able to create the psychological atmosphere, the condition under which Catiline's presence in the city would be undesirable and even dangerous for him. This means that, as we assume, Cicero was able to persuade the audience that Catiline was too dangerous to be allowed to move about freely in Rome. One can achieve this persuasive effect by at least three methods: (1) by using reasoning and presenting the evidence (material or eyewitnesses) against Catiline, or (2) by provoking fear or anxiety among the audience (the senators), or (3) by making a psychological impact (such as invoking doubt or

causing fear) on Catiline's supporters so that they withdrew their support or urged Catiline to escape. We cannot speculate about all the circumstances affecting Catiline's behavior after the speech. We can, however, assume that it was the speech that made such a dramatic impact on the course of historic events. Now it is time to turn to the analysis of the speech.

METHODOLOGY

We applied the method of content-analysis to empirically examine the speech by Cicero against Catiline, which was held in the Roman Senate on the 8th of November, 63 BCE. According to our terminology, Cicero was an attacker and Catiline was a target, who was present when the attack (the speech) was launched.

Content-analysis is a research method (common in psychology and relevant disciplines) that aims at systematically organizing and summarizing both the manifest (what was actually said or written) and the latent (the meaning of what was said and written) content of communication. The researcher usually examines the available transcripts of conversations or interviews, the recordings of television or radio programs, letters, newspaper articles, and other forms of communication (Roberts 1997). The main investigative procedure in content-analysis consists of at least two steps. Initially, the researcher identifies coding categories. These can be particular nouns, verbs, concepts, names, or topics that convey a particular meaning. This first-level coding involves identifying properties of data that are clearly evident in the text. Second-level coding is the next step. It involves categorization and interpreting the frequencies with which the first-level categories were used. More sophisticated statistical procedures are sometimes used if the number of measurements is sufficient.

Our research procedure was organized around the following steps. First, we examined two English translations (Yonge and Macdonald) of Cicero's speech and selected all the expressions with words relating to Cicero and Catiline, as well as their actions and their associates. We did not pre-qualify such words as either "positive" or "negative": they just had to be relevant to Cicero and Catiline, such as their behavior, inner experience, and personality traits. Most of these words were nouns. We then checked the translations against the original Latin and added all the words we had missed in our original analysis.

We have established 26 categories based on their commonsensical and manifest meanings. We did not initially pay attention to the frequency of any particular words used in the speech. For example, although the word "tyrannical" (*regie*) was used only once by Cicero, it was included in a sep-

arate category because we assumed that there might be other similar words that could fall into this category. Indeed, most categories include more than one word. For instance, we have placed both "madness" and "insanity" in the madness category. "Madness" in that particular period in history was used to describe highly dangerous, irrational, and unpredictable behavior. This word has also been used in the past, up to the beginning of the twentieth century, as synonymous to insanity (Shorter 1998). When we compare the English translations, we see that Yonge uses "insanity" for the Latin word *amentia*, while Macd onald prefers "folly" (8) or "madness" (25). Another example. The term "audacity" (*audacia*) indicates an individual's willingness to take bold risks, but also his or her rude or disrespectful behavior. What is bold and what is rude, is based on the observer's interpretation. Therefore, we simply were looking for statements containing the word "audacity" in them.

Only after our categories were established did we assign positive or negative connotations to them. In most cases, we relied on common-sense definitions easily obtainable in major dictionaries. Hence we assume that any reasonable observer is likely to consider words such as *danger*, *disease*, *evil* and *tyranny* as negatively charged, while *dignity* and *safety* were likely to be assessed as positive. For the categorization of some words, we had to consider the context in which they were used. The potentially neutral words "plans" and "designs", for instance, gain a negative ring when they refer to Catiline's plans to burn, murder and destroy. Likewise, the context makes it clear that Cicero is not using "audacity" in the positive sense of the word, but as something rather closer to "recklessness" and "effrontery" (which are translations Macdonald uses for the Latin *audacia* in chapters 1, 4 and 31 of the speech). Ultimately, this categorization technique resulted in the identification of nineteen categories that we believe contain critical, negative comments.

These categories are: alarm and fear; destruction (including arson); audacity; conspiracy; crime, corruption, and wickedness; danger; secrecy and darkness; disease; enemy; hatred (including unpopularity); henchmen; impiety; madness; murder (including slaughter); plans (including designs); robbery (including piracy); shame (including infamy); tyranny; and warfare. We used the "warfare" category as a separate one (and did not bundle it with murder or destruction) simply because we selected all the phrases containing the word "war". See Table 1.

For convenience, we placed the negative categories in several clusters. The first cluster refers to character or personality, including *audacity; impiety; madness;* and *shame and infamy.* The second cluster refers to action, including *arson and destruction; conspiracy; crime, corruption and wickedness;*

Table 1. The Categories Selected for the First Level of Content-Analysis of the Speech

Negative, critical		*Positive, uncritical*
Alarm, fear	Henchmen	Authority, dignity
Arson and destruction	Impiety	Catiline's "positive"
Audacity	Madness	qualities
Conspiracy	Murder and slaughter	Cicero's characteristics
Crime, corruption,	Plans and designs	Honorable men
wickedness	Robbery, piracy	Outstanding individuals
Danger	Shame, infamy	Safety, welfare
Darkness and secrecy	Tyranny	Senate
Disease	War	
Enemy		
Hatred, unpopularity		

murder and slaughter; tyranny; warfare; robbery and piracy; and *plans and designs*. The third cluster refers to people's reaction to these actions or the conditions that occur after these actions, including *alarm and fear; danger;* and *hatred and unpopularity*. The terms *henchmen* and *enemy*—which are likely to stand for adversaries as well as followers or supporters performing unpleasant or illegal tasks for a powerful figure—did not easily fall into a particular cluster.

For each thematic category, we have indicated which Latin words are included and how often each of these occurs in the text. If some occurrences of a particular word are clearly irrelevant, we have left them out. For instance, in the category "plans and designs", we have included the word *consilium* where it means "plan", but left it out where it means "council/Senate". Words can and do occur in more than one category. In some cases, the translation given by one translator would put a particular word in one thematic category, while the translation of the other translator would put it in another. For instance, Yonge translates *malus* as "evil", Macdonald as "ill". In these cases, the words have been put in both categories. Finally, the tables show where particular words occur in the text, how they are translated by Yonge and Macdonald respectively, and who or what they refer to.

After establishing these categories, we placed each and every selected statement from the speech into a particular category. We made sure that each statement had to be placed in a particular category so that there was no overlapping. The full descriptions of categories is vast, so that we have posted it online at: http://communication.gmu.edu/research-and-centers/research. Here we provide a sample of several categories. See Table 2 (next page).

Table 2. An Illustration of the Categories Danger, Audacity, and Safety and their Location in the Translations

CATEGORY: DANGER (NEGATIVE)

Original Latin	*Translation Yonge*	*Translation Macdonald*	*Chapter*
Tantis rei publicae periculis	Such danger to the state	Serious danger for the Republic	4
Magno in periculo	In great danger	In great danger	19
Rei publicae periculis	The dangers of *the* Republic	Peril to the Republic	22
Periculo	Danger	Danger	22
Alicuius periculi	Any danger	Any danger	28
His periculis coniurationis insidiisque	These dangers and machinations of conspiracy	These dangers and plots of conspiracy	31
Periculum	Danger	Danger	31

CATEGORY: AUDACITY (NEGATIVE)

Original Latin	*Translation Yonge*	*Translation Macdonald*	*Chapter*
Sese effrenata audacia	That unbridled audacity of yours	Your unbridled effrontery	1
Audaciam	Your audacity	Your acts of recklessness	4
Audaciae tuae	Your audacity	Your wild scheme	7
Audaciam	Audacious crime	His crime	13
Veteris audaciae	Long-standing audacity	The reckless frenzy of such long standing	31

CATEGORY: SAFETY, WELFARE (POSITIVE)

Original Latin	*Translation Yonge*	*Translation Macdonald*	*Chapter*
Salute rei publicae	The safety of the republic	The safety of the Republic	8
Summa salus rei publicae	The safety of the commonwealth	The very existence of the State	11
Communem salutem	The state	The common safety	12
Summam rem publicam	The welfare of the republic	The supreme interests of the State	14
Omnium nostrum vitam salutemque	The lives and safety of us all	The life and safety of us all	14
Salutem civium tuorum	The safety of your fellow-citizens	The safety of your fellow citizens	28
Summa rei publicae salute	The great safety of the republic	Sure salvation to the Republic	33

Note: The word "chapter" refers to a specific paragraph in the text of the speech, which consists of 33 chapters in total.

Reliability is the extent to which a particular method gives consistent results. Each content-analysis procedure typically undergoes a reliability inspection. Several types of such inspection exist in psychology. The most appropriate in our case was test-retest reliability, which is a measure obtained by administering the same test several times over a certain period (1) by the same person and (2) by a different person or even several people trained in this method. We instructed a number of undergraduates majoring in politics, global affairs, history, and communication (43 individuals or "judges" in total, on two different occasions). Each judge was asked to place each selected word or phrase from the speech (see Table 1) in one of the specific categories we had selected. We conducted this procedure twice to look at the test-retest reliability of our method. During the first test, two categories, "enemy" and "shame, infamy" were not on the list, but later included for the second evaluation; during the second test, the categories "evil" and "vices" were dropped from the list.

We decided to display the results of both tests to demonstrate the test-retest validity of our method. See Table 3 (next page). The reliability score has been calculated as a ratio between the choices made by the judges and the authors' own judgments. In theory, the score of 1.0 indicates that all the judges unanimously agreed and placed the phrases into the same category selected by the authors. On the other hand, the score of 0.0 means that nobody has placed the selected words and phrases from the speech into the category.

In general terms, each judge had a choice to put each selected word or phrase in each of the selected categories. If this were done randomly, for example, the reliability score would have been close to 0.05 because each word has an equal chance to be assigned to any of the nineteen categories. Our results suggest that the judges as a group consistently assigned the words into particular categories and their choices were far from random.

We realize that some categories came out as more clearly identified by content-analysis than others. Moreover, some categories are more "valuable" for us than others simply because of their relevance to the historical momentum and the frequency with which they have been used. For example, a high level of consensus among the judges (0.87) indicates that the words and phrases related to "alarm and fear" have been more or less unanimously identified and Cicero used them 26 times in the speech. The "henchmen" category—although these words were used, as we assumed, 22 times—has not been identified as clearly. The "tyranny" category was unanimously agreed upon (1.0) yet there is only one sentence in the speech that mentions tyranny, compared to eight words related to "madness" (which was assessed with a high reliability score of 0.85). In sum-

Table 3. Results of the Reliability Test of Our Categories. Rel 1 and Rel 2 contain quantitative assessments of our categories on two separate occasions

Categories	Rel 1	Rel 2	Categories	Rel 1	Rel. 2
Enemy	N/A	0.61	Henchmen	0.43	0.34
Alarm, fear	0.91	0.87	Arson and destruction	0.83	0.85
Audacity	0.75	0.75	Conspiracy	1.0	1.0
Crime, corruption, wickedness	0.67	0.55	Danger	0.95	0.85
Darkness and secrecy	0.83	0.75	Disease	0.71	0.75
Evil	0.61	N/A	Hatred, unpopularity	0.85	0.61
Impiety	0.75	0.61	Madness	0.95	0.85
Murder and slaughter	0.87	0.91	Plans and designs	0.73	0.67
Robbery, piracy	0.83	0.75	Shame, infamy	N/A	0.41
Tyranny	1.0	1.0	Vices	0.41	N/A
War (Warfare)	0.91	0.83	Authority, dignity	0.39	0.44
Catiline's positive qualities	0.83	0.73	Cicero's characteristics	0.75	0.69
Honorable men	0.83	0.91	Outstanding individuals	0.51	0.63
Safety, welfare	0.75	0.69	Senate	0.61	0.77

mary, we assume that the words that received the high reliability scores and have been mentioned more frequently than others, should receive our most careful attention.

SPEECH ANALYSIS: DANGER AND FEAR

Several negative categories stand out from the content-analysis. Terms relating to *alarm and fear*, *arson and destruction*, *crime, corruption and wickedness* and *murder and slaughter* are all referenced more than fifteen times throughout the speech. With the exception of *crime, corruption and wickedness*, all these categories have a reliability score of over 0.8, indicating that we can most likely consider them as reliable. Strikingly, none of them fall into the cluster of categories related to personality or character. While *alarm and fear* belongs to the cluster of reactions and conditions, the others are part of the cluster of categories relating to action. Repeated reference is made to the fire and destruction that will be visited upon Rome, including four references to "fire" (*incendium*), one to "setting fire to" (*inflammare*), six to "de-

struction" (*exitium* or *pernicies*), three to "destroying" (*vastare*) and one to "devastation" (*vastitas*). Our analysis shows that 22 terms in the text refer to murder and killing, including, among others, seven references to "slaughter" (*caedes*) and six to "killing" (*interficere* or *necare*). Sometimes these terms relate to Cicero personally, sometimes to the nobles as a group, sometimes to the Roman citizens in general, and sometimes even to the country or the world as a whole—as when Catiline is accused of contemplating "parricide" (*parricidium*) because he wants to murder his father country (17).

Almost all of these negative actions are presented as the acts of Catiline and his followers. Of the nineteen references to acts of arson and destruction, eighteen are implicitly or explicitly attributed to the conspirators. (The one exception is Cicero's statement that he will be "consumed by a perfect conflagration of hatred" (29) if he does not thwart Catiline's plans.) The pattern is even clearer in the case of words related to murder and slaughter, all of which refer to acts by Catiline and his followers. Evidently, Cicero is presenting this group as a threat to Rome and the Romans. Eight times he mentions the ominous words "conspiracy" or "conspirators" (*coniuratio* or *coniuratores*). Catiline is a sinister figure who harbors "designs" (*consilia*) and is "planning" things (*moliri*). These plans are made all the more sinister through their association with terms like *nox* ("night") and *tenebrae* ("darkness").

Although variations of the word "danger", *periculum*, occur only seven times, in a text of approximately 3,400 words, a sense of imminent danger permeates the speech. This sense is directly related to the other negative category that stands out. According to the analysis, no less than 26 phrases in the speech refer to notions of alarm and fear. Some of these are related to Cicero's fear that any rash action against Catiline and his followers would make him unpopular, although he asserts that this is a burden he is willing to bear (28-29). In all likelihood, these passages were added or enhanced in the published version of the speech, after Cicero had been temporarily exiled for his execution of several Catilinarian conspirators without a trial and felt the need to justify his actions. However, most of the references to words like *timor*, *metus* (both meaning "fear" or "dread") and *pertimescere* ("dreading") are related to the fear that Catiline and his co-conspirators inspire—both in Cicero personally and in the Roman people as a whole. The speech conjures up the image of a society where nobody feels safe.

It seems likely that Cicero is aiming to provoke and build an atmosphere of anxiety in the audience. Not only is this state of anxiety stimulated by the numerous references to arson, murder and secret plots, but also by the very setting of the Senate meeting in the heavily guarded and symbolic Temple of Jupiter Stator. As the consul remarks in the opening passage of his speech, addressing his target directly:

> Do not the night guards placed on the Palatine Hill—do not the watches post-
> ed throughout the city—does not the alarm of the people, and the union of
> all good men—does not the precaution taken of assembling the Senate in this
> most defensible place—do not the looks and countenances of this venerable
> body here present, have any effect upon you? (Trans. Yonge)

Whether or not Catiline was impressed directly by the words of the
speech, Cicero likely was intending those words to have an effect on his fel-
low senators. In a city that was rife with rumors of a brooding conspiracy,
he most likely deliberately exploited the feelings of unrest and apprehen-
sion by decisively attacking Catiline and his reputation. It is interesting to
mention that a few weeks earlier, during the consular elections in which
Catiline had once again failed to secure a post, Cicero had appeared wear-
ing a cuirass under his toga, a histrionic display to underline that he feared
a personal assault (Cicero, *Pro Murena* 52). Now, he argued that Catiline en-
dangered the lives of all. Since he lacked any concrete evidence to convict
his opponent, he resorted to general accusations and insinuations, appeal-
ing to emotions, rather than to reason.

SPEECH ANALYSIS: US VERSUS THEM

The First Catilinarian Oration contains 22 words that we have categorized
under the category *crime, corruption and wickedness*, including such terms as
"crime" (*scelus* or *facinus*) and "criminal" (*scelerus*). Although the reliability
score of this category (0.55) is not as high as that of some of the others, it is
still enough to consider the category as reliable. Without exception, all the
included terms relate to Catiline and his followers. There are also nine ref-
erences in the category *shame and infamy*, eight of which refer to the con-
spirators. Ten times does Cicero describe Catiline and his followers in terms
of disease or social ills, such as "pestilence" (*pestis*) and "disease" (*morbus*).
"Lead forth with all your friends, (…) purge the city of your presence," he
recommends his opponent (10). Likewise, the actions of the Catilinarians
are five times associated with banditry (*latrocinium*, *latrones*) and eleven
times with war (*bellum*).

Among the positive categories, *Cicero's characteristics* (26) and *honorable
men* (fourteen) are the most prominent, both with a reasonably high re-
liability factor (0.69 and 0.91 respectively). In fact, the former is a mixed
category, since Cicero does not just use flattering terms to describe himself:
notably, he blames himself for "remissness" (*inertia*) and "culpable inac-
tivity" (*nequitia*), but also associates himself with "vigilance" (*diligentia*)
and aspires to "vigor" (*severitas*) and "boldness" (*fortitudo*). The ambiguous
self-representation serves a strategic purpose: by claiming that he has not
responded quickly enough to Catiline's threat, the orator wants to counter

accusations that his actions are too harsh or rash. Cicero, then, is perhaps not without flaws, but as he suggests, they consist of a lack of assertiveness and a tendency to err on the side of caution—hardly unforgiveable moral defects. Throughout the speech, he associates himself with honorable men, who are described in such terms as "good" (*bonus*), "brave" (*fortis*) and "most honorable" (*honestissimus*). From context, it is clear that these honorable men are the good citizens of Rome, particularly those of the upper classes. Catiline and his followers, on the other hand, are never associated with these positive terms in the speech. The word "enemy" (*hostis*), which occurs seven times within the speech, is exclusively applied to them.

Cicero thus draws a sharp line between the "good guys" (himself and his supporters) on the one hand and the "bad guys" (the Catilinarians) on the other. Using modern political psychology's terminology, he is constructing an enemy image of Catiline and his followers (Keen 1991). According to Ulrich Beck's definition, enemy images are "culturally generated prejudices and heterostereotypes that have been dramatically composed, enhanced, and made legitimate", and which are then employed to "create and expand the apparatus of state authority and the military." On the one hand, this provides the authorities with a basis of legitimation for their actions, on the other hand it ostracizes those who do not subscribe to their vision as traitors or collaborators themselves (Beck 1997, 67). Cicero, as we believe, clearly employed these strategies in the First Catilinarian Oration. Not once in his speech does he address the social issues that had gotten the Catilinarians up in arms, denying them a valid political position. Instead, he keeps repeating that they are hated and feared by all good citizens. "There is no one who does not hate you," he snaps at Catiline (13); and "your country hates and fears you" (17). Thus he creates an "us" versus "them" dichotomy, exclusively associating his own camp with the fatherland and with true Roman society. Phrased in these terms, it became almost impossible to disagree with him.

APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology has always been concerned with subjects such as persuasion and interpersonal influence in an individual's political decisions. Several lines of research have emerged. Richard Koenigsberg (2014) turned to unconscious desires and fantasies as the source of cross-cultural narratives to justify violence. Psychoanalysts argued about distinguishing between excessive fears, which are likely to be cognitive—and associated with conscious experience—and phobias, which have deep unconscious roots (Karon and Widener 2013). Both phobias and fears can be activated by external events. Other scholars took on reasoning and the mechanisms of judgment-formation (Rosenberg 1988). Yet others turned to so-called

"enemy images" and were mostly concerned with the ways the individual forms certain stable and negative cognitive constructs (called attitudes, perceptions, or prejudices) related to social groups, countries, and cultures. Most significant research in this field was conducted primarily during the Cold War in the second half of the twentieth century (Keen 1991).

Several hypotheses have been studied experimentally and a few conclusions have been offered (Van Houten 1991; Levy 2009; Herzog 2017). First, people's negative perceptions of other countries, people, and social groups can be psychologically manipulated—mostly by the mass media and during the early socialization stages. Second, the more educated the individual is, the less prone he or she is to outside persuasion. And third, dramatic events accompanied by powerful emotional associations, such as fear or anxiety, affect the individual's perception of others and create relatively stable and negative images of other people, countries, and social groups. In other words, as research in psychology suggests, people's judgments of others (such as political candidates or strangers) can be affected by the immediate, passing images of the moment (and not always and necessarily by long-term commitments and values).

A number of political psychologists have examined the role of fear and anxiety in politics and electoral campaigns in particular. Although their studies are usually concerned with the effects of these negative emotions and emotional states on voters in modern democracies, there is no reason to think that the psychological mechanisms regulating emotional assessment and decision-making of Roman senators from the first century BCE worked fundamentally different in this respect. A contemporary view in psychology is that human beings share some basic, fundamental emotional features across history. Specific historic, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions, certainly, have modified these features and continue to influence human emotions now (Harré and Parrott 1996).

One of the main conclusions of contemporary studies is that voters' positive and negative emotions influence their decision-making processes. Several theories have been created and tested. According to the affective intelligence theory, which is probably the most applicable in our case, emotion does not only color people's voting choices, but also effects the way they process information about candidates. As long as they regard social and political circumstances as "normal", voters tend to be complacent and to rely on long-ingrained habits and preferences. When they become alarmed, however, and sense that something is "not right", they shift to a more active mode and start to pay close attention to the arguments that opposing parties are making. In short, anxiety loosens party affiliations and stimulates political engagement (Marcus and Mackuen 1993, 680-681; see also Shiraev 2014, 24-25).

Obviously, we are not suggesting that Cicero was aware of the affective intelligence theory. However, the ancients certainly knew that evoking anxiety could be an effective rhetorical tool. "Fear sets us thinking what can be done," Aristotle had instructed in his treatise on rhetoric. "Consequently, when it is advisable that the audience should be frightened, the orator must make them feel that they are really in danger" (*Rhetoric* 2.5.1383). Cicero appears to have taken these words to heart. Applying the affective intelligence theory may help us understand why his speech was so effective in turning Catiline into a political outcast. In order to create a united front against his opponent, Cicero had to bridge the gaps between the various factions in the Senate, most notably between his own *optimates* and the *populares*, who may in part have shared Catiline's outlook on the social problems plaguing the Republic.

The orator achieved this by emphasizing the danger that now threatened Rome, prompting his fellow senators to rethink their old allegiances and join his side. At the same time that he was warning them against the conspiracy, he presented himself as the city's protector. "You attempt nothing, you execute nothing, you devise nothing that can be kept hid from me at the proper time," he ensured Catiline (15). Although such assuring statements seem to undermine Cicero's message of pending danger, they have a clear function in the text, emphasizing that he is a good leader who has things under control. Anxiety, after all, is only a viable tool if one presents oneself as the antidote to the threats one warns about. On the one hand, then, Cicero is rousing fear, on the other he is putting himself forward as a rallying point for those who want to avert danger. As long as everyone supports him, things will be all right!

CONCLUSION

Can we understand and interpret events in history referring to contemporary psychological concepts? In this article, we turn to character assassination. We have attempted to show that modern, empirically tested psychological models using concepts such as fear, anxiety, and enemy images can contribute to our understanding of character assassination in pre-modern cultures. Needless to say, our options are limited: we cannot conduct interviews with Roman senators, nor do we have any survey results measuring the Roman people's opinions. In addition, we should be aware of fundamental differences between our societies. The Roman Republic lacked modern mass media and clearly defined political parties, nor was it a democracy in our sense of the word. Many of its values would seem quite alien to us. Nevertheless, some of the psychological mechanisms used in the defamation strategies that Cicero employed against Catiline should be, as we think, strikingly familiar to the modern citizen and voter.

At least two general themes appeared in the speech as a result of the content-analytical method that we have applied. One refers to fear and anxiety. The other creates a dichotomy between "us" and "them". In particular, appeals to patriotic values and allegations about an opponent's private affairs are well-worn tools in the repertoire of many contemporary politicians. The same goes for the attribution of malicious motives to political rivals and the contention that "they" are out to get us. Insights from political psychology and sociology can help us to understand how Cicero's attacks against Catiline worked and why they were so effective. We will be happy to discuss these issues further in our continuous research.

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