

Why The Monograph: Genre Crossroads in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*

Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, striking in its densely narrow subject matter and its archaically dramatic tone, clearly deviates from its predecessors. The main bulk of the work concentrates on the Catilinarian Conspiracy, focusing on the character of Catiline himself. It has been well established that the work is imbued with notes of tragedy (Syme 1964, Kraus and Woodman 1997) and that Sallust owes this tragic element as well as his archaisms and monographic form to Greek models. (Brunt 1993). In this paper, I will posit that Sallust chooses the monograph form specifically to meld tragedy and history, creating something reminiscent of epic. In order to explore this argument, I will begin with a discussion of the tragedy in the work and a comparison with Sallust's predecessors before arguing two points: firstly the importance of the monograph form and its relationship with epic, and secondly the effect of this intersection of genres on ancient and modern readers.

The *Bellum Catilinae* oddly focuses on a historic villain rather than a civic hero. In the introduction Catiline's character is described in terms *supra quam cuiquam credibile est* (5.3). His mind is *audax, subdolos, varius* (5.4). He desires the *inmoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta*. (5.5) This is the first and lasting impression Sallust creates. In startling contrast to his monstrous visage, however, Catiline is described with a certain nobility. Exhorting his co-conspirators he extolls qualities praised in the preface. (20.1; 13.1) In the final battle before his death he fights as a hero from the golden age (60.4; 7.6). Florus, a second-century historian, notes "the finest of deaths if he had fallen thus for his country." (2.12.4.12) Therein lies the tragedy: the emphasis on the corrupted potentiality for good. This dramatic element of history is modelled after Greek historians, especially Thucydides, who is considered the exemplar of tragic history. In imitating

Greek historians, in both tragic tone and monograph form, Sallust distances himself from Latin precedence of annalistic writing.

Herodotus and Thucydides recorded what they considered the greatest wars – Coelius Antipater too, Sallust's closer Roman predecessor, with his six-book monograph on the Punic Wars. Modelled after these monographs, the *Bellum Catilinae* inflates the conspiracy to a “most significant war.” Though Sallust titles the subject of his monograph as “war”, the focus of the *Bellum Catilinae* is in fact a portrait of one egregious man. Sallust imitates yet deviates with his “War of Catiline.” He undoubtedly writes a historical account of war, yet the narrow plot of a monograph paired with fewer actors and concentrated focus facilitate the staging of history as drama (Mehl 2011, Conte 1994).

Having married historiography and tragedy in his monograph, Sallust creates a new conglomeration of genres that is strikingly close to Epic. Tragedy and history share an affinity to epic in subject matter (Levene 2001). One might describe their common parent as epic married in turn to geography or catalogue and lyric poetry (Marincola, 2007). Sallust's monograph, being both history and tragedy, then is something closer to epic.

In short, Sallust seems to see himself as more than a biographer or a historian, rather as a kind of bard. In the proem Sallust notes the subject's dependence on the historian (8.4). Yet as Herodotus also says in his preface, the glory – or rather kleos – of the doer is only as great as the writer. Additionally he sets out to write anything worthy of memory (4.2). It is odd then to choose a villain as his subject *digna memoria*. But Sallust's purposes are didactic. He presents not a hero to emulate, but an emblem of corruption. As the bard he bestows kleos, but that turns out to be a negative kleos, even infamy, demonstrating that the heirs of a great tradition *bonis initiis malos eventus habuit* (11.4). Everything perverted, even kleos. Yet Sallust did not write

only to teach. He maintains that *pulchrum est bene facere rei publicae, etiam bene dicere haud absurdum est* (3.1). Dependent on his genius, as on a bard's, is the kleos – or infamy – of his subject is as well as his own renown in his work, for *et qui fecere et qui facta aliorum scripsere, multi laudantur* (3.1). The *Bellum Catilinae* is both his *munus* and his monument.

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