

# “Look No More”: Jonson’s *Catiline* and the Politics of *Enargeia*

JOSEPH MANSKY

IN THE FIFTH ACT OF *CATILINE HIS CONSPIRACY* (1611), BEN JONSON’S Cicero conjures the scenes of slaughter that the Roman Republic has narrowly escaped. “This was the spectacle these fiends intended / To please their malice,” he concludes (5.3.186–87).<sup>1</sup> The conspirator Cethegus seizes on the incipient theatrical metaphor:

Ay, and it would  
Have been a brave one, Consul. But your part  
Had not then been so long as now it is.  
I should have quite defeated your oration,  
And slit that fine rhetorical pipe of yours  
I’ the first scene.

(187–92)

Jonson’s audience was apparently just as impatient with Cicero’s “fine rhetorical pipe” and just as eager to see a “brave” spectacle on the stage. In an address “To the Reader in Ordinary” printed in the 1611 quarto, Jonson, prickly as ever, informs this reader, “Though you commend the two first acts, with the people, because they are the worst, and dislike the oration of Cicero, in regard you read some pieces of it at school and understand them not yet, I shall find the way to forgive you” (lines 4–7). Jonson aligns “the people” in the theater and “the Reader in Ordinary” with the bloodthirsty Cethegus, lusting after spectacle and bored by the length of Cicero’s “part.”

Jonsonian dramaturgy and the Roman Republic are equally under siege. At least for Jonson, so too was the English state. Near midnight on 4 November 1605, Guy Fawkes was discovered with thirty-six barrels of gunpowder in the cellars beneath Parliament (Nicholls 9). The thwarted Gunpowder Plot was quickly labeled “worse then Catilinarie conspiracies,” and the Catholic plotters were branded “worse then *Catilines*” (Ormerod T4r; *Discourse* E4v; see also Lemon 139).

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Jonson, then a Catholic, had dined with several of the conspirators less than a month earlier. Although he wisely cooperated with the official investigation, he did not return to the Church of England until 1610—the same year that King Henry IV of France was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic (Donaldson 10–12). These plots (and the crackdown that ensued), Ian Donaldson argues, “gave Jonson a vivid and violent picture of what might eventually happen to a nation so sharply divided over issues of religion” (13; see also Lake).

*Catiline* sets out to purge this violence from the state—and from the stage. I argue that Cicero’s fight to save the republic is also a battle against the kind of spectacular drama that, Jonson claimed, his audiences so enjoyed.<sup>2</sup> Horace’s *Ars poetica* (*The Art of Poetry*), the foundational text for neoclassical poetics, teaches that fantastical or gory spectacles should be made visible only through language, not onstage action. In Jonson’s own meticulous translation, Horace instructs the dramatist to “take / Much from the sight, which fair report will make / Present anon” (lines 261–63). Horace (at least in Jonson’s translation) here invokes the rhetorical technique of *enargeia*: the power of language to conjure an image.<sup>3</sup> Backed by Horace’s authority, Jonson rejects the sensational spectacles of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage in favor of this neoclassical *enargeia*. Cicero’s rhetoric insistently puts images of violence before his audience’s eyes only to prevent their realization onstage. At stake in the political conflict between Cicero and the conspirators, then, is a corresponding set of theatrical and metatheatrical antagonisms: rhetoric against violence, the verbal illusion of spectacle against the thing itself, neoclassical against popular dramaturgy, and even Jonson against his audience.

Jonson’s metatheatrical polemic thus offers an unambiguous, if ultimately unpersuasive, solution to what has been termed the “paradox of representation,” or the “paradox

of mimesis” (Pitkin, “Commentary”; Platt 144). Representation, as Paul Ricoeur points out, has a “bipolar structure” (230): it is at once a re-presentation and a substitution, a “making present” and a “standing for” (Williams 267). Yet how can the thing represented be made present when it is in fact absent? Across the domains of aesthetics, historiography, and political theory, postmodern thinkers have grappled with this question. “[M]imesis necessarily entails the absence of that which it purports to represent,” comments the literary critic Terence Cave (5); “representation literally means . . . to make something *present* that presently is *absent*,” writes the philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit (159); “representation,” the political theorist Hanna Pitkin observes, “means the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact” (*Concept* 8–9).<sup>4</sup>

For the early moderns, *enargeia* provided a seemingly straightforward resolution to this paradox. Classical and early modern rhetorical theory described “language as a quasi-physical force which penetrates into the mind of the listener” (Webb 128). Informed by this theory, Renaissance orators, poets, and historians all relied on *enargeia* to generate compelling illusions of presence (Plett; Struever 75–76). But if *enargeia* was the master trope of early modern representation, its dominance did not go uncontested. An emergent “culture of fact,” characterized by an emphasis on empiricism and impartiality and a suspicion of linguistic surfaces, rejected rhetorical illusionism in favor of documentary evidence (Shapiro). In Shakespeare’s theater, the conflicting epistemologies of evidence and *evidentia* (the Latin word for *enargeia*) underwent perhaps their most searching interrogation. Othello’s demand for “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s infidelity is tragically satisfied by Iago’s vivid descriptions. “Now do I see ’tis true,” Othello declares, when he has seen nothing at all (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.363, 447).<sup>5</sup>

*Enargeia*, then, may solve the paradox of representation, but its solution only exacerbates the latent conflict between presence and absence, representation and thing represented. In the wake of poststructuralism, we have come to take for granted this constitutive difference (or *différance*) built into the structure of representation. "The sign," Jacques Derrida writes, "represents the present in its absence"; it "defers presence" yet "is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence that it defers" (*Margins* 9). *Enargeia* is defined by this interplay of absence and presence. But what made the technique so powerful for its early modern practitioners was its ability to elide difference and deferral, to produce "ocular proof" through words alone. *Enargeia* makes an aesthetic and epistemological claim for the priority of word over image; it reinscribes just the sort of "violent hierarchy" that Derridean deconstruction sought to overturn (Derrida, *Positions* 41).

For Jonson, who throughout his career "fought unavailingly for the priority of his words" over spectacle (Gurr 173), this "violent hierarchy" was in little need of deconstruction. *Catiline* resolves the paradox of representation by subordinating visual presence to verbal mediation, "making present" to "standing for." This hierarchy, I argue, aligns neoclassical poetics with humanist history, producing a novel (and tendentious) experiment in dramatic historiography. Scholars have emphasized the interpenetration of history and poetry in the Renaissance (Kelley and Sacks; Worden), yet early modern English poets and dramatists increasingly set the two arts in opposition (Sidney; Marston 401). In 1607, just a few years before *Catiline* was first performed and published, the playwright Thomas Dekker informed his readers, "I write as a Poet, not as an Historian, and these two doe not live under one law" (497). Jonson's innovation was to make poetry and history live under a single law: the law of *enargeia*. At least since Hayden White's *Metahistory* and the "linguistic turn" in historical studies, crit-

ics have observed that rhetorical tropes structure representation in historiography no less than in fiction (see Kelley 215–24). For Jonson, however, this conclusion has a polemical corollary: even in dramatic fiction, the representational mechanism of history must be primarily verbal, not visual. Translating his Latin sources for hundreds of lines at a time, Jonson stages a history that attacks the visual epistemology of its own theatrical medium.

Yet in its metaphors of vision, *enargeia* cannot but conjure that which it displaces. It is, after all, the most pictorial of figures: *enargeia*, Erasmus writes, sets its object up "like a picture to look at, so that we seem to have painted the scene rather than described it" (*Copia* 577). Jonson's hierarchy of representation thus deconstructs itself, banishing spectacles of violence only to re-present them in speech. And in the rhetorical tradition, speech was no less violent than spectacle. Classical and Renaissance rhetoricians often compared words to weapons (Rebhorn 34–35, 41–42), and *enargeia* in particular was praised for "dominat[ing]" and even "enslav[ing]" its listeners (Quintilian, bk. 8, ch. 3, sec. 62; Longinus, ch. 15, sec. 9). Jonson's coercive illusionism strives to subjugate spectacle and spectators alike. But as Ciceronian *enargeia* dominates the senate and the people of Rome, rhetoric increasingly resembles the spectacular violence that it has replaced—and Cicero, the elected consul, increasingly resembles his nemesis, Catiline (Goldberg 196; Lawry 402; Meskill 183–84). *Catiline* identifies a kind of "mimetic rivalry" in the structure of representation itself: if *enargeia* triumphs over spectacle, it is only because Cicero's rhetoric has so successfully made present, and inflicted on his audience, the violence that it excludes.<sup>6</sup>

### "Under One Law": *Enargeia* in Theater and History

Among the classical rhetoricians, Quintilian offers the most extended—and, in the Renais-

sance, the most influential—discussion of *enargeia*. The two longest treatments are to be found in books 6 and 8 of the *Institutio oratoria* (*The Orator's Education*). According to William Drummond, Jonson was intimately familiar with these books: the playwright believed that “Quintilian’s sixth, seventh, eighth books were not only to be read, but altogether digested” (97–98). In the sixth book, Quintilian stresses the representational power of *enargeia*. This technique, he asserts, relies on *phantasiai*, or “visions,” through which “the images of absent things are presented [*repraesentantur*] to the mind in such a way that we seem actually to see them with our eyes and have them physically present to us” (ch. 2, sec. 29). *Enargeia* creates a powerful illusion of sight, making “absent things” seem to be “physically present.” This mental “representation” (Quintilian elsewhere translates *enargeia* as *repraesentatio* [bk. 8, ch. 3, sec. 61]) is an artifact of language, but it nonetheless appeals to the visual faculty.

*Enargeia*, originally theorized in the context of forensic oratory as a way to “reproduce the vividness of ocular proof through language,” was also crucial to the mimetic effects of classical poetics and historiography (Eden 72; Walker). While this rhetorical vividness is the driving principle of Jonson’s dramatic historiography in *Catiline*, the playwright took a drastically different approach in the 1605 quarto of *Sejanus*. To authenticate his earlier Roman play—“to show my integrity in the story” (19–20), as he put it in the address “To the Readers”—Jonson scrupulously documented his sources in the margins. Columns of Latin citations flank the text of the play and even spill over into the center of the page; superscript letters in the text direct the reader to the marginalia, interrupting any continuous experience of reading.<sup>7</sup> Together with the address to the reader and the commendatory verses, the marginalia mark the quarto as a literary artifact, as a piece of historical scholarship ready to take its place among the Latin

tomes that it cites. Yet they also puncture the play’s dramatic fiction, shifting the burden of historical proof from Jonson’s verse to those authoritative sources.

In stark contrast, the margins of the 1611 quarto of *Catiline* are completely bare. If anything, however, Jonson’s scholarship is even more meticulous. Entire swaths of the play are literal translations of Sallust’s *War with Catiline* and Cicero’s speeches against Catiline: the “oration of Cicero” that “the Reader in Ordinary” so disliked takes up some three hundred lines of act 4. While the *Sejanus* quarto relied on the “evidence” of its marginal citations to guarantee authenticity, in *Catiline* Jonson turns instead to *evidentia*. According to Carlo Ginzburg, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the primary criterion of historical truth began to shift from *evidentia* to evidence, from description to citation. On the cusp of this paradigm shift, Jonson discards scholarly apparatus in favor of a direct re-presentation of history; he returns to the illusionistic method of the classical and humanist historians. Plutarch, for example, famously praised the historiographical *enargeia* of Thucydides, who was continually “striving to make the auditor of his wordes the spectatour as it were of the deeds therein contained” (*Philosophie Nnnn6r*). And in his influential *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (1566), Jean Bodin argued that histories let readers study the causes and the ends of things “as if they were placed beneath their eyes” (11).

Plutarch’s theatrical metaphor suggests a long-standing tropological connection between history and theater. As Erasmus remarks in his popular textbook on rhetoric, *De copia* (*On Copia*), *enargeia* has often been used by both poets and historians. This rhetorical technique, he observes, “is especially remarkable in messengers’ speeches [*narrationes nunciorum*] in tragedy, for these take the place of a real scene [*vice spectaculi subiiciuntur*] and report something which either

cannot be represented on the stage for practical reasons or which is not the sort of thing one wants to represent” (*Copia* 578).<sup>8</sup> From Aristophanes to Bertolt Brecht, the “popular traditions” of the theater have “elevated the visual” above the verbal (Kennedy 5). Yet as early as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, dramatic theory subordinated spectacle to language (ch. 6, 1450b15–20; ch. 14, 1453b1–14). The classical and neoclassical messenger speeches that Erasmus describes enforce this hierarchy of representation, replacing spectacle (*spectaculum*) with narration (*narratio*). “Nor does it matter for this convention,” Erasmus adds, “whether the narrative is true or false” (*Copia* 579). Cave comments on this passage, “The linguistic surface renders with equal colour and evidence the face of real things and of imaginary things. . . . Potential as well as actual occurrences may become the material of *enargeia*: the possible future, no less than the historical past, may be made present in language” (8). *Enargeia* extends the limits of theatrical representation far beyond what can or should take place onstage. On its “linguistic surface,” history and poetry, past and future, fact and fiction become indistinguishable.

Although Jonson surely was familiar with Erasmus’s textbook, he was even more closely acquainted with the source for this discussion of theatrical *enargeia*: Horace’s *Ars poetica*. Horace (in Jonson’s careful translation) remarks:

[T]o the stage at all thou mayst not tender  
 Things worthy to be done within, but take  
 Much from the sight, which fair report will  
 make  
 Present anon. (260–63)

[N]on tamen intus  
 Digna geri promes in scaenam multaque tolles  
 Ex oculis, quae mox narret facundia praesens.  
 (182–84)<sup>9</sup>

In the Latin, the adjective *praesens* (“present”) clearly modifies *facundia* (“fair report”), and

so, as one modern commentator points out, “the presence of the reporter or report is emphasized; he or it, not the action, is presented” (Brink 247). Jonson’s translation, however, defies the grammar of the Latin, attributing “presence” not to the “fair report” but to the actions that have been “take[n] / . . . from the sight.” That is, he translates the feminine, nominative, singular *praesens* as if it were modifying the neuter, accusative, plural *quae* (“[things] which”). This tendentious rendering suggests that the *enargeia* of theatrical narration effectively supplants direct action, creating a verbal illusion that makes the spectacle as present to the audience as if it had happened onstage. Jonsonian *enargeia*, as Erasmus puts it, thus “take[s] the place of a real scene,” transferring the representational magic of the theater from spectacle to language.

### Rhetoric versus Spectacle

In *Catiline*, then, Jonson uses the *enargeia* of his historical sources to contest what he describes in the play’s dedicatory epistle as the vain spectacles of these “jig-given times” (4). Because his own copy of these sources—the 1564 Basel edition of Sallust (*C. Crispi Salustii*)—survives (McPherson 84), we can reconstruct the path from humanist folio to metatheatrical polemic. This folio edition of Sallust’s works bears some resemblance to the *Sejanus* quarto: primary sources are hemmed in by masses of printed notes and interwoven with extended commentaries. Between 1605 and 1611, however, Jonson evidently rethought drama’s relation to history. In the first quarto of *Catiline*, we see the playwright translating the densely annotated folio of the humanist historian into an illusionistic experience of history on the stage and on the page.

Jonson’s adaptation of Cicero’s speeches against Catiline (which are included in the 1564 Sallust folio) provides the most striking example of this scholarly practice. In the fourth Catilinarian oration, Cicero seeks to



persuade the senate to execute the captive conspirators by describing what would have happened if they had succeeded in their plot to overthrow the republic. He conjures a hellish vision of Rome in ruins:

Videor enim mihi hanc urbem videre lucem orbis terrarum, atque arcem omnium gentium subito uno incendio concidentem. Cerno animo sepultam patriam, miseros atque insepultos acervos civium. (In *L. Catilinam* Yy4v)

I seem to myself to see this city, the light of the whole world and the citadel of all nations, suddenly collapsing in a single sheet of flame. In my mind's eye I see our country buried with pitiful and unburied heaps of citizens.

(In *Catilinam*, speech 4, sec. 11; trans. modified)

In the margin next to this passage, the commentary in Jonson's edition (by Philip Melanchthon) notes that this is an example of "Hypotyposis, qua figurat & depingit publicas clades, quarum autores futuri erant coniurati" ("*Hypotyposis*, with which [Cicero] figures and depicts public destruction, the authors of which the conspirators were going to be" [Yy4v; my trans.]). For classical and Renaissance rhetoricians, *hypotyposis* and *enargeia* (or *evidentia*) were often synonyms (Quintilian, bk. 9, ch. 2, sec. 40; Susenbrotus F4v). Drawing on the familiar claim that *enargeia* makes a verbal narrative seem like a painting (Erasmus, *Copia* 577), Melanchthon uses verbs associated with the visual arts to describe Cicero's *enargeia*: *figurare*, to shape; *depingere*, to paint. But this aesthetic or mimetic effect has a political function. Cicero uses *hypotyposis* to depict "publicas clades," which here refers not merely to "public destruction" but also to the destruction of the republic, *clades rei publicae*. Instead of abstracting this figure from its context as an example of rhetorical ornamentation, the gloss emphasizes that nothing less than the republic itself is at stake.

Toward the end of *Catiline*, Jonson inserts this section of the fourth Catilinarian

into Cicero's judicial proceedings against the conspirators. The fate of the republic hangs in the balance as Cicero grandiloquently demonstrates their guilt to the senate. Jonson translates the passage almost word for word but shifts the verbs from the first to the second person:

Think but with me you saw this glorious city,  
The light of all the earth, tower of all nations,  
Suddenly falling in one flame. Imagine  
You viewed your country buried with the  
    heaps  
Of slaughtered citizens that had no grave.  
(5.3.174–78)

Given how closely these lines follow the Latin, the change in person is surely no accident. Jonson transforms Cicero's personal vision ("I seem to myself to see," "In my mind's eye I see") into a shared illusion: the orator addresses the senate, "Think but with me *you* saw. . . ." Quintilian defines *hypotyposis* as "the expression in words of a given situation in such a way that it seems to be a matter of seeing rather than of hearing" and adds, "We can form a picture [*imaginamur*] not only of the past and the present, but also of the future or of what might have happened" (bk. 9, ch. 2, secs. 40, 41). This counterfactual *enargeia*—a picture of "what might have happened"—is precisely what Cicero presents here. As Melanchthon's gloss points out, the conspirators "futuri erant" ("were going to be") the authors of the slaughter. With the imperative "imagine," Jonson's Cicero invokes this power of rhetoric to conjure, and thereby frustrate, the future that "might have happened"; he invites his audience to join him in constructing this fantastic vision of the republic in shambles.<sup>10</sup>

As the speech continues, it becomes clear that Jonson's Cicero is not so much inviting as conscripting his audience into performing this imaginative work. Cicero imagines the conspirator Lentulus "here reigning," Catiline coming "[w]ith his fierce army" (5.3.179, 181), and

the cries of matrons,  
The flight of children, and the rape of virgins,  
Shrieks of the living, with the dying groans  
On every side t'invade your sense. (181–84)

These sounds of murder and mayhem transport the conspirators' army right into the senate. Jonson is drawing on what Ruth Webb calls the classical "conception of the human body as permeable" and thus vulnerable to the penetrative force of rhetoric (98). In his discussion of *enargeia*, Quintilian writes that a speech cannot achieve "total domination" if it "goes no further than the ears, and the judge feels that he is merely being told the story of the matters he has to decide, without their being brought out and displayed to his mind's eye" (bk. 8, ch. 3, sec. 62). Rhetorical domination depends on the illusion of sight, on sensory confusion. Cicero's rhetoric imitates the (sexual) violence of Catiline's "fierce army," violating the integrity of his audience's imagination by forcing a grisly vision before their "mind's eye." As Quintilian puts it, only vivid description can "penetrate the emotions" of the hearer (sec. 67; trans. modified)—or, in the words of Jonson's Cicero, "invade your sense."

Such a sensory invasion is precisely what antitheatricalists feared most. In *The Schoole of Abuse*, Stephen Gosson admonishes anyone who "resortes too Theaters too bee assaulted." There, Gosson asserts, we find music "to tickle the eare," finery "to flatter the sight," and "effeminate gesture, to ravish the sence" (B6v); there, plays "by the privie entries of the eare, slip downe into the hart, & with gun-shotte of affection gaule the minde, where reason and vertue should rule the roste" (B7r). In keeping with his "deeply rooted antitheatricalism" (Barish 132), Jonson likely would have agreed with much of this, and he certainly condemned the theatrical arts that "flatter the sight." But the power of speech to slip in through the ear, to penetrate the body and even "ravish the sence," is essential to his conception of theatrical representation. As

George Chapman writes in a commendatory poem included in the *Sejanus* quarto, Jonson's "lively evidence" (his *enargeia*) turns his "hearers" into "spectators" (97, 98, 99), and "the sense," Chapman tells Jonson, "That thy spectators have of good or ill, / Thou inject'st jointly to thy readers' souls" (99, 100–01).<sup>11</sup> Jonson's *enargeia*, Chapman suggests, is didactic because of, not despite, its penetrative force; whether on the stage or on the page, it injects the audience with the playwright's own moral sensibility. While Gosson worries that this violation will overthrow "reason and vertue," for Jonson it starkly separates "good" from "ill."

In *Catiline*, rhetoric's seductive illusion of presence thus empowers the eloquent individual to guide and protect the state. The central problem of the play, as Joseph Wallace observes, is "the problem of sight": "to match intention with an exterior, visible form" (101). Cicero's *enargeia* solves this problem admirably. "This was the spectacle these fiends intended / To please their malice," he ends his speech, rendering the conspirators' intention visible in language (Jonson, *Catiline* 5.3.186–87). Cethegus's violent response—his bloodthirsty threat to "slit that fine rhetorical pipe of yours" (191)—proves no match for the overbearing power of *enargeia*. Yet as the invasive force of Cicero's rhetoric "enforces his will on the citizens of Rome," the republic seems less and less republican (Lemon 156). Indeed, Jonathan Goldberg goes so far as to describe Cicero's "form" as "the mask of republicanism covering absolutism" (196).

But according to no less an authority than the historical Cicero himself, this tension between republicanism and absolutism is generated precisely by supreme eloquence. In *De oratore* (*On the Orator*), Cicero (through the character of Crassus) paradoxically claims that "[i]n every free nation [*libero populo*]" the art of rhetoric alone has "ever reigned supreme [*dominata est*]" (bk 1, sec. 30). Restating this contrast between freedom and

domination, Cicero then lauds the orator's power as both "regium" and "liberale"—characteristic both of a king and of the free (sec. 32). Jonson's Cicero exercises the same quasi-monarchical power: his authoritarian eloquence rules the senate and the people of Rome. And in this Rome there is no place for the conspiracy's theatrical populism. Jonson stages an antitheatrical, antidemocratic republicanism, a representational politics predicated on the erasure of the represented.

### Spectacles of Violence

It is thus easy enough to see why Jonson's audience preferred the first two acts, before Cicero takes the stage. The arch orator's dominant presence in the second half of the play decisively shifts the dramatic focus from the visual to the verbal. By contrast, the early scenes are filled with the conspirators' ominous plotting, heralded by stage effects like a "groan of many people . . . under ground" and a "fiery light" (1.1.315, 318). As early as the play's first lines, Jonson associates the conspiracy with lurid, spectacular violence. Threatening death and destruction, Sulla's ghost opens the play in the Senecan tradition popularized by Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587). "Behold, I come," the spirit intones, "like a pestilence that should display / Infection through the world—which, thus, I do" (11, 14–15). With the imperative "behold," the ghost presents itself as a spectacle. Soon, though, it draws the audience's gaze to a new sight: the "infection" that the ghost "display[s]" is Catiline himself. The ghost's deictic "thus" points to the theatrical business of "drawing a curtain or opening a door" (Jonson, *Catiline* [Cambridge Edition] 33n), described in the margin of the folio edition of the play by the stage direction "*Discovers Catiline in his study*" (1.1.15).

No longer spectacle but stage manager, Sulla's ghost imbues Catiline with both its theatrical potency and its fantasies of un-

bridled violence. "All that was mine, and bad, thy breast inherit," the ghost commands as it begins to list Catiline's past and future crimes: "incests, murders, rapes"; "lusts, hatreds, slaughters"; "[t]hy murder of thy brother"; and even "[t]he ruin of thy country" (1.1.18, 30, 64, 39, 45). This catalog of villainy could have come right out of an antitheatrical tract. As Gosson writes, "The argument of Tragedies is wrath, crueltie, incest, injurie, murther" (*Playes* C5r). This claim was not without merit. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*—plays, Jonson complained in the induction to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), that were still popular in the early seventeenth century (79–82)—are filled with murder and mutilation. Plays contemporary with *Catiline* like Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* and John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* likewise stage incest, murder, and rape. This violence, moreover, is often self-consciously theatrical. *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* culminate in scenes of elaborately choreographed slaughter carried out through a play and a masque, respectively (Kyd 4.4; Middleton 5.3). In Jonson's play, Catiline and his conspiracy embody this theatrical violence. When the conspirators arrive, Catiline and Cethegus reminisce about the good old days of "Sulla's sway, when the free sword took leave / To act all that it would" (1.1.230–31). Like Sulla's ghost, they equate "act[ing]" with indiscriminate violence, with "Rome burnt" and bloody "[s]laughter" (223, 235).

For the conspirators, watching precludes acting; they want to be a spectacle, not spectators. When a "bloody arm" grasping a torch materializes, Cethegus feels nothing but impatience: "Look no more; / We lose time, and ourselves" (320, 324–25). According to Cethegus, spectatorship is self-alienating. The conspirators, he suggests, can only find themselves by acting, by staging the foreboding sights and sounds that they as yet only witness. Catiline later agrees, developing the



opposition between looking and acting into a theatrical simile. The gluttonous few revel in culinary and architectural luxury, he claims, while "[w]e . . . like calm, benumbed spectators, / Sit till our seats do crack" (404–05). Rather than passively watch the play unfold, the conspirators, Catiline urges, should get up out of their seats and interrupt the drama, creating their own violent spectacle: "Wake, wake, brave friends" (409).

But while Catiline may share Cethegus's bloodlust, he does not display the same hostility toward rhetoric. Translating from Sallust, Jonson gives his villain a speech of around one hundred lines to match Cicero's notoriously long oration in act 4. Catiline's eloquence, however, has received little comment. According to Sallust, he was a skilled orator; Catiline possessed "adequate eloquence, but too little discretion [*satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum*]" (*War*, ch. 5, sec. 5). In Jonson's copy of Sallust, the commentary glosses this phrase by citing Cicero himself on the dangers of eloquence without wisdom (*C. Crispi Salustii* c3v, c4r). Cicero begins *De inventione* (*On Invention*) by asking "whether men and communities have received more good or evil from oratory and a consuming devotion to eloquence." After weighing the good against the bad, he concludes "that wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but that eloquence without wisdom [*eloquentiam . . . sine sapientia*] is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful" (bk 1, sec. 1). Jonson reproduces and even amplifies Catiline's dangerously seductive *eloquentia sine sapientia*. The play's main conflict dramatizes the historical Cicero's ambivalence: if Jonson's Cicero represents the right use of rhetoric, Catiline is the perfect example of its abuse.

Catiline is thus Cicero's inverse. The conspirator, like the consul, exploits the power of *enargeia*—but for opposite purposes. While Cicero's rhetoric reduces spectacle to a verbal illusion, Catiline conjures visions of excess only to encourage his followers to

disrupt them with violence. This bloody disruption, Catiline claims, will be something of a popular revolution. He dwells on the excesses of the wealthy elite in a Rome "engrossed so by a few," and he rallies his men to "redeem ourselves to liberty / And break the iron yoke forged for our necks" (1.1.347, 344–45). As evil as Catiline's motives may be, his characterization of Rome's corrupt oligarchs is largely accurate, according to both Sallust (*War*, chs. 12–13) and Jonson's Chorus (1.1.550–90). Catiline's *enargeia* makes the elite's prodigality visible to his audience. "It doth strike my soul," he begins,

To see them swell with treasure, which they  
pour  
Out i'their riots, eating, drinking, building,  
Ay, i'the sea, planing of hills with valleys  
And raising valleys above hills. (374, 377–80)

In Sallust, Catiline asks, "[W]hat mortal . . . can endure that our opponents have a surfeit of riches to squander in building upon the sea and in leveling mountains?" (*War*, ch. 20, sec. 11). Jonson's asyndeton—"riots, eating, drinking, building"—blurs all kinds of profligacy into a heady vision of consumption. But the crucial addition is the reference to sight. Catiline portrays the force that he wants his *enargeia* to exert on his audience: what he "see[s]," he says, "doth strike my soul."

Against this picture of oligarchic excess, Catiline offers a contrasting vision of "the brave spoil the war brings" (1.1.415). "Wake, wake, brave friends," he cries, "And meet the liberty you oft have wished for! / Behold: renown, riches, and glory court you" (409–11). In Sallust, the construction is more passive: "Behold, here, here placed before your eyes [*in oculis sita sunt*], is the freedom for which you have often longed, and with it riches, honor, and glory" (*War*, ch. 20, sec. 14). Jonson renders this in the active voice: Catiline enjoins the conspirators to "meet" the liberty they yearn for and imagines that wealth and glory "court" them. What was an imaginary specta-

cle “placed before your eyes” in Jonson’s source becomes a scene in which the conspirators actively participate. Catiline’s *enargeia* aims to transform his auditors from “benumbed spectators” into the actors of his bloody plot. As he declares earlier in his speech, “we should come forth bright axes”—no longer lingering in passive obscurity but instead taking the stage in a blaze of violence (1.1.360).

For all their “ravenous malignity” (Swinnburne 57), Jonson’s conspirators are thus not so different from Shakespeare’s. In *Julius Caesar*, after Caesar’s assassination the conspirators stage the “savage spectacle” (as Brutus calls it) that Catiline and his crew so eagerly seek (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 3.1.223). Earlier in the scene, Brutus leads his companions in a grotesque display of patriotism: they wash their hands in Caesar’s blood and smear it all over their swords. “Then,” Brutus continues, “walk we forth even to the market-place, / And waving our red weapons o’er our heads / Let’s all cry, ‘Peace, Freedom and Liberty’” (108–10). His motives are, of course, as virtuous as Catiline’s are malign. But as this bloody spectacle in the “market-place” suggests, Brutus shares the Catilinarian conspirators’ obsession with theatrical violence. Indeed, Brutus and Cassius gleefully imagine Caesar’s death as the piece of theater that it in fact is. “How many ages hence,” asks Cassius, “Shall this our lofty scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown?” (111–13). “How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,” Brutus adds, “That now on Pompey’s basis lies along, / No worthier than the dust?” (114–16). This dizzying metatheater locates the power of dramatic spectacle in repetition: over and over, Caesar will “bleed in sport.” For the conspirators, and perhaps for Shakespeare too, this bloody scene offers a study in republican freedom every time it is staged. “So oft as that shall be,” Cassius asserts, “So often shall the knot of us be called / The men who gave their country liberty”—even in the monarchy of early modern England (116–18).

While Shakespeare seems ambivalent about the link between theatrical violence and republicanism, there is no question where Jonson stands. “Liberty” and “freedom” may be the watchwords of both playwrights’ conspiracies, but Catiline and his cohorts make their insatiable bloodlust abundantly clear. When Cicero first learns of their plot to overthrow the republic, he marvels that “[i]t so far exceeds / All insolent fictions of the tragic scene” (3.2.24–25). Catiline aims beyond the “lofty scene” enacted by Shakespeare’s conspirators, beyond the “wrath, cruelty, incest, injurie, murder” that antitheatricalists like Gosson claimed constituted the argument of tragedy. This popular, and populist, theatricality proves to be no match for the consummate orator who, like the eloquent individual of *De oratore*, defends the republic by dominating it. Yet Cicero’s rhetoric—like Jonson’s neoclassical dramaturgy—seems to thrive on the threat of spectacular violence that the conspirators conjure in the play’s opening scenes. Even as theatrical spectacle gives way to Ciceronian eloquence, this oratory deploys the invasive force of *enargeia* to re-present the images that it has displaced.

### *Cedant Arma Togae*

After the play’s first act, Catiline’s malevolent theatricality largely vanishes from the stage. The threat of spectacular violence, however, becomes ever more present in language. Near the end of the play, Catiline seizes his last chance to generate the spectacle that has eluded him thus far. Having fled the city, he rallies his army to fight a final, desperate battle against the forces of Rome. Jonson translates much of the speech directly from Sallust but again adds a theatrical analogy at the climax. Catiline proclaims, “Methinks I see Death and the Furies waiting / What we will do, and all the heaven at leisure / For the great spectacle” (5.4.46–48). At last, the “great spectacle” that the conspirators have dreamed

of has arrived. For this final act of violence, Catiline envisions a cosmic audience, both infernal and divine—not to mention the spectators in the theater. His recurrent meta-theatrical language marks the conspiracy as the engine of the play's theatricality. All spectacle, all violence, all onstage action will emanate from "Catiline his conspiracy."

But Cicero's rhetoric insistently derails his adversary's attempts to stage a spectacle—and in the process, as the original audience apparently complained, completely stymies the dramatic action. Jonson is clearly on Cicero's side. The playwright's dramaturgy, no less than Cicero's rhetoric, frustrates the conspirators' drive toward violence on the stage. Like his protagonist, Jonson submits Catiline's "great spectacle" to the verbal representation of *enargeia*: instead of the raging battle that Catiline anticipates we get the report of a *nuntius*, or messenger—the Roman general Petreius. Such speeches, as we have seen, are the essence of neoclassical *enargeia*: as Jonson puts it in his translation of Horace's *Ars poetica*, they make offstage events "present anon"; as Erasmus says, they "take the place of a real scene." Petreius describes Catiline as the vision of civic destruction that the conspirator had aspired to become: "Catiline came on, not with the face / Of any man, but of a public ruin: / His count'nance was a civil war itself" (Jonson, *Catiline* 5.5.223–25). According to Petreius, the conspirator even attracted the cosmic audience that he desired, the "Furies" themselves "trembl[ing] to see men / Do more than they" (236, 237–38). But Catiline only becomes this spectacle of civil violence in a messenger's speech, after he has already been killed. His "great spectacle" is in the end an artifact of *enargeia*, made present through a rhetorical description rather than onstage action.

Cicero follows the pattern of Jonson's dramaturgy: he renders the spectacular violence of the conspiracy vividly present not in actions but in words. For example, the

consul's *enargeia* in the fifth act—describing the "cries of matrons," the "[s]hrieks of the living, with the dying groans / On every side t'invade your sense" (5.3.181, 183–84)—echoes and thus foils Catiline's plot to bring down half of Rome "and invade the rest / With cries and noise" (1.1.525–26). And Cicero similarly transforms the physical violence of Catiline's call to "come forth bright axes" into the rhetorical violence of wounding words: "Whom it were fit the axe should hew in pieces / I not so much as wound yet with my voice" (1.1.360, 4.2.222–23). A military invasion becomes the sensory assault of *enargeia*; an "axe" is no more powerful than a "voice." Jonson's play dramatizes the representational logic of *enargeia*, transmuting the anarchic violence of the conspiracy into Cicero's (and Jonson's) rhetoric.

In his long—and evidently unpopular—oration against Catiline in the fourth act, Cicero brings this illusionistic force fully to bear on his audience. As critics have argued, the consul "is trying to make Catiline's guilt immediately obvious and absolutely present to the senators through the power of direct speech" (Archer 116); he "wants to provide his audience with clear, powerful visions that would offer a moment of transformation, when all is revealed" (Wallace 103). Catiline's mistake is dismissing the power of those rhetorical visions: he condemns Cicero as a "boasting, insolent tongue-man" (4.2.102). Yet Cicero immediately proceeds to crush the conspiracy by the sheer force of his tongue. In his speech, he repeatedly uses the language of visual revelation to put the conspirators' secret plots before the senate's eyes: "This the Consul sees" (131); "Thou dost nothing," he addresses Catiline, "But I both see and hear it" (200, 202); "I see 'em, in this Senate, that were with thee" (211); "I would now send him [Catiline] where they all should see, / Clear as the light, his heart shine" (348–49); "All shall be clear, made plain" (386). When Catiline finally gets a chance to respond, he tries

to defend himself by positing an epistemological gap between language and truth: “If an oration or high language, fathers, / Could make me guilty, here is one hath done it” (403–04). Against the weight of some three hundred lines of Ciceronian eloquence, Catiline’s protestation that an oration cannot create guilt sounds hopelessly naive. Indeed, in the rhetorical tradition, manufacturing guilt is precisely the goal of “artificial proofs” (Quintilian, bk. 5, chs. 8–14). As Quintilian puts it, this class of proofs “is entirely within the scope of our art, and comprises various means of creating belief [*faciendam fidem*]” (bk. 5, ch. 8, sec. 1). The upshot of this rhetorical theory is to render guilt or innocence the consequence of belief, *fides*—and *fides* is exactly what “an oration or high language” extracts from its audience.

When Catiline realizes that the senate does not share his contempt for Cicero’s eloquence, he has no choice but to accept his banishment. Before he departs, however, he confronts the consul in an abortive display of violence. “I will go,” he says, “But—my fine dainty speaker—” (Jonson, *Catiline* 4.2.431–32). The folio’s marginal stage direction describes the action that takes place during the pauses marked by the dashes (*Workes* Qqq3v): “*He turns suddenly on Cicero*” Jonson, *Catiline* (4.2.432). Cicero apparently flinches, exclaiming, “What now, fury? / Wilt thou assault me here?” (432–33). But with the senate turned against him, Catiline has already been defeated; his sudden threat of violence dissipates in desperate mockery: “See, fathers, laugh you not? Who threatened him?” (434). As Catiline tries to get off a parting threat, a flurry of voices shout him down: “Parricide!”; “Butcher, traitor, leave the Senate!” (443); “Still dost thou murmur, monster?” (445). Swords give way to words; or, as the historical Cicero notoriously wrote to celebrate his defeat of the conspiracy, “*Cedant arma togae*” (“Let arms yield to the toga” [*De officiis*, bk. 1, sec. 77; trans. modified]).<sup>12</sup>

### “No Violence”? *Catiline* and Its Afterlife

Arms may yield to the toga, but words prove to be just as coercive as swords. Jonson thus embraces the vigorously absolutist strain of Renaissance rhetoric. While (as Cicero does in *De oratore*) classical rhetoricians sometimes describe rhetoric as an instrument of rule, Wayne A. Rebhorn argues that they “chiefly imagine the art . . . as a contest among free citizens” (38). By contrast, Renaissance rhetoricians emphasize the regal and imperial power of rhetoric, its ability to subjugate an audience (23–79). As Henry Peacham puts it, the orator “is in a maner the emperour of mens minds & affections,” and figures of speech “are as martiall instruments both of defence & invasion” (AB3v, AB4r). But swords and words conquer with “great difference”: “that with violence, this with perswasion, that with shedding of blood, this with pearcing the affections” (AB4r). *Catiline* dramatizes this opposition. By “pearcing the affections,” Cicero’s rhetoric prevents bloodshed; persuasion supplants violence as the prime means of coercion. Catiline misunderstands the force of language when he claims, “Our objects must be sought with wounds, not words” (3.1.234). Words, as Cicero says in his long speech before the senate, can “wound” as effectively as any weapon (4.2.223). To rely on physical violence—which Catiline increasingly does throughout the play—is to become a “sword-player,” as Cicero contemptuously labels Cethegus (5.3.70). And in a drama dominated by wordplayers, a “sword-player” does not stand a chance.

One quantifiable measure of Cicero’s triumph over the conspiracy’s theatricality is the frequency with which stage properties appear in the play. At just over three props per thousand lines, *Catiline* is much closer to the neo-Senecan “closet” drama that it often resembles than to other plays written for the popular stage (Bruster 86).<sup>13</sup> Yet this low frequency does not tell the whole story. In the first two acts, when the conspirators dominate the



action, the frequency is around a respectable seven props per thousand lines. The final two acts, however, contain practically no props at all (Bruster 87). Cicero's *enargeia* purges the stage of what Jonson considered its "theatrical claptrap" (Barish 135), transforming the incipient melodrama of the first two acts into a series of extended speeches.

Jonson, however, by no means disavowed props for good. In fact, *Bartholomew Fair*, one of the next plays that he wrote, "probably requires more props than any other contemporary play" (Sturgess 180). There are gingerbread men, hobbyhorses, and bottles of ale (3.6, 3.4, 2.2); pears, ballads, and drums (4.2, 3.5, 5.1); stocks, a booth selling roast pig, and even a puppet theater (4.1, 2.5, 5.4). The play is obsessed with what its Puritan caricature, Zeal-of-the-land Busy, denounces as "the vanity of the eye" (1.6.62). As Michael O'Connell argues, *Bartholomew Fair* "gathers up all [Jonson's] ambivalence and doubt about spectacle and about the theatrical enterprise itself" (124).<sup>14</sup> *Catiline* offers a decidedly less ambivalent solution to the tension between poetry and picture that preoccupied Jonson throughout his career. But even *Catiline* cannot fully escape the spectacles that Cicero's rhetoric attempts to exclude. In the first two acts, praised by "the people," Jonson deploys the visual resources of popular stagecraft if only to reject them decisively. Cicero's *enargeia* thus derives much of its persuasive force from the specter of the spectacular violence that it purports to eliminate.

Even Cicero's rhetorical prowess, then, cannot fully exorcise violence from the play—or from the Roman Republic. As many critics have pointed out, Caesar's impending rise undermines Cicero's final triumph over the conspirators (Bryant 276–77; Cain 182–83; Chernaik 134; Dutton 129–30). Jonson's Caesar is the malevolent provocateur behind the conspiracy, "an insidious, dangerous cancer which slowly consumes and destroys the Roman Republic" (Lovascio 217). While Cato

is eager to go after Caesar (and Caesar's ally Crassus), Cicero is wary of their influence and resolves merely to keep a close watch on them. He tells Cato, "I'll make / Myself no enemies, nor the state no traitors" (Jonson, *Catiline* 4.2.477–78). Toward the end of the play, letters for Caesar (presumably from the conspirators) arrive in the senate, and Cato moves to have them publicly read. Caesar warns, "You'll repent / This rashness, Cicero"; the consul quickly de-escalates the situation, exclaiming, "No violence! Caesar be safe" (5.5.160–61, 163). This commitment to rhetoric over violence, fundamental to Jonson's dramaturgy and politics alike, will prove fatal to the republic.

If the specter of bitter conflict haunts the end of *Catiline*, partisan violence also colors the play's afterlife. As civil war raged in the mid-seventeenth century, both royalists and republicans repurposed the anarchic, theatrical violence of Jonson's *Catiline* for their own literary and political polemic. The anonymous play *The Tragedy of That Famous Roman Orator Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1651), for instance, has been called a republican "sequel" to *Catiline* (Wiseman, *Drama* 74).<sup>15</sup> Skipping over the rise and fall of Caesar, the play begins, like *Catiline*, with a Senecan ghost looming over Rome—this time not Sulla but Caesar himself. Caesar demands vengeance for his murder, prophesying that a cruel tyrant will subjugate Rome and that the "days of Sulla shall return, and blood / Swim down thy streets" (*Tragedy* 1.1.41–42). The ghost concludes his description of the impending slaughter by predicting that Rome will lose its "sacred tongue, / The great patrician of the speaking art" (56–57). On cue, Cicero enters, ready for his next battle in defense of the republic. This time, the "traitor to the freedom of his country" is Antony (1.2.17). Reminiscing about the feats of his own "youth," Cicero compares this new assault on the state to *Catiline's* conspiracy: "I have condemned the swords of *Catiline*; / I will not now fear his" (18, 20–21).



Even as *Marcus Tullius Cicero* imitates the dramatic structure of *Catiline*, the anonymous play aligns the main conflict—between Cicero’s words and a traitor’s swords—with contemporary politics. Caesar’s ghost invokes his “royal power” and the “sovereign command” of his malevolent inheritors (*Tragedy* 1.1.35, 38), while Cicero praises the “free unforced judgments” of the senate and discerns “some gleam of liberty” in the wake of Caesar’s assassination (1.2.3, 6). Scholars have described this struggle between royal sovereignty and republican freedom as a political allegory, associating Caesar’s ghost with the executed Charles I and Antony with Cromwell (Wiseman, *Drama* 74; Randall 42–47). Cicero, according to John Morrill, would thus represent the aristocrats who sided with Parliament yet were disturbed by Cromwell’s authoritarianism (99–100). If Jonson’s *Catiline* echoes any single historical event, it is the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 (Luna). This analogy aligns Cicero not with any sort of resistance, aristocratic or otherwise, but with the monarchical establishment. In Jonson’s play it is thus Catiline, not Cicero, who rallies his followers to pursue “the liberty [they] oft have wished for” (1.1.410). The conspirator’s rhetoric may be specious, but Cicero certainly offers no competing conception of republican freedom. Indeed, Jonson’s Cicero is as much a dictator as a champion of liberty.

History, both contemporary and classical, explains this radically altered vision of the Roman Republic. Just as inevitably as the Cicero of 1611 crushes the Catilinarian conspiracy, the Cicero of 1651 loses his battle against Antony—and his head. Near the end of *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, Antony and his wife, Fulvia, enter with Cicero’s severed hands and head. This gruesome scene reverses the triumph of rhetoric over violence that Jonson staged decades before: the swords of Antony and his followers now silence Cicero’s words. Antony orders the murderer to take Cicero’s head and hands to the forum and instructs him how to present them to the public:

[P]lace them on the rostra, where he vomited  
His Philippics against me. Let his head  
Be set betwixt his hands, ’twill be a brave  
And goodly spectacle. (*Tragedy* 5.10.18–21)

Pointedly undoing Cicero’s eclipse of “spectacle” in *Catiline*, Antony turns the site of public speech into a bloody display. His language echoes that of Jonson’s Cethegus, who asserted that the conspiracy’s intended “spectacle” of slaughter “would / Have been a brave one” had Cicero not thwarted it (5.3.186, 187–88). Here we see the consequences of such a “brave / And goodly spectacle”: Rome’s “sacred tongue” silenced for good.

*Marcus Tullius Cicero* is thus a sustained republican reworking of Jonson’s play. More often, however, *Catiline* and *Catiline* end up as models for parliamentary treason in royalist polemic. Several pamphlet plays published in the late 1640s parodically map Jonson’s depiction of the conspiracy onto the supporters of Parliament. The second act of the anonymous playlet *Craftie Cromwell* (1648), subtitled “A Tragi-Comedie,” begins with the spirit of John Pym—a deceased leader of the parliamentary opposition—arising from the depths of hell. Just as Sulla’s ghost “[d]iscovers Catiline in his study” at the beginning of *Catiline* (1.1.15), Pym’s ghost “discovers Cromwell sleeping” and exhorts him to “be bold . . . and inexorable” (A4v). The pamphlet play *The Levellers Levell’d* (1647) similarly reproduces the melodrama of Jonson’s conspiracy. In the first act of *Catiline*, the conspirators cement their unholy alliance by drinking wine mixed with human blood (1.1.482–504), and in *The Levellers* a cast of allegorical figures—Conspiracy, Apostasy, Treachery, Democracy, and Impiety—echo this “horrid sacrament / In human blood,” as Jonson’s Cicero calls it (3.2.49–50). Conspiracy produces “*Catalines* Effigie” and enjoins his compatriots, “By the fam’d memorie of this brave spirit . . . who took the horrid Sacrament in blood to levell [Rome’s] proud battlements,

swear not to lay down armes till King *Charles* be sent to the invisible land, till all Lawes are repealed and abrogated." Catiline's effigy, "this sacred Relique," mystically represents the lurid (and theatrical) violence of the Catilinarian conspiracy (Nedham A3v). Conspiracy concludes the scene by again channeling the metatheatrical bloodlust of Jonson's Cethegus and Catiline: "I long to see / The first Scene acted of this Tragedie" (A4r).

Given his frequent attacks on the "application" of his works to current events, we might reasonably surmise that Jonson would have hated these polemical uses of his play (see, e.g., *Epicene*, second prologue 11–14). But *Catiline* itself engages extensively with the religious and political conflicts of seventeenth-century England. The play, as noted above, is informed not only by the Gunpowder Plot but also by Jonson's own conversion back to Anglicanism in 1610, in the aftermath of the assassination of King Henry IV of France (Donaldson; Lake). Donaldson suggests that this violence, this religious and political polarization, motivated Jonson's return to Roman history in 1611. *Catiline*, he argues, "can be seen as prophesying the shape of things to come in England of the 1640s" (13). And so in the 1640s and 1650s Jonson's prophetic history was readily appropriated by both sides of the English Civil War. Ironically, republican and royalist adaptations both took from Jonson's play the spectacular violence that he had attempted to banish. Catiline's malign theatrical energy refused to die.

### Coda: Republicanism and the Violence of Representation

"The tradition of all the dead generations," Karl Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (103). Decades after Jonson's play was first performed and published, the spectral presence of Catiline (and of *Catiline*) haunted the short-lived English Republic—and it has

continued to haunt fledgling republics ever since. After his execution in 1794, Maximilien Robespierre was branded "le Catilina moderne," the modern Catiline (*M. J. Maximilien Robespierre*); in 1800, Alexander Hamilton condemned Aaron Burr as "the *Catiline* of America" (257). Catiline figures the enemy within, the aspiring politician whose violence against the republic can only be met with violence itself. This act of historical representation thus seems to license the very violence that it condemns. As Judith Butler writes of the threat, it "registers a certain force in language, a force that both presages and inaugurates a subsequent force" (9).

If the violence of this historical analogy has attenuated, it is by no means gone. As recently as 2014, Barack Obama was compared to Catiline on the floor of the United States Senate (Bump). Our partisan political rhetoric, then, still forcefully accommodates the past to the present. According to Marx, this is the burden of history:

[J]ust when [men] seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. (103–04)

And so Ciceros, Catilines, and Caesars have processed across the stage of history, fighting for (or against) their republics. "No violence!" echoes across the centuries, itself a terse reminder of the violence of representation and the precarity of republicanism. If the tragedy of *Catiline* is the tragedy of the Roman Republic, then the cry of Jonson's Cicero—"No violence! Caesar be safe"—reduces republican politics to an unpalatable dilemma: violence or Caesar?

Yet *Catiline* dramatizes a third choice, what we might call the “literary,” or rhetorical, choice. No matter how closely rhetoric may come to resemble violence, Jonson struggles to maintain their ontological difference: his dramaturgy, historiography, and politics all rely on an essential gap between language and the violence that it represents. “[T]he gap that separates the speech act from its future effects,” Butler argues, makes possible “a counter-speech, a kind of talking back” (15). Cicero’s authoritarian eloquence, as well as Jonson’s metatheatrical polemic, seems to preclude this kind of dialogic response. But in choosing to write for the popular stage, the playwright invited the resistant reception that his play—and Cicero’s rhetoric in particular—evidently encountered. From Jonson’s time to ours, the possibility of separating rhetoric from violence has remained the positive condition of republicanism and the promise of literature.

## NOTES

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1. All quotations of Jonson’s works come from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* and are cited by line number.

2. As Peacock puts it, “*Catiline* is as much a cultural parable as a political tragedy” (206). Jonson, while certainly biased, did not wholly exaggerate the contemporary preference for spectacle. Challenging the critical commonplace that plays were meant to be “heard” rather than “seen,” Egan has convincingly argued that “plays were much more commonly thought of as visual rather than aural experiences in the literary and dramatic writing of the period” (332; see also Lin 112).

3. *Enargeia* is the Greek term; *evidentia* is the most common Latin translation. In the rhetorical tradition, *enargeia* is associated or equated with several other techniques and figures of speech, including *ekphrasis*, *hypotyposis*, *illustratio*, and *repraesentatio* (Vasaly 90; see also Quintilian, bk. 6, ch. 2, sec. 32 and bk. 8, ch. 3, sec. 61; Erasmus, *Copia* 577; Susenbrotus F4v).

4. For other useful overviews of the paradox of representation—in politics and the arts, in historiography,

and in the theater—see, respectively, Prendergast 1–16, Canning and Postlewait 10–11, and Platt 140–44.

5. On the problem of *enargeia* in *Othello*, see Altman 183–205.

6. I borrow the concept of “mimetic rivalry” from Girard, who writes, “The principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model” (11).

7. For further analysis of the 1605 quarto, see Jowett.

8. For the original Latin, see Erasmus, *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum* (204).

9. The Latin text quoted here is taken from *Horace His Art of Poetry*, which contains the original Latin as well as Jonson’s translation.

10. Goldberg evocatively describes this moment: “The spectacle [Cicero] has made he proposes as the instruments of vision for the audience. He wishes to take their consciences and twine them with his, co-conspirators, breathing one life, seeing with the same eyes the visions he constructs” (202).

11. Chapman’s verse adapts Plutarch’s praise of Thucydides’s *enargeia*: “throughout his whole history,” Plutarch writes, Thucydides “contendeth to attaine unto this diluciditie of stile [*enargeia*], striving to make the auditour of his wordes the spectatour as it were of the deeds therein contained, and desirous to imprint in the readers the same passions of astonishment, woonder and agony, which the very things themselves would worke when they are represented to the eie” (*Philosophie* Nnnn6r; see also *Moralia* 347a).

12. In Jonson’s copy of Sallust, this phrase even makes the index (*C. Crispi Salustii* FF2v).

13. On *Catiline* (and *Sejanus*) as “neo-Senecan” or “closet” drama, see Cadman 149–74.

14. This ambivalence, Barish argues, is at the core of Jonson’s comic art: “it is precisely the uneasy synthesis between a formal antitheatricalism, which condemns the arts of show and illusion on the one hand, and a subversive hankering after them on the other, that lends to Jonson’s comic masterpieces much of their unique high tension and precarious equilibrium” (154).

15. The following account of *Catiline*’s afterlife is indebted to Wiseman, “Echo” and *Drama* 74–77.

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