

CATHERINE STEEL

Introduction

Cicero is one of the most prolific authors to survive from classical antiquity; and one of the most varied, whose writings include speeches, letters, poetry and treatises on philosophy, rhetoric, politics and law. He was also part of the ruling elite at Rome during a tumultuous quarter-century, and one of the most self-revealing of ancient figures. He has, as a consequence, multiple characters: a heroic defender of freedom; a political failure, blinded by vanity and oblivious to change; the epitome of oratorical brilliance; the supreme model of Latin; and a human, to whose weaknesses and foibles we have unmediated access.

All these Ciceros, and many others, are discussed in this *Companion*, though its focus throughout is on the textual Cicero. This is the manifestation that has dominated his subsequent reception. Moreover, any attempt to assess his importance as a political figure during his lifetime demands engagement with the complexities of late Republican politics in a manner that is beyond this volume's scope. But some brief biographical notes may provide a helpful introduction to what follows.¹

M. Tullius Cicero was born on 3 January 106 BC at Arpinum in central Italy, about 60 miles from Rome. This town, despite its distance from Rome, was a community of Roman citizens: it had been in this position since the Roman people had voted in 188 BC to give it this status.² As a result, its inhabitants were recorded in the Roman census, and shared rights and duties with Romans across Italy and beyond. We are poorly informed about the use of citizenship, in general, by citizens who did not live in Rome or close to the metropolis; but Cicero's family, which was one of Arpinum's wealthiest, was connected to the political and social elite in

¹ Flower 2004 and Rosenstein and Morstein-Marx 2006 offer wide-ranging introductions. There are numerous modern biographies of Cicero: see Fotheringham in this volume (Chapter 19).

² Livy 38.36.

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Rome.³ In addition, three days before Cicero was born Gaius Marius, a native of Arpinum and a relative by marriage of the Cicerones, had concluded his first consulship, and was continuing his campaign against Jugurtha as proconsul.⁴ Marius was a 'new man': he had no Roman senators among his ancestors, and his achievement in reaching the consulship was exceptional. But an aspiration towards active participation in Roman politics, and entry in the senate, albeit without tenure of the highest magistracies, was certainly realistic for someone from Cicero's background.

Cicero's forebears had not followed this route, and he was, like Marius, a 'new man'. But his father was able to place his two sons into a distinguished circle when he decided to move to Rome, probably in the mid nineties and quite possibly with the specific intention of supporting their education.⁵ His acquaintances included M. Antonius, consul in 99 BC, and L. Licinius Crassus (cos. 95 BC).⁶ The opportunities to associate with such men were a supplement to formal, structured training in rhetoric, conducted in Greek. Cicero also began his study of law by attending Q. Mucius Scaevola's advice sessions; here he met Atticus.⁷ This period was broken by the consequences of the outbreak of the war between Rome and its Italian allies towards the end of 91. Arpinum remained loyal to Rome, as did almost all communities that were Roman or Latin in status, and Cicero served in the armies of Pompeius Strabo and of Sulla. His experiences during this war can only be reconstructed through two anecdotes preserved in works he wrote towards the very end of his life. In the *Twelfth Philippic* he records being present at negotiations between Pompeius Strabo and the Marsic leader Vettius Scato; and in *De divinatione* he records an episode he witnessed when Sulla was

³ Nicolet 1967; Rawson 1985: 5–8; Cébeillac Gervasoni 1998: 205–31; Fantham 2004: 27–9.

⁴ Marius' sister was married to Cicero's great-uncle Gratidius; see Evans 1994: 146–52.

⁵ Cicero's brother Quintus was a few years younger; he too pursued a political career, though with less dazzling success, reaching the praetorship in 62 BC. He was the recipient of a number of letters from Cicero (particularly in the mid fifties, when he was absent from Rome as a legate), and quarrelled with his brother during the civil war; the two were never fully reconciled (Bailey 1971: 179–85). Quintus Cicero was also killed at the end of 43 during the proscriptions.

⁶ Gratidius and Cicero's uncle L. Cicero had served with Antonius (and both died) during the latter's command against the pirates in 102–100 BC; *Brut.* 168; *De or.* 2.2. The link to Crassus may originally have been Crassus' friendship with Cicero's maternal uncle C. Visellius Aculeo (*De or.* 2.2).

⁷ *De amicitia* opens with a description of Scaevola attended by a group of his associates (*Amic.* 2). Cicero began to study with Scaevola once he had assumed the *toga virilis*; unfortunately this event cannot be precisely dated in relation to the outbreak of the Social War.

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sacrificing in his camp near Nola.⁸ We do not know what position the Tullii Cicerones adopted in the violent struggle between Marius and Sulla during 88; they appear to have avoided harm both then and in 82 when Sulla returned to Italy, which suggests quiescence, but a number of their Roman patrons and Arpinate connections, on both sides, were harmed in various ways.⁹ Cicero himself was in Rome throughout the eighties, continuing his studies in rhetoric and engaging with philosophy. He began his legal career in 81 BC, as Rome was adjusting to Sullan despotism; he spoke for a man called Quinctius, who was being sued by his former business partner Naevius. The speech, *Pro Quinctio*, survives; beneath the dense legal argumentation, it offers a fascinating glimpse of Roman business practice and of the disruptions of the eighties.¹⁰ The fact of its survival is also significant; it represents a conscious choice by Cicero to preserve his legal activity and thereby to advertise his skills. The same impulse presumably informed his decision to disseminate, even in unfinished form, his rhetorical handbook *De inventione*.¹¹

Cicero's next recorded case was much higher profile: the defence of a man accused of arranging the murder of his father, in one of Sulla's new standing courts. The political significance of the case and of Cicero's involvement in it have been the subject of endless debate.¹² These divergent scholarly analyses can well be seen as demonstrations of Cicero's skill in balancing a powerfully affecting demand for a fresh start in public life with the avoidance of criticism of specific individuals, apart from an otherwise unknown freedman of Sulla.

⁸ Cic. *Phil.* 12.27; *Div.* 1.72. Cicero is generally assumed to have moved from Strabo's army to Sulla's, but the chronological indicators are not decisive (though *ILLRP* 515 suggests that Cicero was not with Strabo's army when Asculum was captured). He does not even mention military service in the autobiographical notes at *Brut.* 304, which slips seamlessly from Cicero's listening to the *contiones* of 90 (305) to those of 88 (306).

⁹ M. Antonius died in 87 in Marius' purge of his enemies after his return to Rome; Scaevola Augur appears to have died of natural causes, but his cousin, the *pontifex maximus* (with whom Cicero studied after the augur's death, *Amic.* 1) was killed in 82 on the orders of the younger Marius. M. Marius Gratidianus, by birth a first cousin of Cicero's father and adopted by Gaius Marius' brother, died after Sulla's capture of Rome, allegedly executed at the grave of Catulus by Catilina (Marshall 1985).

¹⁰ Kinsey 1971; Bannon 2000.

¹¹ At *Quinct.* 4 Cicero refers to 'other cases' as though he had been involved in them before his speech for Quinctius, but no details survive. *Brut.* 311–14 implies a number of cases prior to Cicero's departure for Athens and Rhodes, though it is not known whether any others predate *Pro Roscio Amerino*.

¹² See Vasaly in this volume (Chapter 8).

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At some point during the following year Cicero left Rome for further philosophical and rhetorical study in Athens and then Asia Minor.¹³ The details of his trip provide a backdrop to some of his philosophical works from the fifties and forties: *De republica* (set in 129 BC) is presented as the product of Rutilius Rufus' reminiscences, when Cicero met him in Smyrna during his travels, and the fifth book of *De finibus* is a conversation between Cicero, Atticus (by this point resident in Athens), his brother Quintus, his cousin Lucius and M. Pupius Piso (the future consul of 61) in the Academy at Athens in 79 BC.

Cicero returned to Rome in good time to campaign for the quaestorship, to which he was elected in the summer of 76, and allotted to western Sicily. Much later, he offered an amusing glimpse at his chagrin when he returned to Rome, expecting everyone to be talking about his successes, only to find that no-one knew he had been away; and his subsequent resolution to remain firmly in Rome (*Planc.* 62). He resumed his legal activity, but he did not attract prominent clients, and was not notably successful.¹⁴ This may have contributed to the gamble he took in 70, when he prosecuted the former governor of Sicily, Gaius Verres, on *repetundae* charges. Verres' reputation has been so comprehensively blackened by Cicero, and Cicero stresses the scale of his own achievement so emphatically, that it is difficult to assess Verres' standing before the trial and his prospects of reaching the consulship. But Cicero did take a chance with his prosecution; if he failed, he would have to manage the consequences of the subsequent *inimicitia*, and prosecuting itself was socially and ethically dubious. And he exploited his success to the full, with the dissemination of the seven speeches that made up the case, a corpus of oratorical prose writing unparalleled in earlier Latin literature.

After the Verres case and the *Verrines*, and quite possibly as a result, Cicero finally began to defend the political elite, with his first senatorial client in 69. He was elected to the praetorship in the summer of 67 and the following year openly declared himself a supporter of Pompeius in 66 with his first speech at a *contio*, *De imperio Cn. Pompei*. As he began his preparations in the summer of 65 for the consular elections, he had the good fortune of not facing any very strong rivals.¹⁵ Nonetheless, one

¹³ Cic. *Brut.* 314, which makes health the reason for his departure. Before his departure he had been involved in at least two further defences, those of Titinia and of a woman from Arretium; Marinone 2004: 59.

¹⁴ Scamander and Varenus (both charged under the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et ueneficiis*) were both convicted, but Cicero disseminated his *Pro Vareno* and it was much admired and quoted by Quintilian (Crawford 1994: 7–18); other speeches from this period were in civil cases. See Steel 2005: 24–6.

¹⁵ Cic. *Att.* 1.1.1 offers a list of likely contenders.

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might expect that Antonius and Catiline, who emerged as the other serious candidates, would normally have been elected on the basis of the prestige of their families; Catiline's failure to do so – and the gap between the tally of votes for Cicero and Antonius – was because of the inflammatory remarks Catiline made during the campaign, and Cicero's adept exploitation in his own campaigning of his audience's fears about Catiline's intentions and Antonius' reputation.

Cicero's later career appears to be dominated by the choices he made during his consulship: had he not overseen the execution of those of Catiline's followers who were arrested after their failed negotiations with the Allobroges, he would not himself have been exiled with its attendant loss of power and prestige. But, as so often in the late Republic, an apparently simple chain of causation becomes less clear on closer inspection. Clodius was behind Cicero's exile, and in his decision to pursue Cicero combined defence of the rights of citizens with the deep personal hostility that had arisen when Cicero gave evidence against him at his trial in 61.¹⁶ It is impossible to know whether Clodius would have refrained from his *popularis* manoeuvre against Cicero if the two men had not already been enemies for reasons unconnected with Catiline.

Cicero found himself largely irrelevant in political terms after his return from exile; unable to challenge Caesar or Pompeius effectively, he turned to large-scale non-oratorical prose writing, with *De oratore*, *De republica* and possibly *De legibus* between 55 and 51. He was also more intensely busy in the courts than at any time earlier in his career, often at the behest of Pompeius.¹⁷ Whether or not he might have contributed effectively to averting conflict between Pompeius and Caesar, had he not been absent from Rome between the late spring of 51 and the end of 50 as governor of Cilicia, is an intriguing counterfactual.

Cicero's despair and uncertainty following the outbreak of civil war can be traced in the almost daily letters he sent to Atticus during the opening months of 49. In the end, and very reluctantly, he decided that he must actively join Pompeius. His military contribution was of no importance, however; once permitted by Caesar to return to Rome from internal exile at Brundisium he spent his time largely in retirement (a state compounded by the death of his daughter Tullia early in 45).¹⁸ Between 46 and 44 he produced an astonishing set of rhetorical and philosophical texts, fuelled by

¹⁶ Tatum 1999: 151–2.

¹⁷ 56 and 54 were exceptionally busy; 55 (the second consulship of Pompeius and Crassus) much less so. For details, see Marinone 2004: 115–38.

¹⁸ For Cicero's relationship with Tullia, see Treggiari 2007.

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a commitment to Roman educational practice and a desire to create a Latin philosophical literature.

The final phase of Cicero's career was shaped by the assassination of Caesar in 44. Cicero was not involved in the plot, but was deeply sympathetic to it; intimidated initially by Antonius' assumption of power, he began in the autumn of 44 a sustained attempt to re-assert senatorial authority and to prevent Antonius from taking over Caesar's position through the set of speeches which became known as the *Philippics*. This involved the creation of an enormous coalition of disparate interests, centring upon *imperium*-holders with armies; and the promotion of Caesar's great-nephew C. Octavius as an alternative location for Caesar's residual power. The attempt was a failure; Octavius successfully consolidated his position and joined with Antonius and Lepidus to take control of the state. Once the three men had their position confirmed by the people in November 43, they proceeded to use the Sullan device of proscription to eliminate their enemies, including Cicero, who was killed in December 43.¹⁹

This volume explores Cicero's writings under three broad headings. The first section relates his work to the intellectual context of Rome in the first century BC. It considers Cicero's contribution to a range of genres and fields, and compares his work to that of other leading intellectuals of the period, particularly Varro and Caesar. In the second section, the focus is on the relationship between Cicero's writing and his political career: here are discussions of his oratory, letters and the relationship between political theory and practice, and a detailed study of the intersection between text and action in the months after Caesar's assassination. The final section addresses the ways in which Cicero's life and writings have been handled subsequent to his death: this is a vast topic, and the approach adopted here is to offer a series of case studies, beginning with Roman treatments in the early empire and concluding with anglophone film and novels in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I am very grateful to Michael Sharp at Cambridge University Press, who first suggested the idea of a *Cambridge Companion to Cicero* and has been a tirelessly supportive editor ever since; to John Henderson, for wise advice at crucial moments; to Clifford Ando, for his assistance with the proofs of Chapter 15; and to all the contributors for their enthusiasm, scholarship and patience. In the very final stages of preparation came the news of Sabine MacCormack's sudden death; it seemed fitting to dedicate the volume to her memory.

¹⁹ On the proscriptions which began in 43, see Osgood 2006: 62–81.

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PART I

The Greco-Roman intellectual

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I

ANTHONY CORBEILL

Cicero and the intellectual milieu of the late Republic

The late Republic marked Rome's zenith of original literary and scholarly creativity. The republican form of government encouraged development of the finest forensic and judicial oratory written in Latin (preserved for us almost exclusively in Cicero); scholars of antiquarianism, with Varro at the forefront, began perfecting linguistic and other tools for reconstructing the history, religion and thought of the seemingly irrecoverable past; a wish to become acquainted with Greek schools of philosophy prevailed among the elite; and developments in history and poetry were preparing the way for great authors of the following generation such as Livy, Virgil, Horace and the elegists. I shall attempt to touch upon some of these areas by focusing on what Cicero viewed as the primary function of intellectual activity, in particular that activity informed by Greek precedents, in the formation of his own political and cultural identity.

Cicero's education

Educating a late Republican Roman meant creating a citizen, but only a citizen of a certain type. State-sponsored schooling was unknown, and the instruction that did become publicly available for a fee beginning in the early first century suffered under the notoriety of both personnel and pedagogy. Teachers supposedly displayed deviance in sexual practice and in political direction, while the actual training occurred in the Latin language, a practice reproved, ironically enough, by the Roman censors in an official edict of 92.¹ Cicero's own education reveals the various manifestations taken by this often uneasy fit of respecting an impressive Greek intellectual heritage while simultaneously embracing native Roman ideals. The elite would normally

¹ Teachers' reputations: Kaster 1995: xlv–xlviii (esp. n. 37); edict of 92: Gruen 1990: 179–91 offers an overview, with bibliography. All translations from Greek and Latin are my own.

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have undergone the crucial first steps of learning at home, picking up familiarity with Greek language and literature from house-slaves or freedmen in addition to learning to read and write Latin. Male members of the non-wealthy classes, by contrast, were probably rarely educated beyond basic literacy and numeracy, and their familiarity with Greek would have derived largely from commerce, military service and immigration, yielding a different sort of vocabulary from that heard in the homes of the wealthy.² Outside the home, elite education can be roughly reconstructed from a variety of sources, in particular from Cicero's many references to his own. Cicero's first exposure to philosophy would have been in Greek; his writings refer to boyhood contacts with the Stoic Diodotus (*Acad.* 2.115) and the Epicurean Phaedrus (*Fam.* 13.1.2), while he recounts that in 88 he 'devoted himself entirely' to the teachings of Philo of Larissa, head of the Academy in Athens, during that philosopher's sojourn in Rome (*Brut.* 306). The one personal teacher whose name we know with certainty, the Greek poet Archias, is credited by the mature orator as teaching him in his earliest youth, presumably in literature (*Arch.* 1). Cicero's first instruction in rhetoric was in Greek as well, beginning when he moved to Rome in the early nineties, and will have included lessons in dialectic, rhetorical theory and declamation (*De or.* 1.23, 2.2; *Brut.* 310; Plut. *Cic.* 4.6).

Access to the study of Roman topics was more restricted. Cicero asserts that he and Atticus had memorized as boys the Roman law-code known as the Twelve Tables, a standard practice since neglected (*Leg.* 2.59). Beyond this rote learning, no formal education in law is known to have existed. Rather, a young man learned through personal observation of current practitioners, either in their homes or at the forum; this is also how he would gain practical training in oratory (*Orat.* 142; *Brut.* 306). An indication of the type of formal instruction that the young Cicero obtained in this period can be gleaned from the one prose treatise composed in his youth, the *De inventione* of the late nineties. During the succeeding decade, when Cicero was in his late twenties, he studied in the Greek east for two years, a step in education that by the end of the Republic was to become 'perhaps almost obligatory for young men of the upper class'.³ Exposure to this overseas training was perceived as offering an overt advantage in the courts back home. In a telling passage from one of his orations, Cicero derides a competing orator for having studied Latin literature in Sicily rather than at Rome, and Greek literature in Lilybaeum rather than Athens (*Div. Caec.* 39). Once again, a pure Greek training assists in the creation of something uniquely Roman.

² Horsfall 2003: 48–63 gives a vivid appraisal of the evidence. ³ Rawson 1985: 10.